An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Dunboyne Senior National School,
Dunboyne, County Meath
Uimhir rolla: 20033D

Date of inspection: 7 March 2012
1. Introduction

Dunboyne Senior National School is a co-educational nineteen teacher school under the patronage of the Catholic Bishop of Meath. A team of seven teachers provides additional support for pupils with special educational needs (SEN). The school caters for pupils from third to sixth class and attendance levels for the 566 pupils are high. During the whole-school evaluation, inspectors observed teaching and learning in twelve mainstream class settings and five SEN settings. The board of management of the school was given an opportunity to comment on the findings and recommendations of the report; the board chose to accept the report without response.

2. Summary of Findings and Recommendations for Further Development

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

- Members of the board of management discharge their duties diligently to provide valuable support for the school.
- The principal is dedicated to the work of the school and exhibits a high level of organisational skills.
- The commitment and positive work ethic of the teachers, combined with a deep sense of care for pupils’ welfare is highly commended.
- There is good teaching and learning across the school. The teaching of Mathematics is a particular strength.
- Pupils are very well behaved and exhibit very good application to their learning activities. They achieve a commendable standard with regard to their penmanship and presentation skills.
- The school provides for a wide range of co-curricular and extracurricular activities.

The following main recommendations are made:

- A skills-based approach should underpin the development and extension of pupils’ oral language and reading competencies.
- The SEN team should explore in-class models of support to further ensure that available resources are used to maximum effect.
- Teachers should engage with the systematic assessment of pupils’ learning with regard to identified learning outcomes.
- The curriculum leadership roles of the in-school management team should be enhanced to add momentum to ongoing school self-evaluation and to address the school’s chosen priority areas.
- A range of communication strategies should be developed to foster deeper links with the wider parent community.
3. Quality of School Management

- The board of management meets regularly and discharges its duties in a professional manner. The board is keen to ensure the development of the school infrastructure. The advancement of current plans to replace the existing school with a new building is an ongoing priority for the board.

- The quality of in-school management is good. The dedicated and long-standing principal exhibits very effective organisational leadership to the school. His interest in pupils’ welfare is very evident and he is committed to maintaining good academic standards and providing a broad educational experience for the pupils. The deputy principal and the in-school management team carry out their duties diligently. The curriculum leadership and decision making aspects of their roles should be further enhanced to add momentum to school self-evaluation and school improvement.

- The management of resources is very good. Existing procedures for staff rotation should now be documented. The school has a wide range of useful resource materials to support teaching and learning. The compilation of an overarching list of resources in the SEN settings is recommended. Very purposeful and attractive displays were noted in classrooms and circulation areas. Ancillary staff provides very valuable support to the school.

- In questionnaires, parents responded that they are kept informed of their children’s progress and they indicated high levels of satisfaction with the work of the school. From these questionnaires, a substantial number of respondents indicated low levels of awareness of consultation on school matters or knowledge of the school’s Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) policy. There is, therefore, some need for greater openness and engagement with the wider parent body. This should be addressed in a timely manner.

- Through a range of activities, the parents’ association demonstrates valuable commitment to supporting the work of the school.

- The management of pupils is very good and they engage eagerly in their learning. In particular, the school is commended for its approach to managing some pupils with challenging behaviour. Most pupils reported getting on well with other children in the school and acknowledged that teachers talk to them about bullying.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- The quality of organisational policies is good and these inform the smooth running of the school.

- In the main, good quality curricular plans have been devised.

- School self-evaluation is at a very early stage of development. The analysis of data underpins a three-year action plan for Mathematics. There is need for the ongoing collation and analysis of the available data to be used more systematically in the setting of targets and the planning of learning activities.
• Teachers’ long-term planning is generally of good quality. There is significant scope for development in teachers’ short-term planning which is primarily topic-based. An objective-based and learning-outcome focus is now recommended.

• All teachers in SEN settings diligently devise individual education plans and programmes. More extensive and consistent use of diagnostic assessment data should underpin the setting of clear attainable targets and skills-based learning activities.

