

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Muslim NS
Clonskeagh, Dublin 14
Uimhir rolla: 19949B

Date of inspection: 11 October 2010



1. Introduction

The Muslim NS is a 20-teacher vertical national school in the grounds of the Islamic Cultural Centre in Dublin. The current patron is the President of the Islamic Foundation of Ireland. Current enrolment is 288 pupils, representing over twenty nationalities, 73% of whom do not have English as their first language. The pupils travel by bus from south Dublin city and county and some adjacent counties. The poor attendance of a significant number of pupils is a concern and the school has contacted the National Education Welfare Board (NEWB) in this regard.

The Department of Education and Skills (DES) has sanctioned one concessionary post and five English as an Additional Language (EAL) posts to help address the significant language needs of the pupils. Of these, most are currently deployed to mainstream class teaching to reduce the pupil/teacher ratio. The board of management was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the evaluation, and the response of the board will be found in the appendix to this report.

2. Summary of Findings and Recommendations for Further Development

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

- The school staff members work in a collegiate manner and are very committed to the welfare of the pupils in their care. The pupils present as happy, motivated and interested learners.
- Some very good teaching was observed during the evaluation particularly in the teaching of Mathematics in the mainstream classes and in the teaching of English as an Additional Language in the support settings.
- The buildings and the grounds are very well maintained and all classrooms present as pleasing and attractive learning environments.
- The school has placed a focus on the teaching of Literacy and Mathematics and has put some new initiatives in place to improve learning outcomes.
- The board of management is committed to, and supportive of, the school.

The following **main recommendations** are made:

- While acknowledging and respecting the stated aims of the school, the leadership at board and in-school management levels should prioritise clearly the development of a more whole-school, cohesive and consistent approach to addressing the particular needs of the pupils in core areas of learning. In that regard, curriculum planning and decision-making should be highly learner-focused, systematic and based on sound pupil performance data.
- Effective leadership in the school should enable staff to reflect critically on their own work, to identify how improvements can be made, to implement well-planned actions that will bring about identifiable improvement and to monitor pupil outcomes effectively.
- It is recommended that the board of management review the timetable to ensure that adequate time is provided for the teaching of English. It is also recommended that curriculum plans be discussed at board level in order that any ethos or other issues are

formally addressed.

- Pupil attainment, particularly in Mathematics and English, should be monitored systematically at all class levels. This information should then be used to inform differentiated programmes of learning in both literacy and numeracy in all classes.
- The current model of support teaching should be further refined to ensure that the learning needs of targeted groups of pupils are being addressed effectively. It is recommended that specific programmes of learning for in-class support be developed that are based on identified needs and diagnostic assessments. These support programmes should be carefully monitored and regularly reviewed.

3. Quality of School Management

- The last school report in 2005 made a number of recommendations for the board of management. In that regard this current board is commended for addressing issues relating to the certification of accounts, the provision of a school policy on enrolment that is compliant with relevant statutory requirements and the development of a vision statement that reflects the board's statutory responsibility to uphold the characteristic spirit of the school.
- The board of management is currently endeavouring to appoint another member to ensure that it is properly constituted. The current members are committed to and supportive of the school. It is recommended that the board produces an annual report outlining its objectives and achievements to keep parents informed.
- The principal in place at the time of the evaluation had a long association with the school and oversaw its expansion from a two-teacher to a twenty-teacher school. He and the in-school management team worked diligently and conscientiously. The challenge for a new principal will be to develop a whole-school, cohesive and consistent approach to addressing the particular learning needs of the pupils. In addition, staff should be enabled to reflect critically on their own work, to identify how improvements can be made, to implement well-planned actions that will bring about identifiable improvement and to monitor pupil outcomes effectively. Enhancing and developing the current communication links between school and home and between the school and the Muslim community will also be an essential element of the leadership role.
- Because most pupils travel to school by bus, it is a constant challenge to promote informal contact with parents, but efforts at improving home-school communication are commended. A continued focus on involving parents in their children's learning is advised.
- The majority of teachers manage the pupils capably and effectively. Some very good examples of mutually respectful practices were observed in classes where pupils' self confidence and self-efficacy are fostered and supported. Responses from the pupils' questionnaires indicate that they generally like coming to school and that they feel safe in their classes and in the playground. They also express a desire to have a greater say in school decision-making. It may therefore be appropriate to consider a forum for pupil voice.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- A range of organisational policies has been developed that provide guidance regarding practices and procedures in the school. It is strongly recommended that all school policies be

reviewed, agreed and ratified by the board on a phased basis and that ethos and other issues relating to curriculum delivery are formally discussed at this level.

