

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

**Whole School Evaluation
REPORT**

**St. Dominic's National School
Tallaght, Dublin 24
Uimhir rolla: 19950J**

Date of inspection: 14 December 2010



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

1. Introduction

St. Dominic's National School is an eighteen-teacher, co-educational, vertical, primary school under the patronage of the Catholic Archbishop of Dublin. It shares its campus with Scoil Colmcille. It is a DEIS Band 2 school and has 210 pupils on roll. A significant number of staff changes have occurred recently. Attendance levels for a small number of pupils are a matter of concern and strategies for improving attendance are in place. 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 principal, who is committed to the welfare and holistic education of pupils, promotes staff collegiality and demonstrates competent management and administrative skills.
- The teachers are a vibrant presence in the school; they have very good communication skills and present lessons in a lively and engaging manner.
- The school is to be commended for the successful implementation of a range of early-intervention initiatives for infant pupils.
- The teaching of writing and poetry is effective and pupils attain very good standards in their personal writing in a wide range of genres.
- Across the school there are effective co-teaching models in place and the teachers competently promote cooperative learning among pupils.
- The management of pupils is very good; the children display positive attitudes to learning.
- The board and the parents' association are very supportive of the school.
- The school is responsive to pupils' needs and provides a wide range of supports for individual pupils.

The following **main recommendations** are made:

- A comprehensive review of the teaching of reading and the development of an oral language skills programme are recommended.
- In Mathematics, the school should liaise with the professional development service for teachers (PDST) in order to implement whole-school, effective practices for the screening of pupils, ability grouping, programme planning and assessment.
- In the teaching of Irish, sustained opportunities for the pupils to converse in pairs and groups should be a central feature of lessons.
- The setting of targets and learning objectives should be more specific and attainable in all aspects of planning, both at whole-school and at individual level.
- The board should provide clarity regarding the length of the school day and ensure compliance with the provisions of Circular 11/95.

3. Quality of School Management

- The cohesive, hard-working board is very supportive of the school and maintains the building and grounds to a very good standard. The chairperson is a visible presence in the school. Further board engagement in curriculum planning matters, particularly in monitoring standards, is advised. The board should provide clarity regarding the length of the school day in line with the provisions of Circular 11/95.
- The principal is a competent manager. She demonstrates good administrative skills, promotes a culture of collegiality among staff and is committed to the welfare and holistic education of all pupils. She is ably assisted by a diligent, enthusiastic in-school management team who carry out their duties very well. Almost all parents' questionnaire responses state they are happy with the school, and that it is welcoming and well run.
- There is very good management of resources overall and curriculum resources and materials are well organised, accessible and widely used. The school hosts a well run library, garden, and also dedicated rooms for parents, cooking and computers. More consistent use of computers to support pupils' learning is advised, as reflected in pupil-questionnaire responses.
- Good relations and communications with the school community are supported by newsletters, text-a-parents, notes, notice boards, journals, regular parent/teacher meetings and annual reports. The parents' association provide very good fund-raising and other supports to the school. Parents are involved in a range of school-based activities including the garden, library, sports, and in initiatives for reading, science and mathematics. Parents' responses reflect a desire for greater communication regarding the work of the board and the parents' association.
- Overall, there is very good management of pupils, enhanced by the school wide implementation of 'Discipline for Learning' and the promotion of cooperative activities among pupils. The pupils are respectful, enthusiastic and well behaved. Pupil-questionnaire responses reflect the need to consider how pupils could have a greater say in school matters, for example, by the establishment of a student council.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- A collaborative school planning process is well established among the staff. Organisational policies provide clarity on school procedures. Overall curriculum planning is good, particularly regarding mathematics and English, with scope for development regarding whole-school assessment approaches in all plans.
- The school has begun engagement in self-evaluation on the outcomes of standardised tests. These data should now be analysed further in order to review planned programmes of learning and teaching methodologies, and also to target specific groups of pupils. In the next DEIS action plan it is important that measurable targets are identified using available school data. Current DEIS programmes including Reading Recovery, First Steps writing and Maths-for-fun are implemented competently. The schools' well-planned early interventions, the Power Hour and Literacy Hour, are effective.
- The quality of, and approaches to individual teachers' planning are varied. Best practice observed adopts objectives-based planning with provision for targeted group teaching. All teachers should implement this approach and be more specific on ongoing assessment of learning. Monthly progress reports are maintained.