• 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

• Tá cáilíocht an teagaisc agus na foghlama sa Ghaeilge go maith agus déantar soláthar éifeachtaidh do gach snáth den churacáim. Ar an iomlán, tá cumas cumarsáide na ndaltaí á bhforbarait go córasach. I gcuí mhaith ranganna, tá sé ar chumas formhór na ndaltaí abairtí a struchtúrú i gceart, na briathra a láimhs eáil go cumasach agus an Ghaeilge a úsáid go neamhspleách. Leagann na múinteoirí béim c huí ar mhúineadh agus ar fhoglaíom na gramadaí. B’fhéidir an obair seo a chomhthéacs go dtí leis an Ghaeilge a úsáid le haghaidh-chomhthéacs na foghlama. I bhformhór na ranganna, léann cuid mhaith de na daltaí le tuiscint agus le fuaimniú ceart. Tá moladh tuillte ag na hoidí maidir le caighdeán scríbhneoireachta na ndaltaí.

• The quality of teaching and learning in Irish is good and there is effective provision for all strands of the curriculum. Overall, pupils’ communication skills are systematically developed. In many classes, the majority of the pupils are able to structure sentences correctly and to use Irish independently. Teachers place an appropriate emphasis on the teaching and learning of grammar. It would be worthwhile to further integrate this work into the general learning context. In the majority of classes, many of pupils read with understanding and correct pronunciation. The teachers are commended for the high standard of writing achieved by the pupils.

• The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in English is good. Pupils have access to suitable novels and engage regularly in talk and discussion. Good reading attainment is noted for many pupils. To further extend pupils’ attainment, a systematic whole-school approach to the teaching of specific oral and reading skills at each class level is recommended. In many classes, pupils demonstrate great enthusiasm for poetry. Process writing is carefully developed and teachers are commended for the high standard of presentation and penmanship skills achieved by the pupils.

• The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in Mathematics is very good. Pupils demonstrate a confident mastery of key mathematical concepts and apply mathematical skills with accuracy. In some contexts, there is potential to differentiate the learning activities to facilitate greater levels of support or challenge for a range of learners. There is a consistent whole-school approach to activity based learning, the development of mathematical language and problem solving skills. In questionnaires, many pupils indicated very positive attitudes to Mathematics.

• The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in Physical Education (PE) is good. There is good provision across five strands of the curriculum. There is scope however to develop more guided-discovery and exploration by pupils of how skills may be employed during some activities. The school’s participation in various inter-schools
sporting activities is considerable and is facilitated through the dedicated commitment and enthusiasm of the teachers.

- The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement is good overall. Teachers make skilful use of well-chosen resources and information and communication technology (ICT). All teachers exhibit very effective classroom management skills and are dynamic and effective communicators. Lessons are well structured and in the main are predominantly teacher directed and delivered on a whole-class basis. There is some scope to further match learning activities to pupils’ abilities. Pupils’ efforts and achievements are acknowledged through constructive use of praise and feedback.

- The monitoring of pupils’ written work is of a very high standard. In some contexts, high quality formative feedback is documented. Where very effective assessment practice was found, the use of criterion reference tests, rubrics and pupil self-assessment strategies was noted. It is recommended that ongoing assessment of pupils’ learning with regard to intended learning outcomes be developed on a whole-school basis.

6. Quality of Support for Pupils

- Provision for pupils with SEN is characterised by positive teacher/pupil interactions and the successful building of pupils’ self-esteem. Current support categories include resource, learning support and English as an additional Language (EAL). While teachers demonstrate a clear commitment to the welfare of pupils, there is scope for development in some aspects of this provision.

- A number of the lessons observed in some contexts were well structured and appropriate to pupils’ needs, there is scope however to ensure consistently that pupils’ learning activities are aligned to pupils’ diagnosed learning needs. Currently, provision is on a withdrawal basis. To further ensure that available resources are used to maximum effect, it is recommended that the team review this provision with a view to exploring in-class models of support.

- There is scope to develop practice with regard to pupils who may be experiencing disadvantage. The board should now consider the introduction of a book rental scheme to minimise costs for parents.

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