

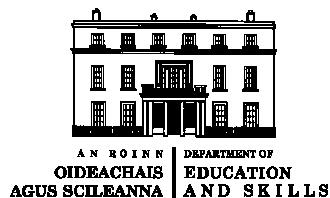
An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

**Whole School Evaluation
REPORT**

**Scoil Thomáis
Laurel Lodge, Castleknock, Dublin 15
Uimhir rolla: 19769W**

Date of inspection: 15 October 2010



1. Introduction

Scoil Thomáis is a thirty-eight teacher, co-educational primary school under the patronage of the Catholic Archbishop of Dublin. Enrolment figures are stable and pupils' attendance levels are good. During the whole-school evaluation inspectors observed teaching and learning in fourteen mainstream class settings and in seven 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 works conscientiously in the interests of the school.
- The principal is commended for the effective management and organisation of the school.
- The dedicated teaching staff uses effective methodologies that contribute significantly to pupils' achievements.
- The parents' association is supportive, committed and keenly interested in the development of the school.
- The pupils are commended for the respect and courtesy they display and for their high levels of engagement in learning.
- The quality of teaching and learning in Music is very good.
- Tá gnéithe de theagasc agus d'fhoghlaim na Gaeilge an-mhaith.
- Many aspects of the teaching and learning in Mathematics and English are very good.

The following **main recommendations** are made:

- A formal mechanism for school self-review should be established.
- The responsibilities of the in-school management team should be regularly reviewed to allow for additional focus on curriculum development and leadership.
- The current practice of some support teachers teaching mainstream classes for particular lessons during the school day should be discontinued.
- Formal communication channels should be established to further foster good working relationships between the board of management and the parents' association.
- Moltar an Ghaeilge neamhfhoirmiúil a úsáid go leanúnach ar fud na scoile. (*It is recommended that informal Irish be used more regularly throughout the school*).

3. Quality of School Management

- The quality of the work of the board of management is very good. It is properly constituted and functions in an effective manner. Responsibilities are shared among board

members and are fulfilled diligently. The successful completion of a school building project is testimony to their tenacious work. The board's current priority is to ensure post-primary provision for its pupils in the local area. Consideration and ratification of whole-school policies is a feature of board meetings. It is now timely that the board increases its involvement in the planning process.