- Some good initial work is evident in curriculum planning. For example, the English and Mathematics school plans provide an outline of the content to be covered and guidance on the teaching approaches to be used. It is recommended that the curriculum reviews scheduled for the coming year provide more specific guidance on programme delivery at each class level.
- The overall quality of teachers' planning is satisfactory. While short-term planning in general places emphasis on content and topics, very good practice was noted in some individual teachers' planning. Specific learning objectives and planning for differentiated needs were the hall marks of the very good planning and contributed significantly to very good teaching in some classes.
- It is recommended that a culture of school self-evaluation be developed. This would enable the principal and staff, in conjunction with the board, to plan activities for improvement, set specific learning programmes, monitor progress and modify practices on a school-wide basis.
- 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

- The stated key aims of the school include fostering the Islamic way of life, enabling the pupils to develop English language competence as well as accessing the primary school curriculum. The Islamic ethos is clearly manifest in the organisation of the school day and the school year. School holidays are determined by the Islamic calendar of celebrations and festivals and the school day has been extended by 10 minutes. The school timetable provides significant time each day (50 minutes) for the teaching of Arabic, the Qur'an and Religious Education (RE) to all classes. In addition pupils from third to sixth classes attend prayer in the Mosque on a daily basis and pupils in the senior classes also attend Jumah prayer on Fridays.
- As 73% of pupils do not have English as their first language, there are significant language learning needs among these pupils. It is a matter of concern that a substantial amount of curricular time is used to accommodate the teaching of Arabic, which is not a recognised subject on the curriculum, even allowing for some use of the recommended discretionary curricular time set out in the Primary School Curriculum 1999. This impacts significantly on teachers' capacity to use the facility of discretionary curriculum time to provide additional and much-needed teaching in curriculum areas such as English and Mathematics. Notwithstanding progress arising from previous correspondence with the Department of Education and Skills on this matter, this issue should continue to be addressed by the school as a matter of priority.
- Cothaíonn na hoidí dearcadh dearfach i leith na Gaeilge agus usáidtear an Ghaeilge mar theanga teagaisc sna ceachtanna. Tá raon maith chluichí agus gníomhaíochtaí in úsáid chun stór focal na ndaltaí a fhorbairt. Tugann cuid de na hoidí deiseanna do na daltaí páirt a

ghlacadh in obair ghrúpa agus in obair bheirte chun na foclóra a dhaingniu. Soláthraítear an-chuid áiseanna le haghaidh na gceachtanna agus baintear úsáid chuí as an gclárban idirghníomhach. Moltar úsáid na Gaeilge neamhfoirmiúil ag na múinteoirí i rith an lae. Tá caighdeán sásúil á bhaint amach sa léitheoireacht agus sa scríbhneoireacht. Tá an clár sa Ghaeilge háirithe sna ranganna go léir bunaithe go mórmhór ar théascleabhair agus mar sin níl dóthain béime leagtha ar úsáid na teanga agus ar fhorbairt na teanga labhartha. Ba chóir clár cuimsitheach don scoil ar fad a leagan amach a léiríonn leanúnachas ó rang go rang agus a chuireann níos mó béime ar dhaingniú agus ar chleachtadh na teanga.

Teachers foster a positive attitude towards the Irish language and use Irish as the language of instruction when teaching Irish. A good range of games and activities is used to foster vocabulary development. Some teachers provide opportunities for pupils to participate in pair and group work to practise the language learned. A good range of resources is used in the lessons and appropriate use is made of the interactive whiteboard. Teachers are commended on the informal use of Irish throughout the school day. The standard of reading and writing in Irish is satisfactory. The programme in Irish in all classes is based primarily on a class text book and consequently there is insufficient emphasis on the use or development of oral language. A clear whole-school programme of learning is required that would provide continuity in the programme from class to class reflecting more emphasis on the practice and consolidation of the language.

