

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Donabate-Portrane Educate Together
National School
Donabate, Co. Dublin
Uimhir rolla: 20161M

Date of inspection: 19 September 2012



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

1. Introduction

Donabate-Portrane Educate Together National School is a co-educational primary school serving the towns of Donabate and Portrane in north County Dublin. The school is under the patronage of Educate Together and there are currently 499 pupils enrolled. Pupil attendance levels require attention arising from an increase in levels of pupil absence during the school year 2011/2012 relative to 2010/2011. During this whole-school evaluation, provision for Irish, English, Mathematics, Drama and Social, Personal and Health Education was evaluated. Inspectors observed teaching and learning in eleven mainstream class settings, three support settings and one special class setting. 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:

- There is a strong commitment among all stakeholders within the school community to a shared purpose and ethos centred on the holistic development of every pupil.
- The principal is to be commended for her success in developing a facilitative and empowering approach to distributed leadership focussed on the development of learning within the school.
- A palpable air of mutual respect characterises all interactions between teachers and pupils and among the pupils themselves. The school is to be particularly lauded for the manner in which it provides pupils with an authentic voice in school life.
- The pupils' attainment levels in English reading are very good with very careful attention being paid to addressing the needs of all pupils.
- The quality of teaching and learning in Mathematics is very good.
- The quality of teaching and learning in Social, Personal and Health Education is very good.
- Support for pupils with particular learning needs is of a very high quality.

The following **main recommendations** are made:

- The school needs to develop an attendance strategy both to comply with the Education (Welfare) Act (2000) (section 22) and to address the increase in pupil absences during the last school year.
- Tá gnéithe le forbairt maidir le cáilíocht an teagaisc agus na foghlama sa Ghaeilge.
There is scope to develop the quality of teaching and learning in Irish.
- As the school refines its approach to engaging in school self-evaluation, a greater focus on the gathering and the analysis of evidence is recommended, as is a greater focus on establishing the extent to which the learning outcomes of particular initiatives are being achieved consistently throughout the school.

3. Quality of School Management

- The quality of the work of the board of management is very good. It operates according to required procedures and with a genuine commitment to the development of the school. It is commendable that the board sees a clear role for itself in the development and ratification of curriculum policies. In order to enhance its communication with the wider parent body, the board should seek to increase its profile in the monthly school newsletter and produce an annual report for dissemination to parents.
- The quality of the work of the in-school management team is very good. The principal, through carefully cultivated channels of communication, has been very successful in creating a strong commitment among the school community to the development of the school as a holistic learning environment for all pupils. The principal has also been very successful in facilitating the development of a very purposeful and empowered in-school management team. Its associated curriculum committees include representatives from across the school community: teachers, special needs assistants, parents and board members.
- The quality of the school building is very good. The teachers' and special needs assistants' creation and purposeful use of informal learning spaces in the corridors are particularly notable. The school is very well resourced with materials for teaching and learning.
- The management of pupils' behaviour is very good with a strong sense of mutual respect permeating interactions between teachers and pupils and among pupils themselves.
- The management of relationships with parents is very good. A clear priority has been given to developing home-school links that will benefit pupils' learning. In a meeting with the inspectors held as part of the whole-school evaluation, parent representatives reported strong levels of satisfaction with the ease in which parents can communicate with teachers and the responsive manner in which they are heard. All parents who completed a questionnaire as part of the evaluation reported strong levels of satisfaction with regard to the quality of education being provided by the school.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- The quality of organisational planning is very good. Organisational policies are clearly written and are very successful in addressing the specific context of the school. The quality of curriculum planning is good. Where these plans are most successful, they document practices specific to this school; where they are less successful, they are too general and would benefit from the inclusion of guidance appropriate to each class level, thereby ensuring progression and development in learning. As the school refines its approach to school self-evaluation, it needs to focus on ensuring that action plans generate an optimum impact on pupils' learning.
- The quality of teachers individual planning is generally good. Where this planning is particularly effective, it focuses primarily on learning objectives and learning outcomes and less on textbook page numbers.
- 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