- The in-school management team comprises a principal, an administrative deputy principal, five assistant principals and eleven special duties posts. The school is led very effectively by a diligent and committed principal who has taught in the school since its foundation. Her focused and systematic approach to organisation ensures the smooth operation of the school and a very orderly learning environment for pupils. The principal's commitment to the holistic development of pupils is laudable. She espouses a great sense of pride in the school and promotes the development of self-esteem and respect among pupils. The administrative deputy principal offers sustained support to the principal and they collaborate on all management issues. They have a shared vision for the curricular and organisational progress of the school. The in-school management team works diligently to support the work of the school. In many instances their expertise is utilised to good effect to advance the development of the school. However, the responsibilities of the in-school management team should be formally reviewed on a cyclical basis to allow for additional focus on curriculum leadership and to respond to the evolving needs of the school.
- The quality of the management of resources is very good. Teachers are deployed appropriately affording them opportunities to gain experience in teaching at various class levels in mainstream and support settings. The ancillary staff contributes significantly to the organisation and maintenance of the school. The accommodation and school environs are maintained to a very high standard. Stimulating learning environments are created in most classrooms and a wide range of teaching and learning resources is used effectively to support pupils' learning. The use of information and communication technology (ICT) needs to be further monitored to ensure its effectiveness as a learning tool in the teaching of languages and Mathematics.
- The school communicates regularly with its parent community and informs parents of their children's progress. The parents' association actively supports the work of the school. The parents' representatives expressed their satisfaction with the educational provision and the achievement level of pupils in the school. This was borne out by the response to questionnaires distributed to parents as part of the evaluation. While parents are involved in certain areas of school life greater emphasis could now be placed on the potential of parental involvement in the school. A formal structure of communication should be put in place to enable further collaboration and partnership between the board of management and the parents' association.
- There is effective management of pupils at all class levels. A positive learning atmosphere is created for pupils and questionnaires administered during the evaluation indicate that they enjoy school. Pupils conduct themselves in an exemplary manner and are courteous, respectful and friendly. There is a caring relationship evident between staff and pupils and this is led by the in-school management team who has responsibility for pastoral care in the school. It is now timely that a student's council be established to give a voice to pupils in aspects of school life.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- The whole-school planning process is led by the principal and staff with some involvement by other school partners. The board of management should ensure that a formal process for school self-review is initiated and established in the school. This process could be led by the senior in-school management team. Priorities need to be identified and targets set for school improvement. Consideration should then be given to the development and implementation of action plans to address agreed whole-school priorities. All relevant administrative policies are in place. Some policies require review in light of changes in legislation. In the cyclical review of curriculum plans it is advised that they be further contextualised to the needs of the school.
- Individual classroom planning is good. The collaborative planning process is effective in developing content, methodologies and resources for teaching and learning. In order to maximise the opportunities provided by this process, teachers should now focus on identifying short-term learning targets that would be specific to the needs of individual class settings. The method of recording the monthly report (*cuntais mhíosúla*) should be reviewed for the purpose of providing clear records of the work undertaken and of evaluating the effectiveness of curriculum implementation at classroom level.
- School authorities provided evidence that, in compliance with Primary Circular 0061/2006, the board of management has formally adopted the Department's *Child Protection Guidelines for Primary Schools*. Evidence was provided to show that these child protection procedures have been brought to the attention of management, school staff and parents; that a copy of the procedures has been provided to all staff (including all new staff); and that management has ensured that all staff are familiar with the procedures to be followed. A designated liaison person (DLP) and a deputy DLP have been appointed in line with the requirements of the guidelines.

5. Quality of Teaching, Learning and Pupil Achievement

- Baineann caighdeán an-mhaith le múineadh agus le foghlaim na Gaeilge. Gabhann cinnteacht agus struchtúr maith leis an teagasc i gcoitinne agus baintear leas an-éifeachtach as áiseanna. Múintear an teanga labhartha le tairbhe. Baineann na daltaí líofacht bhreá amach laistigh de réimse na gceachtanna a mhúintear. Moltar a thuilleadh drámaíochta a úsáid le go mbeidh deiseanna líonmhara fíorchumarsáide ag na daltaí. Moltar tuilleadh úsáide a bhaint as an nGaeilge tríd an scoil mar theanga cumarsáide neamhfhoirmiúil. Múintear an léitheoireacht le cumas. Baineann céatadán suntasach de na daltaí líofacht innholta amach sa léitheoireacht idir fhoghraíocht, thuiscint agus chruinneas. Moltar taithí níos leithne léitheoireachta a thabhairt do na daltaí trí fhíor leabhar a chur ar fáil dóibh. Tá caighdeán sásúil á bhaint amach ag na daltaí sa scríbhneoireacht, ach moltar deiseanna saor-chumadóireachta a leathnú a thuilleadh.
- *The quality of teaching and learning in Irish is very good. Certainty and good structure apply to teaching in general and very effective use is made of resources. Oral language is taught to good effect. Pupils acquire fluency within the parameter of the lessons taught. Further use should be made of drama so that pupils have many opportunities for real communication. The use of Irish in informal conversation should be extended throughout*

the school. Reading is taught competently. A significant proportion of pupils acquire fluency in reading, in terms of phonology, understanding and precision. It is recommended that pupils' reading experience be extended by the use of real books. Pupils achieve a satisfactory standard of writing, but their opportunities for free writing should be broadened.

