

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**

**Department of Education and Skills**

**Whole School Evaluation**

**REPORT**

**St Matthew's National School  
Ballymahon, County Longford  
Roll number: 201280**

**Date of inspection: 26 May 2011**



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

## 1. Introduction

St Matthew's NS provides primary education for boys and girls from junior infants to sixth class. At the time of the evaluation, the school had an administrative principal, nine mainstream class teachers and seven teachers working in support roles. There were 245 pupils enrolled. The school receives various supports that are available to rural schools under Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS), an initiative of the Department of Education and Skills aimed at alleviating educational disadvantage.

The school was formed when the town's former boys and girls schools were amalgamated in 2000. St Matthew's NS is currently located in the original girls school. There is an application with the Department for a new building on the site of the original boys school. The current accommodation is deficient in various respects and provides challenges for the principal and staff on a daily basis. Following flood damage in January 2011, pupils and teachers were dispersed among three different locations in the town until the main building was restored shortly before the evaluation. 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 principal and teachers engaged positively and openly with the WSE process.
- The school has a cohort of committed, talented teachers.
- The overall quality of the teaching and learning observed in individual classrooms was good.
- Individual teachers demonstrate a very good commitment to the welfare of pupils and to their own professional development.

The following **main recommendations** are made:

- The leadership role of the principal should be developed, as discussed at the post-evaluation meetings.
- The management and leadership roles of teachers, including members of the in-school management team, should be greatly enhanced. These roles should include whole-school planning, curriculum development and collaborative planning for pupils with special educational needs.
- The school should provide well-informed leadership and management of the school's support team.
- The whole-school planning process should be conducted in a way that involves collaboration and consultation with key stakeholders such as staff members and parents, as appropriate.
- The board of management should support and monitor the work of the principal and teachers in implementing the recommendations of this report, especially those regarding in-school management, school planning and support for pupils.
- It is recommended that the board put in place procedures to facilitate the principal and staff in discussing, preparing and implementing a policy on dignity in the workplace, with a view to fostering and maintaining positive working relationships in the school.

### 3. Quality of School Management

- The board of management is properly constituted and operates in accordance with relevant legislation and Department rules. The minutes of board meetings are recorded and maintained in a transparent manner and the school's financial accounts are certified independently. It is recommended that the board support and monitor the work of the principal and staff in implementing the recommendations of this report, especially those regarding in-school management, school planning and support for pupils. To this end, it is recommended that the chairperson of the board hold regular, scheduled meetings with the in-school management team.
- Since his appointment in 2002, the principal teacher has overseen a significant increase in enrolment and staffing. He has had to deal with various difficulties arising from the amalgamation and from the delay in acquiring a new school building. During the period of the evaluation he managed the day-to-day operation of the school with courtesy and efficiency.
- There is evidence, however, of significant scope for development in the leadership role of the principal. In particular, there is a need for better co-ordination of the work of the teachers and meaningful engagement with teachers in the process of whole-school planning. The recent growth of the school has resulted in the recruitment of a cohort of committed, talented teachers. There is a pressing need now to manage and develop these human resources effectively, through affirmation, delegation and clear role definition. There is a need also for an increased emphasis on fostering trust and raising staff morale. Staff should be deployed in accordance with Department regulations. Teachers on probation and teachers with restricted recognition should be allocated only to posts for which they are eligible.
- It is recommended that the principal and other members of the in-school management team avail of continuous professional development to improve their capacity to provide effective school leadership. The school is reminded of the support available from the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST).
- The post of deputy principal had been vacant for five months at the time of the evaluation and the school was advised to commence the process of appointing a new deputy principal as soon as possible. It is recommended that there be regular scheduled meetings of the in-school management team, to comprise the principal, deputy principal (when appointed), assistant principal and special-duties teachers. The curricular responsibilities attached to each post should be extended to include the provision of leadership and support for planning and teaching in designated curricular areas.
- Officers of the parents' association reported that they communicate with parents through regular meetings, text messaging and Facebook and that they organise occasional fundraising events.
- As part of this evaluation, questionnaires were issued to all parents, through the school principal. Fewer than half of the questionnaires issued were returned. In the questionnaires that were returned, parents' responses regarding the work of the board of management and the parents' association suggest that there is a need for each of these bodies to consider how they might improve communication with parents.
- The management of pupil behaviour, as observed during the evaluation, was good overall. In some cases, it was very good. Many teachers reported, however, that discipline was a source of concern in the school, especially in the recreation area. These views were reflected also in pupils' responses, in questionnaires, to statements regarding

behaviour and personal safety. It is recommended that the staff, under the leadership of the principal, evaluate the effectiveness of school policy and practice in this area and that revised procedures and supports be put in place, as necessary.

#### **4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation**

- There are significant weaknesses in school planning that will make it very difficult for the good practice observed in many individual classrooms to be sustained. It was evident that the school plan that was available for inspection during the WSE was not generated in the consultative manner that is envisaged by Section 21(3) of the *Education Act 1998*, and the guidelines of the Department of Education and Skills, as set out in *Developing a School Plan: Guidelines (1999)*.
- It is recommended that the school management conduct the whole-school planning process in a way that involves collaboration and consultation with key stakeholders such as staff members and parents, as appropriate. It is recommended that all policies be ratified by the board and signed by the chairperson. Policies should include the date of ratification of the policy, the target date for review and the name of the person responsible for that review.
- It is recommended that the school conduct a full review of the curricular section of the school plan, with a view to ensuring consistency between teachers and continuity and progression in the pupils' learning as they move from one classroom to the next.
- It is recommended that, with the support of the board, the school staff discuss, prepare and implement a policy on dignity in the workplace, with a view to fostering and maintaining positive working relationships in the school.
- The DEIS action plan for St Matthew's NS is based on an appropriate template. It is recommended that the school use available data to set specific measurable targets in each of the areas prioritised and that it measure the success of its interventions.
- The overall quality of the classroom planning done by individual teachers was good.
- 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 accordance with the *Child Protection Guidelines for Primary Schools*.

