

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

**Whole School Evaluation
REPORT**

**Scoil Íosagáin
Buncrana, County Donegal
Uimhir rolla: 19967D**

Date of inspection: 20 September 2013



1. Introduction

Scoil Íosagáin is a vertical, co-educational school under the patronage of the Catholic Bishop of Derry. At the time of the evaluation there were twenty-six mainstream classes and seven classes for pupils with special educational needs. Overall attendance levels for the 706 pupils are very good. The school serves the Buncrana area with enrolment to the special classes meeting the needs of the wider Inishowen peninsula. International pupils account for a significant percentage of the school population. The school participates in the School Completion Programme (SCP) which is a Department of Education and Skills initiative that supports pupils at risk of early school leaving. During the whole-school evaluation, inspectors observed teaching and learning in fourteen mainstream class settings, four special classes and five support-teaching settings. The subjects evaluated were Irish, English, Mathematics and Science. 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:

- Scoil Íosagáin provides a very welcoming, nurturing and inclusive learning environment for its pupils.
- The school's commitment to the inclusion and integration of pupils with special educational needs is exemplary.
- The board of management functions very effectively and is committed to school improvement and development.
- The principal demonstrates excellent school leadership.
- The in-school management team is deeply committed to meeting the needs of pupils and to school improvement.
- Teachers are enthusiastic, innovative and diligent in their teaching.
- The overall quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement across the settings evaluated is very good.
- The development of pupils' leadership skills is highly commended.

The following **main recommendations** are made:

- Going forward, it is recommended that school management, in consultation with the National Council for Special Education, continues to work towards ensuring an appropriate age profile among pupils with special educational needs.
- Sa Ghaeilge, moltar forbairt sa bhreis a dhéanamh ar an léitheoireacht agus ar an scríbhneoireacht neamhspleách. *In Irish, it is recommended that reading and independent writing should be developed further.*

3. Quality of School Management

- The board of management functions very effectively. Members bring a valuable range of expertise to their roles and there is great commitment to school development. The board's role in actively supporting policy review is commended.
- The in-school management team comprises the principal, administrative deputy principal, four assistant principals and eight teachers with posts of responsibility. There are very high levels of collegiality among the team and all members are deeply committed to meeting the needs of pupils and to school improvement. The principal demonstrates excellent commitment and dedication to all aspects of school leadership. She is a very effective curriculum leader and promotes a culture of distributed leadership successfully. The principal leads a nurturing school where children are encouraged to learn happily together. She sets high professional standards and her regular presence in classrooms in supporting learning is commended.
- The work of the administrative deputy principal is very valuable. In particular, her mentoring of newly qualified teachers is very successful. All assistant principals have key leadership responsibilities. The special duties post-holders work diligently and contribute to the successful management of the school. Commendably, there is great willingness among the wider staff to take on additional responsibilities.
- Human resources are managed effectively. There are forty-four teachers on staff. They are enthusiastic, innovative and demonstrate a very good work ethic. They undertake considerable continuing professional development (CPD) linked to school improvement priorities. In particular, there is significant focus on CPD in special education. Many teachers have experience of teaching in a range of settings within the school. This good practice should be extended across all settings.
- There are twenty-six special needs assistants (SNAs); seven have been appointed to mainstream classes and nineteen to special classes. They work very diligently helping particular pupils to function as independent learners and supporting their inclusion in classroom activities. The work of the librarian, employed under the SCP, is very supportive of the development of pupils' literacy skills. Ancillary staff, including two secretaries and a caretaker, provide very valuable support.
- The management of material resources is very good. Learning environments are highly praiseworthy. Corridor displays celebrate the pupils' sporting and cultural achievements as well as their written, creative and environmental work. Visual timetables, in place in some classrooms, would be valuable in all junior classrooms.
- The management of relationships with the school community is very good. Responses to parental questionnaires, administered as part of the evaluation, indicate that a very high number of parents are happy with the school, believing that their children feel safe at school and that the school is well run. The parents' association works industriously to raise additional funding for school needs.
- During the evaluation, the management of pupils was very effective overall. Pupils are enthusiastic learners and they benefit from a very wide range of co-curricular and extracurricular activities. Pupils have received many accolades for cultural, academic and sporting achievements at local, regional and national level. Drama and buddy systems support the inclusion of pupils with varying needs. Commendably, pupils are encouraged

to adopt leadership roles including membership of the student council and the school's Green Team.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- The quality of whole-school planning is very good. It is very useful in guiding the work of teachers and ensuring progression in pupils' learning. As a next step, planning that fosters greater independent pupil-use of information and communications technology (ICT), including the progressive development of skills, would be beneficial.
- Teachers' individual planning is very good. There is very effective shared long-term planning and teachers maintain appropriate short-term planning and monthly progress records. It is advised that, in some instances, teachers review their timetables to include Irish, English and Mathematics on a daily basis. Discrete oral language lessons should feature in all classroom timetables. This happens currently in many cases but not in all.
- A very good level of school self-evaluation pertains. The school is involved in a continuing process of improvement which includes seeking regular feedback from both parents and pupils. Very good progress has been made in developing the school improvement plan for literacy in accordance with Department Circular 39/2012.
- 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

