

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

St. Laserian's Mixed N.S.,
Leighlinbridge, Co. Carlow
Uimhir rolla: 19784S

Date of inspection: 4 February 2015



AN ROINN DEPARTMENT OF
OIDEACHAIS | EDUCATION
AGUS SCILEANNA | AND SKILLS

1. Introduction

St. Laserian's National School is situated in Leighlinbridge, Co. Carlow and operates under the patronage of the Catholic Bishop of Kildare and Leighlin. It caters for boys and girls from junior infants to sixth class. The attendance of the 174 pupils on roll is generally very good. At the time of the evaluation the school employed an administrative principal, seven mainstream teachers, one full time learning support teacher, one shared learning support teacher and one shared resource teacher. 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 welcoming, supportive and inclusive school atmosphere.
- The complementarity of management and leadership skills that exist amongst the principal and members of the in-school management team.
- The very good levels of pupil achievement in Mathematics and the incremental improvements in learning in this area in recent years.
- The clear focus that is placed on the development of skills in the teaching and learning of Science.
- The high quality teaching, as well as the openness and reflectivity that exists amongst the teaching staff.
- The range and variety of assessment approaches in use.

The following **main recommendations** are made:

- The board of management should strengthen its processes, to ensure that decisions to ratify, amend or review policies are clearly recorded in the minutes of meetings.
- The lines of communication amongst the stakeholders should be strengthened to ensure, that all voices are consulted, that processes are clarified and that there is a shared sense of purpose.
- The school self-evaluation process should be used to devolve leadership and to develop a system to share the positive teaching approaches and high expectations for learning that exist in the school with all teachers.
- Learning experiences should be broadened for pupils to include more independent and open ended learning opportunities.
- In-class support and team teaching approaches should be introduced.

3. Quality of School Management

- The board of management meets regularly, effectively fulfils its duties and provides good support to the school. Individual members give generously of their time and carry out a range of duties. So that the board fulfils its statutory requirements, processes should be strengthened to ensure that decisions to adopt, ratify or amend policies are clearly recorded in minutes of meetings. Furthermore, copies of reports to the board, certified accounts and review checklists should also be filed with the minutes.
- The principal oversees the effective management of the school and ensures that there is a positive school climate. He manages the whole-school planning process and ensures that all plans and policies are in place and are reviewed regularly. He articulates a commitment to school self-evaluation and sees the potential within it for instructional leadership. In questionnaires, most parents agree that the school is well run and that there is a good atmosphere in the school. The principal is supported by an enthusiastic and

hardworking in-school management team. Members conscientiously co-ordinate the subject areas for which they are responsible and have led some aspects of provision. Commendably, duties are reviewed annually in line with school priorities. Team members possess a variety of skills and great leadership potential exists among the team. To realise this potential, the principal should devolve more responsibility to team members to enable them to lead and drive school improvement.

- The school has invested in a very good range of resources to support teaching and learning. Current priorities for the board are the investment in the school's ICT infrastructure as well as in resources to support a targeted literacy initiative. The school's ancillary staff add to the positive school atmosphere.
- The parents' association provides positive support to the school and organises a number of fundraising activities that contribute to the sense of community. A number of positive channels of communication have been developed to communicate with the school community. These channels should be used to a greater extent to communicate with parents about pupils' learning and the school's teaching and learning priorities.
- Opportunities should also be explored to develop parents' role in supporting pupils' learning within the school. Parents were consulted as part of the school's self-evaluation and small groups of parents have contributed to working groups for some policies. However, in questionnaires administered to parents, a significant proportion of parents disagree that the school seeks the views of parents on school matters.
- The school has recently reviewed its anti-bullying policy, in-line with circular 0045/2013. Commendably, in questionnaires, almost all pupils agreed that there are clear rules in the school with regard to bullying and that they have learned about different kinds of bullying in school. Similarly in their questionnaires almost all parents agreed that their child feels safe and is well looked after in the school. However, a significant number of parents were either unsure or disagreed that the school would act promptly and effectively if their child experienced bullying. Management should ensure that the school's process with regard to addressing bullying is clarified with the school community so that parents know the steps that will be taken when allegations of bullying are made.
- During the evaluation, pupil behaviour and overall engagement levels were very good and pupils were well managed. A system should be developed to capture pupils' voice around issues pertaining to them in school, including the organisation of learning and recreational spaces, as well as other factors that affect their learning experience.
- The board of management should review and strengthen the lines of communication amongst the stakeholders to ensure, that all voices are consulted, that processes are clarified and that there is a shared sense of purpose across the school community.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- The quality of school planning is very good. All curricular plans are in place and recently efforts have been made to ensure that these plans are living documents and are reflective of the practices in the school. Individual teachers are diligent about classroom planning and there is a sense of integrity around planning. The school has a common template for the monthly report which commendably includes a reflective commentary completed by teachers about their own learning.
- A good start has been made to the process of school self-evaluation (SSE). Most of the focus to date has been on numeracy. Teaching approaches were agreed at whole-staff level and improvements in pupil learning have been monitored at an individual and a whole-school level. These positive aspects of this initiative should be replicated in other areas identified for improvement. The SSE process should be used to develop a system to share the positive teaching approaches and high expectations for learning that exist in the school amongst all teachers.
- 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 is high, with some very good practices evident during the evaluation and pupils are achieving at commendable levels. The teaching staff are open and reflective and high expectations are set for pupils' learning. In questionnaires almost all parents agree that the teaching is good in the school and that their children enjoy school. Lessons are well-structured and resourced and with a good range of effective methodologies. Where practice was particularly strong, there was a clear focus on language development in all subjects and there was fluidity in the organisation of groups which facilitated targeted differentiation and greater variety in pupils' learning experiences. Overall, to enhance pupils' learning, their experience should be broadened to include more independent and open ended learning opportunities, where they are self-directed learners. To this end, *Aistear, the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework*, should be prioritised for introduction in the infant classes, while in middle and senior classes, greater use should be made of project work, presentations, ICT and problem based learning.
- The quality of assessment in the school is very good, with some excellent practices evident during the evaluation. A wide range of assessment approaches is in use across the school including tests, colour coded risk indicators, and pupil self-assessment. In the settings where assessment practices were most effective, consistent use was made of assessment for learning. The school has developed a commendable system to track pupils' assessment information and achievements. To develop the assessment practices in the school further, the positive practices should be embedded in all learning settings.
- Baineann caighdeán maith leis an mhúinteoireacht, leis an bhfoghlaim agus le gnóthachtáil na ndaltaí sa Ghaeilge. Déanann na hoidí iarrachtaí maithe an teanga a chur chun cinn agus tá dearcadh dearfach ag na daltaí. I bhformhór na suíomhanna, baineann na múinteoirí úsáid as Gaeilge amháin agus cuirtear béim chuí ar an gcur chuige cumarsáideach. Baintear úsáid as dánta, amhráin, puipéidí agus cluichí chun na daltaí a spreagadh. Tá foclóir leathan agus tuiscint réasúnta mhaith ag fórmhór na ndaltaí. Go ginearálta, sonraítear caighdeán maith ina gcuid léitheoireachta. Chun cur lena gcuid scileanna, moltar béim sa bhreis a chur ar úsáid neamhspléach na teanga agus ar saor-scríbhneoireacht.