- In the teaching of English, the importance of oral language is acknowledged in the school plan. Explicit language teaching across the curriculum is effective in some classes and this focused approach should be extended to all classes. All teachers should provide discrete oral language lessons that enable the pupils to develop specific language skills and to acquire a wide and relevant vocabulary.
- The approaches to the teaching of reading vary through the school. All classes have print-rich environments and individual library corners and an interest in reading is fostered. The provision for early literacy overall is good and includes differentiated approaches to the teaching of reading. Some pupils in every class attain good levels of fluency in reading and can discuss texts with interest and understanding. A commercial reading scheme has recently been introduced and is being used at every class level. There is however, an over emphasis on whole-class teaching of reading as the pupils progress through the school. In the middle and senior classes the comprehension of texts becomes a significant challenge for some pupils. It is recommended that a co-ordinated whole-school approach to the teaching of reading be developed. This would include the teaching and assessment of explicit reading *and comprehension* skills at every level and the setting of reading materials at an appropriate level for all pupils. The support of parents in the school reading programme is noted.
- The standard of handwriting is very good through the school. Where best practice in personal writing was observed pupils were encouraged to write independently in a variety of genres. They were also engaged in very good preparation activities and displayed an appropriate range of writing skills. These approaches are commended and should be extended through the school. It is advised that teachers monitor writing samples closely and provide clear and detailed feedback to the pupils in order that individual skills can be developed appropriately.
- Overall pupil achievement in Mathematics is satisfactory. Best practice observed in the teaching of Mathematics included the use of oral language in preparation for the lessons, effective mental mathematics, concrete materials, high levels of pupil participation, clear explanation of concepts and close monitoring of pupil progress. However, in many of the lessons observed there was an over reliance on the whole-class teaching of text book activities with insufficient promotion of mathematical language and mental mathematics and an absence of concrete materials.

- Good work has been initiated in planning for a music programme that is respectful of the Islamic tradition. This plan provides for a broad and balanced programme but current practice in most classrooms does not reflect this. The support services and internal expertise should be utilised to raise standards of learning in this area. It is also recommended that the music curriculum be discussed at board of management level in order that any ethos or other issues are formally addressed. The school has contributed to a research dissertation on Music and the Islamic faith, the findings and recommendations of which will be helpful to the school in planning and implementing an appropriate music programme.
- The quality of learning outcomes in Visual Arts is very good across the school as evident in the range of examples of pupils' work exhibited in classrooms and corridors. Teachers endeavour to explore all strands of the curriculum and use the environment artistically to enhance the programme for pupils.
- Responses to parent questionnaires indicated that they are generally happy with the teaching in the school and with the help given to their individual child. Similarly, almost all pupils in their questionnaire responses stated that their teachers clearly explained things in lessons and that they enjoy learning.
- While teachers overall make good efforts to monitor pupil progress using a range of teacher-designed tests and checklists, it is essential that pupil attainment, particularly in Mathematics and English, should be monitored systematically at all class levels. This information should then be used to develop differentiated programmes of learning in both literacy and numeracy in all classes.

6. Quality of Supports for Pupils

- The school engaged in a review process to examine the effectiveness of its model of support for pupils with special education needs. A new model was subsequently developed in which each teacher from the learning support team provides support in both literacy and Mathematics to two assigned classes only. This support is primarily provided on an in-class basis with some pupils withdrawn if required. Good teaching approaches are provided in some of these withdrawal settings. To ensure the effectiveness of the support in the in-class settings, the learning needs of the targeted pupils must be clearly addressed. Specific programmes of learning, based on identified needs and diagnostic assessments, should be developed and these support programmes should be carefully monitored and regularly reviewed.
- Two dedicated EAL teachers and one resource teacher continue to provide focused support on a withdrawal basis to those pupils who require it. Comprehensive Individual Education Plans are drawn up for these pupils in consultation with the class teachers. Very good teaching approaches are in use in these settings and very good processes for monitoring and recording progress are in place.
- The Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) provide good support to the pupils assigned to them. It is recommended that formal meetings take place between the in-school management and the SNAs to support them in their work.
- Some very good work is being carried out by individual teachers to foster an appreciation of the Islamic way of life for example in the Visual Arts, Music and History. It is recommended that the school build on this good work and develop a formal policy on Intercultural Education.

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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

English is given priority in the Muslim National School, and the teachers are fully aware how E.A.L. considerations permeate all school/teaching activities. The school is fortunate in offering Arabic studies to the children. This is accommodated by extending the school day by ten minutes, and by reducing formal Religious instruction lessons.

Arabic develops overall linguistic skills, which greatly benefit the children. Given that 77% are Irish citizens, we hold that our students with their advanced, multi-lingual skills, are an asset for Irish society/economy.

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

Pupil attainment in Mathematics and English has been monitored in all classes from 1st to 6th class since 202.

Class teachers use this information to assist in the planning of differentiated programmes in Maths and English in all classes.