

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

St Thomas' Junior National School
Jobstown, Tallaght,
Dublin 24.

Uimhir rolla: 19702N

Date of inspection: 29 January 2014



1. Introduction

St Thomas' Junior National School is under the patronage of the Catholic Archbishop of Dublin and caters for boys and girls from Junior Infants to second class. The school participates in the DEIS (*Delivering Equality in Schools*) (Band 1) programme and has an Early Start Unit which caters for 60 pupils. The school has an enrolment of 429 pupils and the effective implementation of attendance strategies has improved attendance levels in recent years. During the whole-school evaluation inspectors observed teaching and learning in 13 mainstream class settings and 8 support teaching settings. The board of management was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the report, and the response of the board will be found in the appendix of this report.

2. Summary of Findings and Recommendations for Further Development

The following are the **main strengths** of the work of the school:

- The board of management and parents are very supportive of the work of the school. The board is highly commended for maintaining the school to a very high standard and for supporting the acquisition of a wide range of resources to support teaching and learning.
- The work of the principal in leading and managing the school is of a very high standard. She is committed to promoting effective learning for all pupils.
- A very positive school climate, which is characterised by positive working relationships, is evident throughout the school. A culture of team work and collaborative decision making is promoted among members of the in-school management team and teaching staff.
- The management of pupils is praiseworthy and appropriate supports are provided using a variety of strategies based on developing respect and self-esteem.
- The quality of support for pupils is of a very high standard with a focus the promotion of diversity and inclusive education.

The following **main recommendations** are made:

- Teachers should further develop long-term plans to include an overview of the differentiation strategies being implemented across the curriculum.
- Assessment outcomes at class level should be further analysed and used to inform differentiated classroom planning.
- To enhance the development of the pupils' writing skills, it is recommended that the school policy on writing should be reviewed in order to identify clear targets for penmanship and presentation of pupils' work at each class level.

3. Quality of School Management

- The board of management is very supportive of the work of the school. Members of the board are frequent visitors to the school and keenly support school events and celebrations. Finances are well managed and accounts are audited annually. The board is highly commended for the development of school facilities and the maintenance of the school building to a very high standard.
- The quality of in-school management is very good. The principal displays highly effective leadership skills, and her organisational and management skills enhance the work of the school and promote effective learning. She has a deep knowledge and understanding of the children and the wider school community. She is ably supported by the deputy principal who fulfils a range of duties diligently and conscientiously. The in-school management team oversees the planning, delivery and monitoring of a range of initiatives which have a positive impact on teaching and learning.
- The management of resources is of a very high quality. Well-maintained classrooms and communal areas of the school host an impressive range of visually-stimulating and purposeful educational displays. A wide range of resources to support teaching and learning is well organised in each classroom and efficiently utilised by teachers. The work of the ancillary staff effectively contributes to the smooth running of the school.
- The management of pupils is very good and strategies are in place to promote positive behaviour. A constructive, respectful atmosphere is fostered throughout the school. The pastoral care of the pupils is of a very high standard. This is supported by the development of the well-organised multi-sensory and nurture rooms.
- The management of relationships and communications within the school community is of a very high standard. Almost all parents surveyed as part of the evaluation indicate that they are happy with the school and believe that the school has a positive atmosphere. Communication between home and school is promoted by regular newsletters and notes. Parents participate in a wide variety of courses and support in-class curricular initiatives organised through the effective HSCL (*Home School Community Liaison*) scheme in the school.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- Whole-school planning is of a high quality and contextualised to the needs of the school. The school engages in a collaborative planning process, and a wide range of administrative plans are in place to support the smooth operation of the school. Administrative and whole-school curriculum plans are shared among teachers.
- The school has engaged in the process of school self-evaluation and has produced its first school self-evaluation report. The school improvement plan includes clear learning targets and strategies for improvement in numeracy. The school improvement plan is clearly linked to the DEIS action plan.
- Good work has been undertaken in developing a consistent approach to long-term planning. To further develop this work individual teachers' long-term plans should provide a broad overview of differentiation strategies being implemented across the curriculum. Learning objectives should be relevant to the abilities and learning needs of pupils in each class and should ensure continuity and progression in pupils' learning in each curriculum area. Short-term plans outline learning objectives to be achieved on a weekly or fortnightly basis.

- The quality of planning prepared by teachers in support settings is excellent. Teachers are advised to set out learning objectives on a weekly basis as recommended in the *Learning-Support Guidelines*.
- Confirmation was provided that the board of management has formally adopted the *Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools* without modification and that the school is compliant with the requirements of the *Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools*.