Child protection policy and procedures

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 teachers are effective communicators, learning environments are very attractive and pupil participation levels are good. The use of resources is good overall. The provision for group teaching by mainstream teachers should be extended further, particularly where there is significant disparity between pupils' achievement levels. Approaches by teachers to the correction of pupils' work vary. There is insufficient evidence that the teachers' assessment tools are having a direct impact on future planning of learning objectives. A whole-school approach to assessment for improving learning outcomes is recommended.
- Tá caighdeán cuí i dteagasc agus i múineadh na Gaeilge. Cé go mbaineann na hoidí úsáid as raon breá de mhodheolaíochtaí, áiseanna agus gníomhaíochtaí, ar an iomlán tá easpa béime ar an gcumarsáid. Ba chóir go mbeadh deiseanna leanúnacha ag na daltaí labhairt i bpéirí agus i ngrúpaí mar chuid lárnach de cheachtanna, mar a fheictear i gcuid bheag de na ranganna. Ullmhaíonn na hoidí téascanna a thugann dúshlán oiriúnach do dhaltaí. Is cleachtas breá é sin. Moltar réimse gníomhaíochtaí scríbhneoireachta a leathnú thar tascanna as téascleabhair. Glacann na ranganna go léir páirt bríomhar i n-aithris agus i gcanadh amhrán.

There is satisfactory teaching and learning of Irish. While all teachers use a good range of methodologies, resources and activities, overall there is insufficient emphasis on communication. Sustained opportunities for the pupils to converse in pairs and groups, as observed in a small number of classes, should be a central feature of lessons. Teachers prepare appropriately-challenging reading texts for pupils. This is good practice. An extension of the range of writing activities, beyond workbook tasks, is advised. All classes engage in recitation and song singing with enthusiasm.

- The teaching of early-reading skills using levelled texts, phonics, and early intervention is very good. Elsewhere there are varied approaches to the teaching of reading. While some pupils attain good standards, there are many pupils who do not yet display competence in reading for meaning and with appropriate fluency. A review of the teaching of reading is required regarding the development of specific reading skills, phonics, ability grouping using appropriate texts and ongoing assessment.
- In oral language, the pupils engage in talk and discussion, and recount of news. Some elements of commercial programmes are also taught. A comprehensive programme of oral language skills to be taught at each class level is recommended. In addition, all lessons should be preceded by intensive oral language learning. The pupils achieve very good standards in their personal writing. A suitable range of genres is taught with competence. The teaching of poetry is very good. The writing process is in evidence and the pupils' work is well presented.
- Overall, teaching and learning Mathematics are satisfactory. The teachers provide good explanations; ensure language promotion and real-life emphasis; and prepare suitable displays and mental mathematics activities. The co-teaching model is very good in all

aspects of provision. Achievement trends in the standardised test results of recent years are not steady. The majority of mainstream teachers should provide more differentiation in their planning and teaching to cater for the varying ability levels of pupils. Assessment of each pupil's mastery of mathematics objectives is required on an ongoing basis. It is recommended that the school liaise with the PDST in order to implement effective practices for the screening of pupils, differentiation, programme planning and assessment.

- The teaching of Music overall is satisfactory. The quality of song singing varies. Some classes achieve good standards in performance and due attention is given to vocal warm-ups, correct pitching and dynamics. Where lessons were effective and well-prepared they incorporated learning across the strands, emphasis on the elements of music, stimulating listening tasks and good exploration of a range of sounds. It is recommended that best practice be disseminated in order to ensure that all strands of the music curriculum are consistently taught with confidence.

6. Quality of Support for Pupils

- There are very good supports for pupils, enhanced by the work of the care team, support teacher, and personnel for the school completion programme and home-school-liaison coordination. They promote positive links with parents by home visits and the provision of courses; they enable the smooth transfer of pupils to post-primary education and put actions and supports in place for targeted pupils, including participation in cookery and cooperative games.
- All special-education-needs (SEN) supports are provided in a caring way. Best practice observed involved highly-focused planning based on the outcomes of assessment, clear target setting, intensive teaching and ongoing recording and analysis of learning outcomes. The special needs assistants support the care needs of the pupils very well. There is good coordination among teachers and parental involvement is promoted. It is recommended that this newly-emerging SEN team be provided with ongoing opportunities to coordinate practices relating to those aspects identified as best practice.

Appendix

School response to the report

Submitted by the Board of Management

Area 1: Observations on the content of the inspection report

The staff have examined the report and are acting on the recommendations of the report. We thank the inspectorate for their courtesy and professionalism to the children and staff.