

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

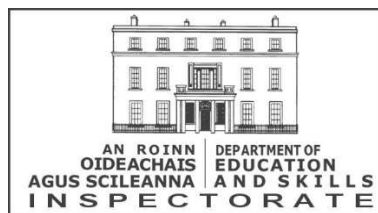
Department of Education and Skills

**Whole School Evaluation
Management, Leadership and Learning**

REPORT

**The Harold School,
Glasthule, Co. Dublin.
Uimhir rolla: 20141G**

Date of inspection: 11 June 2014



Whole-School Evaluation – Management, Leadership and Learning Report

Introduction

A Whole-School Evaluation – Management, Leadership and Learning (WSE - MLL) was undertaken in the Harold School, Glathule, Co. Dublin in June 2014. This report is based on the selection of lessons observed in a range of learning settings in the school, interaction with pupils and review of their work, meetings with the principal, in-school management team, special educational needs team and with board and parent representatives, the findings of questionnaires completed by a sample of parents and pupils, and a selection of school documents. The board of management of the school 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.

The school caters for boys and girls from junior infants to sixth class and is under the patronage of the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Dublin. The attendance levels of the 630 pupils currently enrolled in the school are very good.

The school has **strengths** in the following areas:

- The high quality learning achievement of pupils in many aspects of the curriculum
- The skills and expertise that exist amongst members of the teaching staff
- The clear vision of the principal for the development of provision in the school
- The openness of the school's teaching staff to engaging in professional dialogue
- The school's self-evaluation process
- The support of the parents' association and the wider parent body for the work of the school
- The capacity of the school to develop under the leadership of the principal and the current chairperson of the board of management

The following **main recommendations** are made:

- The board should ensure that it is compliant with all regulatory, procedural and statutory requirements.
- Structures should be put in place for meaningful, participative engagement by all stakeholders in policy formation, implementation and review.
- The board should review the plant, its facilities and environs, in light of the increased enrolment and take the actions necessary to ensure an environment appropriate to the delivery of a 21st century education for pupils
- To ensure that pupils are adequately challenged in their learning, greater use should be made of differentiated teaching. This requires more effective assessment practices to track pupil progress and inform programmes of learning.
- Greater whole-school use should be made of curriculum approaches that increase pupil engagement in learning.
- A system to share effective pedagogical practices should be developed and greater opportunities for professional collaborative discussion should be provided for the teaching staff.
- The potential for in-class support should be maximised and such interventions should be more targeted.

Findings

1. The learning achievements of pupils

- There was evidence of high levels of achievement by pupils in many aspects of the curriculum. Many pupils perform to high standards in literacy and in numeracy. Pupils with special education needs are progressing well. There are very good examples of writing across a range of genres at all class levels and pupils are clearly benefitting from the commendable whole-school focus that has recently been placed on the development of oral language skills in English. Many fine examples of pupils' work in the Visual Arts were on display in the school, illustrating very good breadth and balance in the learning of pupils. Pupils' learning in Music is guided by an exploration of the concepts. In many classrooms, pupils' skills in Social, Environmental and Scientific Education are advanced through commendable project work.

- Tá foghlaim go leor de na daltaí sa Ghaeilge faoi bhun ionchais an churaclaim don abhár sin. Trí athbhreithniú tosach den bhforáil, tá sé aitheanta ag an scoil go bhfuil riachtanas láithreach chun feabhas a chur ar fhoghlaim na Gaeilge sa scoil agus tá roinnt céimeanna dearfacha tógtha chun gnóthachtáil na ndaltaí sa Ghaeilge a úismhéidiú. Chun tacú leis an obair atá ar siúl maidir leis seo, moltar clár córasach, le tagarmhairceanna soiléire agus mionsonraithe do gach leibhéal ranga a aontú agus a chur i bhfeidhm. Ina theannta sin, moltar deiseanna, structúrtha, chumarsáide sa Ghaeilg do dhaltaí i ngach ceacht.

The learning of many pupils in Irish is below curriculum expectations for that subject. The school, through an initial review of provision, has rightly identified an immediate need to improve the learning of Irish in the school and has taken some positive steps towards raising pupils' achievement in the language. To support the work underway in this regard, it is recommended that a core language programme with clear and adequately detailed benchmarks for each class level be agreed and implemented. Furthermore, pupils should be provided with structured, communicative opportunities to use Irish in every lesson.

- A particular challenge for this school is that of ensuring that the learners are adequately challenged in their learning and that they experience learning in a way that takes due account of their abilities and learning needs, particularly in the areas of literacy and numeracy. In order to achieve this, the strengthening of the school's existing systems for monitoring, tracking and communication of pupils' progress in learning is required. The potential of the Aistear framework for advancing learning in infant classes should be explored. Further, the introduction of a whole-school approach to ICT that enables pupils to develop their skills across the curriculum is advised.

2. Quality of teaching

- The quality of the teaching observed ranged from satisfactory to very good, with some excellent examples of pedagogy noted in a small number of settings. Where teaching was most effective, there was evidence of high expectations for learning, purposeful collaborative engagement by pupils, guided discovery and problem based learning, as well as the effective use of differentiated teaching. Among the strengths of teachers' individual preparation were the effective use of an agreed whole-school approach to written planning and the focus on skill development.
- There is a commendable agreed and shared approach to the teaching of literacy skills at the junior level and this impacts positively on learning outcomes in these classes. There is, however, scope for delivering other aspects of the curriculum more cohesively. To this end, greater whole-school use of curriculum approaches that increase pupil engagement in learning, such as focused pupil talk and discussion and collaborative problem-solving is recommended.
- To ensure that teaching takes account of the abilities and learning needs of all pupils and that all learners are adequately challenged in their learning, greater use should be made of differentiation. To support this, information gathered through assessment should be used to a greater extent to create programmes of learning that are guided by specific developmental objectives that recognise the flexibilities inherent in the national curriculum. Furthermore, a whole-school approach regarding the provision of feedback to pupils on their learning that is consistent with assessment for learning principles is advised.
- The recent introduction of in-class support for several collaborative interventions through the school is a positive development in the overall special educational needs (SEN) provision. There is scope to continue to refine the approaches to SEN support, in order that the identified learning needs of pupils can be fully met. In this regard a reconfiguration of current provision is recommended. As part of this reconfiguration, the potential of targeted, needs driven, in-class support should be maximised.