#### **5. Quality of Teaching, Learning and Pupil Achievement**

- The overall quality of teaching and learning observed in mainstream classes was good. In some cases it was very good. High levels of commitment, ability and professionalism were evident in the teachers' engagement with their classes. There was very little evidence, however, of agreed whole-school approaches in any area of the curriculum. There is a need for better leadership and co-ordination of classroom teaching with a view to sustaining the high levels of professionalism that exist among class teachers and with a view to ensuring continuity and progression in pupils' learning as they move through the school.

- The teaching and learning observed in English was good. The teaching of English reading was good in many classes. There was very good work in the area of phonics in the infant classes. In many classes there was good use of class novels and other authentic reading materials. Paired reading and the organisation of regular visits to the local library help to foster pupils' interest in books and reading. Very good work was observed in creative writing in the middle and senior classes. There is a need to implement whole-school approaches to oral-language development, handwriting, the use of poetry and the use of class libraries.
- Bhí caighdeán an teagaisc agus na foghlama sa Ghaeilge go maith ar an iomlán. I bhformhór na gceachtanna baineadh leas as raon de stráitéisí feiliúnacha chun na daltaí a chur ag caint agus chun a gcuid foclóra agus líofachta a chothú. Bhí an cur chuige cumarsáideach in úsáid sa chuid is mó de na ceachtanna. Moltar go gcuirfí i bhfeidhm é i ngach rang. Ar an iomlán, cé go bhfuil ag éirí go maith ag formhór na n-oidí aonair lena ranganna, chuirfí go mór le héifeacht na hoibre seo dá mbeadh ceannasaíocht agus comhordú níos fearr ar an obair.
- *The overall quality of teaching and learning in Irish was good. In most of the lessons observed, there was good use of appropriate strategies to elicit conversation from the pupils and to develop their vocabulary and fluency. The communicative approach was used in most of the lessons observed. It is recommended that it be implemented in every class. Overall, although individual teachers are making good progress with their classes, the effect of their work would be improved by the provision of better leadership and co-ordination.*
- The overall quality of the teaching and learning observed in Mathematics was good. The lessons observed were well structured and well paced. There was good use of mathematical equipment and useful opportunities for pupils to work in pairs and small groups. The teachers showed a good understanding of the principles and methodologies of the *Primary School Curriculum*. It is recommended that there be a greater emphasis on the teaching of key vocabulary at the beginning of each unit of work.
- The quality of teaching and learning in Music varied significantly from one class to another. While some of the practice observed was very good, the overall quality was fair. It is recommended that the teachers provide a continuous, developmental programme to enable all pupils to play a melodic instrument.
- A range of appropriate formal assessments are conducted. These include standardised attainment tests in Mathematics and English reading, which are administered annually. It is recommended that the results of these tests be collated electronically to facilitate recording and analysis of whole-school data and the use of such data in the DEIS action plan. The school issues a written end-of-year report. The samples seen were positive and affirming. Practice regarding the communication of pupil achievement in standardised tests to parents varies from teacher to teacher. There is a need for the school staff to agree and implement a consistent whole-school approach in this area.

## **6. Quality of Support for Pupils**

- At the time of the evaluation the school had six additional teaching posts to support pupils with learning difficulties, pupils with special educational needs, pupils who were learning English as an additional language and pupils from the Traveller community. There was evidence of interest, commitment and ability on the part of the individual support teachers generally. They fostered a positive relationship with pupils and in some cases the quality of the teaching observed was good.

- Overall, however, significant weaknesses were evident in the management of support for pupils. The roles allocated to teachers did not make best use of teachers' qualifications and experience. There was insufficient emphasis on induction and ongoing professional development of teachers. There were significant weaknesses in the areas of planning, recording and assessment. All of the above had a discernible, negative impact on teaching and learning.
- Each of the support teachers was advised regarding what constituted good practice in her area. There is a pressing need, however, for the school management to provide well-informed leadership and management of the school's support team.

# 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 of St Matthew's National School wishes to thank the inspectors for their courtesy and professional manner throughout the inspection process. The Board accepts the findings of the report and its recommendations.

The Board recognises that early 2011 was a particularly difficult time for St Matthews NS and wishes to thank the Principal Staff and Parents Association for their dedication and hard work during the off site relocation period

The Board of Management is fully committed to facilitating the Principal and Staff with the implementation of all the recommendations in the report and welcomes follow up from the Inspectorate in the near future.

#### **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 actively supporting the Principal and Teachers in the implementation of the report's recommendations

The in-school management team, which is central to the recommendations, is now complete with the appointment of the new Deputy Principal.

In school management and teachers are working together on whole-school planning, pupil support and curriculum development and much has been completed.

Continuous Professional Development is prioritised and management and leadership issues are being addressed.

Communication and networking across the whole school is progressing rapidly including parental involvement.