The standard of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in Irish is good. The teachers make good efforts to promote the language and the pupils have a positive attitude towards it. In most classes, the teachers used only Irish during lessons and a suitable emphasis is placed on the communicative approach. Poems, songs, puppets and games are used to encourage the pupils. Most pupils have a wide vocabulary and reasonably good comprehension. In general a good standard is noted in their reading. To add to their skills, it is recommended that further emphasis be placed on their independent use of the language through pair work and free writing.

- In English the quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement is good. In reading pupils are making very good progress. A commendable focus is placed on phonics and there is a suitable emphasis placed on comprehension in many classes. In questionnaires, almost all parents agree that the school is helping their child to progress with reading. The planned expansion of the use of individualised readers in junior classes is a welcome development and to challenge pupils further in middle and senior classes, greater use should be made of novels. The presentation of pupils' work in copies is highly commendable and pupils write for a range of purposes and across a variety of genres. To ensure that pupils' writing skills are developed systematically, benchmarks that clarify the expectations for writing at each class level should be agreed. Oral language is discretely taught at all levels and there were a number of particularly effective practices. To maximise pupils' oral language skills greater emphasis should be placed on the enhancement of pupils' confidence levels.
- The level of pupil achievement in Mathematics is very good overall. There have been commendable incremental improvements over the past number of years and the whole school focus on number facts is paying dividends. The school has rightly identified pupils' problem solving skills as priority area and positive whole-school initiatives have already commenced. Problem solving should be centralised in mathematics lessons and pupils should have regular opportunities to engage in open ended problematising. The quality of teaching in Mathematics is good and in several classrooms there is an explicit focus on the language of Mathematics and on the use concrete materials.

- The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in Science is very good. There is a consistent whole school focus on the scientific investigation skills through enquiry based learning. In a number of learning settings, pupils' scientific language is developed to a high level. In order to further develop pupils' experience, greater whole school focus should be placed on open ended design and make activities and efforts should be made to incorporate ICT and Mathematics into learning in science.

6. Quality of Support for Pupils

- This is an inclusive school where pupils are valued and supported. Pupils with special educational needs are making very good progress. Members of the special educational needs (SEN) team are hardworking and the quality of teaching in SEN settings is generally high. A very good range of resources is used to support SEN teaching, including a wide range of screening and diagnostic tests. Most teaching takes place in individual and small group withdrawal settings and it is recommended that in-class support and team teaching initiatives be introduced to target the learning needs of pupils.
- Individual educational plans (IEPs) and group learning plans are prepared by teachers through a good consultative process. While there are some very good practices amongst members of the team with regard to the setting of targets in these plans, targets are not sufficiently clear in all instances. To ensure that effective practices are shared, opportunities for the team to work together, particularly on IEP formulation should be considered. The school should also clarify the practice regarding the formal review of targets in these 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 welcomes the many positive findings in the report, in particular the affirming comments regarding the open, welcoming and inclusive atmosphere in the school, the high standard of teaching, the commendable learning achievements of pupils, the support provided for children with special educational needs and the management and leadership skills that exist in the school.

The Board is pleased with the observations made with regard to pupils' very good behaviour and the positive contribution of the Parents' Association.

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 accepts the recommendations and has already begun work on their implementation.

