

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**  
**Department of Education and Skills**

**Whole School Evaluation**  
**REPORT**

**St. Helen's Senior National School**  
**Portmarnock, Co. Dublin**  
**Uimhir rolla: 19762I**

**Date of inspection: 23 November 2011**



**A N R O I N N** | **D E P A R T M E N T O F**  
**O I D E A C H A I S** | **E D U C A T I O N**  
**A G U S S C I L E A N N A** | **A N D S K I L L S**

## 1. Introduction

St. Helen's Senior National School is a co-educational senior school comprising classes from 3rd to 6th class. It is located in Portmarnock, Co. Dublin and is under the patronage of the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Dublin. 224 pupils are enrolled and the attendance levels of the pupils are very good. 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 is effective in its role and is committed to providing a high-quality education for the pupils.
- The work of the principal is characterised by commitment and efficiency. She has developed very good quality systems that support the effective operation of the school.
- The quality of involvement with parents is very good and effective systems of communication have been established.
- The significant advancement in whole-school planning is highly commendable.
- The pupil attainment levels in Mathematics are very good. The school has achieved highly commendable success in developing and sustaining attainments in this area.
- The quality of support for pupils with special educational needs, particularly in the identification of needs and monitoring of progress, is very good.

The following **main recommendations** are made:

- Tá gá le forbairt a dhéanamh ar an gcur chuige cumarsáideach mar thacaíocht d'fhoghlaim sa Ghaeilge, ag díriú ar ghnéithe den obair ó bhéal agus den léitheoireacht. *There is need to develop the communicative approach underpinning learning in Irish, focusing on aspects of oral language work and reading.*
- There is scope for more planned differentiation in order to facilitate greater challenge in some teaching.
- A common approach to classroom planning, building upon existing very good practices identified, should be adopted.
- There is need to develop assessment for learning practices in the school. *Assessment in the Primary School Curriculum (NCCA 2007)* should guide this process. The in-school management team should take a central role in guiding its development and implementation.

### 3. Quality of School Management

- The board of management discharges its duties effectively and has a very good understanding of its responsibilities. Specific duties have been assigned and members have availed of training courses to assist their work. The board has an active role in whole-school planning and appropriately supports policy drafting and review. A very high percentage of parent questionnaire responses strongly agreed or agreed that the school is well run.
- The principal carries out her administrative duties diligently and the quality of the organisational systems she has established is very good. Her instrumental role in progressing whole-school planning is particularly commendable. The in-school management team works purposefully and displays a keen awareness of its current and future roles in leading learning.
- The quality of the management of resources is good. Overall, the school has an appropriate supply of material resources. Classrooms are prepared as attractive learning environments and the quality of display in corridors and school entrance areas was also of a very good standard. The diligence of staff, both teaching and ancillary, is commended in this regard. Almost all parent questionnaire responses strongly agreed or agreed that facilities are good in the school
- Relationships within the school community are very good. The board of management and staff commit themselves greatly to the involvement of parents as partners in education. A very active parents' association directly and indirectly supports the provision of education appropriately. Representatives of the parents' association stated that they are very happy with the quality of education provision in the school. Almost all parent questionnaire responses indicated high levels of satisfaction with the school.
- The pupils' behaviour during the evaluation was excellent. The staff is commended for how it is responding to the pastoral needs of the pupils. High expectations in respect of behaviour and engagement in learning were evident. Questionnaire responses show that almost all pupils feel safe in class and in the playground and that they feel they can talk to a teacher if they are upset about something at school.

### 4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- The quality of whole school planning is very good and progression in the whole-school planning process is evident. Organisational policies are informative and clear and the quality of the whole-school curriculum plans is very good. The enrolment and admissions policy, however, must be revised to ensure it is in accord with relevant legislation in respect of the enrolment of pupils with special educational needs. The use of action planning is commendable. The school's self-evaluation processes are effective. There is evidence of follow through to action planning and of its influence in classrooms.
- The quality of classroom planning ranged from very good to having significant scope for development. In the most effective classroom planning clear learning outcomes and specific differentiating of objectives and approaches for pupils with additional learning needs were present. Other classroom planning was overly textbook and content-focused and too brief to support differentiation for varying ability levels. Some planning also contained an overabundance of resource documentation. It is recommended that the identified high-quality practices be extended as a common school approach. The levels of detail provided in monthly progress records (*cuntais mhíosa*) varied, with some including very significant amounts and others less detail about learning outcomes. There

is potential for monthly progress reports to play a greater role in self-evaluation through implementing a common whole-school template that gathers concise and exact detail on learning outcomes. This would aid monitoring of continuity and progression greatly.