5. Quality of Teaching, Learning and Pupil Achievement

- The overall quality of teaching and learning is commendable with some very effective practice observed in some classes. Where effective practice was observed, lessons were well-structured and well-paced with appropriate use of resources and explicit teaching of new content. Where learning objectives were shared and explicitly taught the quality of the learning outcomes was enhanced.
- Tá caighdeán na múinteoireachta agus na foghlama sa Ghaeilge sásúil sa scoil. Baintear úsáid chuí as achmainní, amhráin, agus rainn i gceachtanna. I suímh áirithe, áfach, tá deacrachtaí ag na daltaí abairtí a chumadh, ceisteanna a chur agus a fhreagairt agus cumarsáid a dhéanamh lena chéile. Moltar don scoil clár córasach a chumadh ag leibhéal cuí do gach rang. Moltar an clár córasach seo a chur i bhfeidhm trí obair bheirte, ceisteanna a chur agus a fhreagairt agus trí úsáid Gaeilge neamhfhoirmiúl i rith an lae.
- *The quality of teaching and learning in Irish is satisfactory in the school. Appropriate resources, songs and rhymes are used in lessons. In some settings however, pupils have difficulty structuring sentences, asking and answering questions and communicating with one another. It is recommended that the school devise a specific language programme at an appropriate level for each class. The systematic teaching of this programme is recommended through the use of pair work, through asking and answering questions and through the use of incidental Irish throughout the day.*
- There is effective practice in the teaching and learning of English. The school places a strong emphasis on the development of oral language skills which are promoted through the use of poems, rhymes and songs that are linked to the phonics programme. A whole-school approach to the teaching of writing has been developed and samples of pupils' writing were evident in copybooks and displayed in classrooms. Good work was observed in the development of writing genres. There is scope for further development in the area of penmanship and presentation of pupils' work in some areas to enhance this work. There is evidence of progression in reading attainment in recent years, and the school has introduced a range of reading initiatives to maintain this progress.
- Teaching, learning and pupil achievement in Mathematics is of a good standard. The school has made steady progress in raising the pupils' achievement levels in the area of number. For the most part, teachers present well-structured lessons and utilise a variety of resources and methodologies in learning activities. Concepts are generally explained clearly and good levels of pupil participation and engagement are evident in lessons through the use of pair work, a variety of resources and modelling of mathematical language.
- There is evidence of effective practice in the teaching and learning of Drama. The pupils display a keen enthusiasm for Drama, and benefit from a balanced programme which involves teacher-in-role, exploring and making drama, and reflecting upon dramatic activities. The teachers use a variety of drama strategies and conventions to develop the pupils' empathy and to reinforce their understanding of stories and events. Greater

consideration should be given to utilising Drama as a methodology in the development of pupils' expressive language skills.

- The school employs a wide range of assessment modes which includes the administration of standardised and diagnostic tests and the regular monitoring of pupils' written work. Very good developmental feedback is given in some classes. It is recommended that an in-depth analysis of assessment outcomes at class level should be used to inform differentiated classroom planning.

6. Quality of Support for Pupils

- The quality of supports for pupils with special educational needs is of a very high standard. The school is inclusive, open and welcoming, and appropriate supports are put in place to respond to the needs of all pupils. The shared responsibility among management, teachers and support staff is praiseworthy, ensuring that each child's educational needs are addressed.
- Teaching methods and activities are very well matched to the pupils' specific needs. Clearly-defined learning targets are included in education plans, and the pupils' progress is carefully monitored. Commendable models of in-class support are utilised throughout the school. To further develop this model of support, it is recommended that both support teachers and mainstream class teachers be actively involved in the overall programme planning, delivery and assessment with agreed learning targets recorded in mainstream class teachers short-term plans.

Appendix

School response to the report

Submitted by the Board of Management

Area 1: Observations on the content of the inspection report

The board of management wishes to thank the whole school staff for their ongoing hard work and commitment in striving to provide high quality learning opportunities for our pupils.

The board is pleased that the report acknowledges and affirms the following points:

- Whole school planning is of a high quality and contextualised to the needs of the school
- The overall quality of teaching and learning is commendable.
- The management of relationships and communications within the school is of a very high standard.
- The quality of supports for pupils is of a very high standard with a focus on promotion of diversity and inclusive education.

Area 2: Follow-up actions planned or undertaken since the completion of the inspection activity to implement the findings and recommendations of the inspection

The board and staff acknowledge the recommendations of the whole school evaluation report. These will be systematically addressed as part of our ongoing process of continuous improvement. We will continue to build on our strengths to address the recommendation in relation to long term planning incorporating further differentiation strategies. Analysis of assessment outcomes will be further developed in teachers short and long term plans. A sub-group will review the school policy on penmanship for the next school term