- Léiríodh go bhfuil foclóir breá agus tuiscint sásúil ag na daltaí ar an nGaeilge ach tá laigí faoi leith ag baint leis an gclár teagaisc agus foghlama. Moltar tuilleadh béime a chur sa phleanáil ranga ar na torthaí foghlama atá le baint amach in ionad ábhar na dtéacsleabhar. B'fhiú, freisin, úsáid sa bhreis a bhaint as raon níos leithne acmhainní ar nós fíorleabhair, an clár bán idir-ghníomhach agus an timpeallacht áitiúil. D'fhéadfadh níos mó den Ghaeilge leanúnach a úsáid le linn an cheachta, aistríuchán a sheachaint, bheith cruinn san ábhair foghlama agus ceachtanna a struchturú go céimniúil. Moltar córas céimnithe do mhúineadh an litriúcháin. Tá plean gramadaí faoi leith leagtha amach ag an bhfoireann ach níl eolas sásúil ag formhór na ndaltaí air. Chun an léitheoireacht a fhorbairt, moltar tuilleadh béime a chur ar phrionta cruinn sa timpeallacht. Sna hardranganna, léann na daltaí an téacsleabhar le foghraíocht cheart agus le tuiscint sásúil. B'fhiú réimse níos leithne de théacsanna difriúla a léamh. Cuirtear an bhéim ar scríbhneoireacht fheidhmiúil agus moltar é seo a leathnú chuig modhanna scríbhneoireachta eile. Baintear úsáid mhaith as obair bheirte agus modh na drámaíochta mar mhodhanna múinte agus is féidir cur leis seo le modhanna múinte ilchineálacha a úsáid sa bhreis. Mar fhorbairt ionghairme b'fhiú béim a chur ar fhorbairt na Gaeilge phearsanta ar bhonn foirne
- *Pupils demonstrate a good level of vocabulary and understanding in Irish but there are a number of specific weaknesses with the programme of work and learning. It is recommended that additional emphasis be placed in classroom planning on the expected learning outcomes instead of textbook content. It would also be worth making greater use of a wider range of resources such as real books, the interactive white-board and the local environment. More continuous Irish needs to be used in lessons, translation needs to be avoided, greater accuracy in lesson content needs to be ensured and lessons need to be carefully structured. A systematic programme for the teaching of spelling is recommended. There is a specific grammar plan laid out by the teachers but the majority of the pupils do not have a satisfactory knowledge of it. To enhance the development of reading, it is recommended that there be an increase in the amount of accurate print in the environment. In the senior classes, the pupils read their textbook with satisfactory pronunciation and understanding. It would be worth increasing the range of texts that are being read. An emphasis is placed on functional writing and it is recommended that this be expanded upon to other writing approaches. Good use is made of pair work and drama as teaching methodologies and there is scope for this to be developed further as part of a range of methodologies. As a focus for professional learning, it would be worth placing an emphasis on the development of teachers' own level of Irish.*
- The quality of teaching and learning in English is good. Pupils have very good oral language capacities. To further enhance pupils' learning, teacher planning for oral language should focus more explicitly on skill development. General attainment levels in reading are very good. Very close attention is paid to ensuring that all pupil ability levels are recognised and addressed. During the whole-school evaluation, a number of pupils of differing ability levels were heard to read and these pupils did so with a good level of fluency and understanding. It is very good practice that lessons in reading are focused on specific skills and that these skills are developed in a coherent and progressive way through the class-levels. The school has been very proactive in developing a well-resourced and very appealing school library. General attainment levels in writing are very good from the perspective of penmanship and writing content. However, from the perspective of accuracy in spelling, there is some scope for development. As pupils' engagement in writing increases as they progress through the junior classes and the middle classes, strategies to transfer learning in spelling to independent writing should be

practised more explicitly to ensure greater spelling accuracy earlier in the drafting process.