- Teaching and learning of English is good. Oral language is very well developed through a range of stimulating, creative and collaborative teaching approaches, using many effective resources. Overall, standards in reading are good, but there is a lack of an agreed whole-school approach to this area. Some pupils in classrooms evaluated, while showing mastery of reading practices, do not read very fluently and lack appropriate expression and pace. The range of reading books read in each class level should be extended. A good standard of writing across a wide range of genres is noted. There is, however, a need to extend pupils' independent writing, especially in the early years. Pupils' handwriting is somewhat inconsistent. A whole-school handwriting policy needs to be adopted and implemented.
- Teaching and learning in particular aspects of mathematics was of good quality in the lessons observed. Pupils' thinking skills are well developed and many of them demonstrate a good understanding of a range of strategies and mathematical procedures. Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is skilfully used as a teaching resource in the development of mathematical concepts. However, more extensive opportunities for the manipulation of concrete resources are recommended. Mainstream and support teachers co-operate to support pupils' learning in certain classes. Further reflection on the specific needs of pupils within these classes will add greater focus to this provision. Additional challenge and differentiated learning activities would extend the learning potential for more able pupils and also for those pupils who are still acquiring proficiency in English language skills.
- The quality of teaching and learning of Music was very good in the lessons observed. This provision is characterised by dynamic teaching and high levels of teacher collaboration and pooled expertise. Rhythm and percussion exercises, impressive composition activities, musical notation and listening and responding activities are incrementally developed throughout the school in a noteworthy manner. Pupils sing a carefully selected repertoire of songs in Irish and English tunefully and enthusiastically. The teaching of the tin-whistle in particular classes is noted. To capitalise on the considerable music skills within the school and to extend music provision at classroom level, consideration should now be given to the teaching of a range of instruments and the creation of a school band.
- Overall, the quality of teaching and learning is very good. A good balance is achieved between whole-class teaching and the active involvement of pupils in the learning process. Teaching is relevant to pupils' experiences and needs. An emphasis is placed on the development of thinking and problem-solving skills. Effective and creative use is made of all available resources to explain and reinforce concepts. Additional differentiated activities should be organised for pupils of varying abilities.

6. Quality of Supports for Pupils

- Provision for pupils with special educational needs (SEN) is good. The support is provided by twelve full-time teachers and one teacher who is employed on a part-time basis. Support is provided on a withdrawal basis and is complemented by the more recent introduction of cooperative teaching in mainstream contexts. The practice of releasing some support teachers to teach mainstream classes should be reviewed in order to ensure that they are solely deployed to respond to the learning needs of SEN pupils.
- In general, appropriate plans have been developed on a collaborative basis for pupils in receipt of support teaching. In some instances very good detailed weekly planning and progress records are maintained. This good practice should be emanated by all support teachers. Consideration should also be given to extending the use of diagnostic testing to inform more focused individual programmes of learning for pupils. In general, appropriate learning environments are created and in some settings pupils' work is celebrated through display. Lessons are well structured and a variety of active-learning methodologies are employed using a range of suitable resources, including ICT. The development of additional models of in-class support is recommended to optimise learning benefits for pupils with varying abilities, including those of high ability. The special needs assistants work effectively in supporting individual pupils with special educational needs.
- Language support for pupils for whom English is an additional language (EAL) is provided on a withdrawal basis. Pupils' language abilities are appropriately assessed. Proficiency benchmarks should be further utilised in compiling learning programmes, however. Pupils' communicative language is suitably developed and their communication skills fostered through a range of effective methodologies and active learning approaches. Further consideration should be given to the systematic development of pupils' cognitive language, however. A whole-school intercultural policy should now be formulated.

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 and Staff of Scoil Thomáis are very happy with the report. We would like to thank the Inspectors for their very professional approach and the courtesy they showed to all members of the school community.

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 of Management is considering ways to further foster good working relations with the Parents' Association

The responsibilities of the in-school management team will be reviewed in the coming year.

The practice of some support teachers teaching some mainstream classes during the day has been discontinued.

In recent months, programmes have been devised to develop the cognitive language skills of EAL pupils.