- Baineann caighdeán maith amach i múineadh agus i bhfoghlaim na Gaeilge. Tá scileanna éisteachta agus labhartha na ndaltaí á bhforbairt go éifeachtach. Léiríonn torthaí na scrúduithe caighdeánaithe go bhfuil roinnt daltaí ag baint amach caighdeán an-ard sa léitheoireacht agus san éisteacht. Le barr feabhais a chur ar an obair, moltar na gníomhaíochtaí réamhléitheoireachta a mhéadú chun scileanna aithint agus fuaimniú na bhfocal nua a dhaingniú. B'fhiú freisin an grúpléitheoireacht a fhorbairt. Tá caighdeán réasúnta maith ar an scríbhneoireacht. Moltar an scríbhneoireacht neamhspléach a chleachtadh níos rialta. B'fhiú an *Triail Ghaeilge Dhroim Chonrach* a úsáid, ní amháin i rang a sé ach anois ó rang a dó, chun na hoidí a chur ar an eolas faoi dul chun cinn na ndaltaí.
- *Good standards are achieved in the teaching and learning of Irish. Pupils' listening and speaking skills are developed effectively. Results of standardised tests indicate that some pupils are achieving very high standards in reading and listening. In order to further enhance the quality of work, it is recommended that pre-reading activities should be increased to consolidate word recognition and the pronunciation of new words. The practice of group reading should also be established. The standard of writing is reasonably good. It is recommended that independent writing be undertaken more regularly. The Drumcondra Irish Test should now be used, not only in sixth class but from second class upwards, to inform teachers of pupils' progress.*
- Teaching and learning in English are of a high quality. Oral language and listening skills are addressed carefully. The development of pupils' reading is thorough and very effective. In the junior classes, assisted reading approaches are praiseworthy. Pupils have access to an excellent school library as well as individual class libraries. Some very

good comprehension strategies are used. Overall results in standardised tests of reading are very good from year to year. Provision for writing is successful and well-considered opportunities are provided to write in various genres. Consequently, most pupils write confidently and fluently. While pupils' handwriting is good in the main, the introduction of script writing at an earlier stage is advised. Poetry is well addressed but further attention to memorisation and recitation would be beneficial.

- Provision for Mathematics is very strong with appropriate emphasis on mental calculations and the development of problem-solving skills. Mathematical language and the use of guided-discovery methods are prioritised. It is advised that teachers' monthly progress records now outline completed work in these two areas. Pupils' knowledge of tables and number facts is appropriate. Their written work presents very well overall and it is monitored carefully. Overall results in standardised tests are very good from year to year.
- The quality of provision in Science is very good. Features of very effective practice include the promotion of scientific skills through collaborative investigations, the development of higher-order thinking skills and the very good attention to safety. The school garden provides an excellent outdoor classroom. Fine examples of the pupils' work are displayed in classrooms and pupils demonstrate good understanding of the concepts taught.
- The overall quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement across the settings evaluated is very good. The progress of pupils, including pupils with special educational needs, is very successful. This finding is reflected in the responses of the parents' and pupils' questionnaires.
- The quality of assessment is excellent overall. Differentiated teaching and learning result from the assessments undertaken and pupils' progress is tracked carefully. Aspects of assessment for learning (AfL) have been introduced successfully on a school-wide basis and pupils maintain self-assessment learning folders.

6. Quality of Support for Pupils

- The commitment of management and staff to the inclusion of pupils with additional and special educational needs is exemplary. It is very clearly evident in all daily practice. There is very good collaboration amongst mainstream teachers, support teachers and SNAs for the benefit of pupils. It would be beneficial to host further CPD courses in support of the team work of teachers and SNAs. The school community's shared high expectations for pupils' needs have led to obvious successes. While support staff is deployed appropriately in the main, the current deployment of learning-support resources for higher-achieving pupils should be reviewed in line with the Department's *Learning Support Guidelines* (2006).
- Overall, support and special class teachers provide extensive planning documents which align with best preparation practice. Record keeping is conducted assiduously and assessment practice is very good. According to degree of need, pupils' access to learning is guided either by Individual Education Plans (IEPs) or by class-support plans. Priority learning needs are well identified, specific learning targets are outlined and defined achievement criteria are included for almost all targets. In a very small number of cases, targets are too general and could be more measurable. Some class-support plans would benefit from the target-setting approach utilised in IEPs.

- The engagement of all support and special class teachers with their pupils is very positive. High-quality teaching approaches and interventions are evident. In the special classes, there is very good emphasis on the development of language and communication skills. Learning outcomes, the progression of learning for the pupils and their integration into mainstream settings are excellent. In the mainstream classrooms, team teaching supports pupils' learning successfully. Reading Recovery is employed very effectively and its use is being maximised.
- At the time of the evaluation, it was found that a number of pupils with special educational needs were not age appropriate for a primary school setting. School management reported that revised criteria have been put in place for the transition of pupils with special educational needs to post-primary placement. Going forward, it is recommended that management, in consultation with the National Council for Special Education, continues to work towards ensuring an appropriate age profile among pupils with special educational needs.
- School procedures promote and celebrate intercultural education and experiences. Pupils' additional English language needs are very well addressed. There is very good deployment of the resources available under the SCP.
- Throughout the school, very effective home-school links are maintained. Parents receive letters regularly, parent-teacher meetings are held annually and informative written reports are issued to parents. The pupils' magazine, produced for the wider school community, is highly commendable.

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 wishes to acknowledge the Whole School Evaluation as a process that was exceedingly positive and one that was affirming and respectful of Board members, staff and pupils.

We welcome the Inspectors' report which acknowledges the commitment, diligence and enthusiasm of our staff and the high quality of teaching and learning in our school.

We particularly welcome the recognition of the development of leadership skills in our pupils, their many and varied achievements and their eagerness to learn.

The Board appreciates the very high satisfaction rate among parents as indicated in questionnaire responses during the evaluation.

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 continuing to consult with the National Council for Special Education towards ensuring an appropriate age profile among our pupils with Special Educational Needs.

Tá foireann na scoile ag obair ar phlean chun an léitheoireacht agus an scríbhneoireacht neamhspléach a fhorbairt.