- 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

- Sa foriomlán, léiríodh réimse le haghaidh forbartha maidir le snáitheanna éagsúla de churaclam na Gaeilge a chur abhaile. Le linn ceachtanna áirithe léiríodh cleachtais an-mhaithe. Sna cleachtais ab fhearr tugadh go cinnte faoi mhúnlú na teanga, faoi fhoclóir nua a fhorbairt agus iarrachtaí diongbháilte daltaí a chur chun chomhrá. I gceachtanna eile níor úsáideadh an sprioctheanga go seasmhach agus níor caitheadh sách ama i dtréimhse réamhchumarsáide saibhir. Dá bharr ní raibh tuiscint agus líofacht sa chaint ar chaighdeán sásúil ag roinnt daltaí. Tá gá le na dea-chleachtais aitheanta a chur i bhfeidhm ar bhonn scoile agus béim a chur ar chleachtadh na teanga i gcomhthéacsanna cumarsáideacha fadaithe. Baineann eagsúlacht le caighdeán sa léitheoireacht, maidir le líofacht agus scileanna tuisceana. B'fhiú béim a chur ar fhorbairt scileanna na léitheoireachta Gaeilge a thuilleadh agus glacadh le cur chuige coiteann scoile. Déanann na daltaí cleachtaí éagsúla scríbhneoireachta. Léiríodh struchtúr maith ar abairtí agus úsáid chuí de bhriathra. Léiríodh caighdeán breá sa scríbhneoireacht fheidhmiúil agus sna sleachta cruthaitheacha.
- *Overall, there is scope to develop the implementation of different strands in Irish. During certain lessons very good practices were in evidence. In the best practices the modelling of language, the development of new vocabulary and dedicated efforts to engage pupils in conversation were advanced with certainty. In other lessons the target language was not used consistently and sufficient time was not spent in a rich pre-communicative phase. As a result some pupils' understanding of the language and fluency in speaking was not of a satisfactory standard. There is need to implement the identified good practices on a whole-school basis and to emphasise practice of the language in extended communication contexts. There is variation in reading standards, particularly in respect of fluency and comprehension skills. The development of Irish reading skills should be emphasised more and a common school approach adopted. Pupils engage in different writing activities. Sentences displayed good structure and appropriate use of verbs. Good standards were evident in functional writing and in creative extracts.*
- The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in English is good and pupils express themselves with confidence. Overall reading and comprehension standards are good and attention is paid to the development of a range of skills during lessons. Writing skills are promoted purposefully and good writing, with good content, structure, use of grammar, spelling and conventions in different *genres* was evident during the evaluation. Very good standards were evident in some examples of extended writing. Pupils' presentation skills are of a very good standard. In building upon existing valuable delivery, specific expectations of new learning should be emphasised more in every lesson.
- The quality of pupil attainment in Mathematics is very good. There is a strong emphasis on teaching the language of mathematics. The clear oral explanation of concepts characterised lessons evaluated. Where best practice was evident consistent use was made of physical materials during the demonstration and consolidation phases of

lessons. During tasks, most pupils completed problem-solving and computational tasks accurately and confidently.

- A supportive atmosphere was created for the lessons in Drama evaluated and a good range of methodologies was observed. Role play by both teachers and pupils were valuable aspects. In some lessons purposeful integration with other curriculum areas was clearly evident and enabled clarification of learning expectations for the pupils. This constituted good practice.
- Overall, the quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement is good, while some possibilities for improvement also exist. There is scope overall for more planned differentiation and greater challenge in some teaching. These can be addressed through extending the identified existing high-quality practices school wide. During the evaluation interactions between teachers and pupils were encouraging and supportive. Clear explanation characterised whole-class teaching and the pace of lessons was good. Where observed, group work was organised well. Almost all pupils confirmed that teachers explained things clearly during lessons.
- The systematic analysis of standardised assessment results in English and Mathematics by the school is highly commendable. Diagnostic testing of pupils with additional learning needs is also a particular strength. There is scope to develop whole-school assessment practice, however, especially assessment for learning. A range of formal practices should be implemented. *Assessment in the Primary School Curriculum* (NCCA 2007) should be used to guide this process.

## **6. Quality of Support for Pupils**

- Provision for pupils with special educational needs is very good. Planning and preparation are of a high standard leading to well-prepared learning activities in supportive learning environments. The application of diagnostic procedures effectively has led to very good identification of needs and informing of future planning for teaching and learning. There is good monitoring of progress, analysis of learning and linking of supplementary lessons with classroom teaching experiences. The deployment of the special needs assistants contributes positively to the quality of the overall provision.
- The lessons evaluated were structured and taught effectively with good attention paid to exploring comprehension strategies and to developing oral and written communication skills, for example. During all teaching the questioning of pupils was of a very good standard. Care was taken to encourage pupils in their learning activity. Commendable progress was evident in learning.
- The quality of home-school partnership is very good. Almost all parent questionnaire responses indicated satisfaction with the arrangements for parent-teacher meetings and with the clarity of information provided to parents about their child's learning.

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# **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 of St. Helen's S.N.S. welcomes the findings of this report.

The Board is delighted that the report recognises and affirms the great work being done by all involved in our school.

We are particularly pleased that the report acknowledges the positive behaviour and engagement of our pupils, the high level of support and satisfaction of our parents and the commitment and dedication of all our staff to providing high quality teaching and learning. We welcome the report's commendation of the staff for their care of the pastoral needs of our pupils and the creation of a very supportive school atmosphere.

### **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 will address any recommendations made in the report.