3. Support for pupils' well-being

- Overall pupils are managed very well and almost all classroom interactions were observed to be respectful and courteous. The findings of pupil questionnaires suggest that there is a need to clarify further for pupils the expectations regarding behaviour.
- A sense of school community is fostered through school assemblies and the school's garden project.
- The school has an active green school committee, which seeks and gives due weight to the voice of pupils in matters pertaining to the school's green agenda. Using this example as a blueprint, efforts should be made to increase pupil participation in school decisions that affect them. In this regard, consideration should be given to the establishment of a student council.
- 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*.

4. Leadership and Management

- At the time of the evaluation the board of management was not effectively fulfilling many of its regulatory, procedural and statutory obligations. A new chairperson was appointed at the beginning of the school year. She now needs to lead a process that actively and formally improves the functioning of the board.
- The board needs to ensure that it is compliant with all regulatory, procedural and statutory requirements. In this context appropriate structures for meaningful, participative engagement by all stakeholders in policy formation, implementation and review should be put in place. The strengthening of the accountability dimension of the board's work is also recommended. To ensure that the obligations on the school's board are fulfilled, support, including any necessary training should be sought from the patron.
- The board should also review the plant, its facilities and environs in light of the school's recent increase in enrolment and take the actions necessary to ensure an environment appropriate to the delivery of a 21st century education for pupils.
- The principal was appointed in an acting capacity in 2011. She has a clear vision for the development of provision in the school. She is insightful and open and recognises the teaching strengths in the school as well as the importance of distributed leadership. She is ably supported by the deputy principal. The impending appointment of the deputy principal in an administrative capacity provides a timely opportunity for the leadership to collaboratively shape and drive a cohesive approach to teaching and learning in the school.

- The in-school management team meets regularly and assists with the management of the school. As priorities for teaching and learning are identified, the duties of team members should be reviewed to reflect the renewed focus and to ensure that these priorities are actioned. A challenge for the leadership is to harness the skills and expertise that exist within the teaching staff. To build capacity amongst the teachers, further opportunities for professional interaction should be provided and a greater sense of shared responsibility and accountability for the quality of teaching and learning should be fostered.
- The results of questionnaires of a sample of parents show that parents are very supportive of and satisfied with the work of the school. However, a proportion of those parents indicated that they are not satisfied with the arrangements for parent teacher meetings. Consultation with the wider parent body should occur with a view to revising the arrangements for parent teacher meetings.
- The parents' association actively supports the school through its fundraising activities and through the commendable school garden project. A system of parent representatives is used by the core committee to communicate with the wider parent body. Further opportunities should be explored to enhance home-school links and to ensure the participation of a wider group of parents.

5. School Self-evaluation

- A very good start has been made to the process of School Self-Evaluation (SSE) through an evidence based evaluation of provision in literacy. A clear whole-school target based on pupils' learning in oral language has been set and whole school actions are being implemented. The careful monitoring and review of targets and actions is advised. The school is well placed to use the process to bring about improvements in other areas of provision. A system to share effective pedagogical practices should be developed and greater opportunities for professional collaborative discussion should be provided, to ensure cohesion of provision and the sharing of high expectations for learning.

Conclusion

Under the leadership of the principal at school level and the current chairperson at board of management level, the school's capacity to develop and bring about the necessary improvements, as outlined in this report are very good.

Appendix

SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

Submitted by the Board of Management

Area 1 Observations on the content of the inspection report

The school community of The Harold School wishes to respond in a constructive and realistic manner to the far-reaching report following the WSE-MLL of June 2014. In particular, we welcome the strengths identified by the team, and equally the identification of areas in which further work is required to create a truly excellent 21st century place of teaching and learning. The findings contained in the report will serve as a compass to guide all the stakeholders in developing the school in ways that make for high quality education and age-appropriate, holistic development for the pupils who attend The Harold School. Furthermore, the findings will constitute an agenda for all those who commit to the volume of work required to reach those goals. In short, the WSE-MLL report will constitute a major influence in all aspects of life in the next phase of The Harold School.

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 school community is determined to implement in a continuous and coordinated way the set of recommendations set out in the inspection report. Already some relevant developments have been initiated.

- The Board of Management has sought to address all aspects of regulatory, procedural and statutory requirements.
- As the building project comes to completion, the school should become the attractive environment that is so important to all who form the school community.
- Work is underway to increase the engagement of the stakeholders across many aspects of school life.
- Plans are in place to facilitate the sharing of effective practice among the school staff and to disseminate approaches to curriculum enactment that are in line with modern pedagogical principles. The interventions now in place are more targeted and needs driven.
- Those with designated responsibility for the advancement of teaching and learning will have the opportunity to share their work with the Board of Management at intervals throughout the year. The process of tracking individual pupil progress to inform programmes of learning has commenced.

The Board of Management has refocused its priorities and will keep the set of recommendations contained in the WSE-MLL report as a standing item on its agenda in the year ahead.