- The quality of teaching and learning in Mathematics is very good. Lesson objectives are clear and appropriate. Skilful use of both teacher-directed talk and discussion and pupil-directed collaborative discussion and problem-solving was observed. Within these approaches, teachers engage in a number of worthwhile practices including asking open-ended questions, using mathematical vocabulary explicitly and accurately, modelling mathematical thinking, encouraging pupils to explain their thinking and encouraging pupils to self-evaluate their learning. Pupils are comfortable asking questions and are able to pose these questions clearly and concisely. In a few situations, there was scope for the more-able pupils to be challenged further. Pupils achieved well in both the written and oral activities organised by the inspectors during the whole-school evaluation.
- The quality of teaching and learning in Drama is generally good. Some very good quality lessons were observed, both stand-alone lessons and lessons where Drama was used to support teaching and learning in other curriculum areas. Where these very good lessons happened, there was an explicit attention paid to specific skill development and to ensuring that the elements of Drama were accommodated and that the specific techniques of teaching Drama were utilised. In using drama as a means of teaching other curriculum areas, teachers are strongly urged to follow this good practice and to explicitly include these elements in their lessons. Very effective use of drama contracts was observed as was the very commendable practice of encouraging pupils to reflect on their learning at the conclusion of the lesson.
- The quality of teaching and learning in Social, Personal and Health Education is very good. The sense of deep regard for the personal and social development of pupils is palpable both in terms of the atmosphere that permeates the school and the classrooms and the initiatives set up to facilitate the pupils' voice in the life of the school such as the Students' Council and the peer mediation initiative. Lessons observed during the whole-school evaluation were clearly focussed, appropriately challenging and skilfully taught through very effective questioning and thought-provoking discussion. A very worthwhile assembly for all pupils from third to sixth class on the theme of confronting bullying was observed. In a questionnaire completed by a representative sample of the pupil population, strong levels of satisfaction were expressed by pupils with regard to how they are treated within the school and the quality of their school-life generally.
- The quality of overall teaching and learning in this school is good with many examples of very fine teaching and rich learning experiences being provided. There is some scope to make more use of a greater range of teaching resources including the interactive white board. During the evaluation visits the use of textbooks varied in effectiveness from class to class. Where textbooks are used effectively, they are used to consolidate pupils' learning. In other instances the approach of teachers to the use of textbooks is inhibiting their very good teaching skills and constraining their capacity to provide optimum learning experiences. In some instances, more explicit provision needs to be made in lessons for more able pupils.

6. Quality of Support for Pupils

- The quality of teaching and interventions evaluated in the support settings visited and in the newly-established special class for pupils with autistic spectrum disorders was highly commendable. Teachers' engagement with their pupils was positive and affirming. Lessons were well-structured with suitable priority paid to the promotion of pupils' language and communication, literacy and numeracy and socialisation. Good-quality learning environments have been established and a good range of resources was observed in use

during the evaluation. Detailed planning is undertaken to address pupils' individual and group needs. Good-quality baseline assessment information has been collated. The special needs assistants are deployed appropriately and engage purposefully with the targeted pupils. In instances where support involves teachers implementing recommendations from occupational therapists, an educational dimension should be added to these activities.

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Appendix

SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

Submitted by the Board of Management

Area 1: Observations on the content of the inspection report

The DPETNS Board of Management wishes to thank the inspectors for their courtesy and professionalism in carrying out the WSE in September 2012. We welcome the findings of the report which affirm the work of our school community since the school opened in 2002. We are delighted that the inspectors noted the mutual air of respect that permeates our school and that the authentic voice of the child in DPETNS is recognised and valued. We welcome the acknowledgement of the high standards we have achieved in a number of subject areas, particularly in Maths and Reading. We are thankful that our commitment to Special Needs Education has been noted by the inspectorate.

We would like to thank former staff members, former Boards of Management and other committee members as well as past pupils and their families for all that they did over the years to make DPETNS the vibrant and thriving school that it is today. We also wish to take this opportunity to thank the current staff of the school for all their hard work and commitment in striving to provide high quality learning opportunities for our students. We thank the parents/guardians for their unwavering support of the school and of their children's education. Above all else we would like to acknowledge the wonderful work of our students. It is a privilege for all of us to work with such enthusiastic and eager learners.

Area 2: Follow-up actions planned or undertaken since the completion of the inspection activity to implement the findings and recommendations of the inspection

We are grateful for the observations received from the inspection team. We are using the recommendations made to inform our work, as we maintain our efforts to ensure that DPETNS continues to grow as a healthy and holistic school, welcoming and supportive of all students and their families, of the staff, and of the visiting professionals. As a school community we have already started to work on the recommendations made. For example, an Attendance Policy is now in place and we are actively advising parents against taking holidays interm time as we have identified this as the main cause for the recent decrease in attendance levels. Tá foireann na scoile ag obair go dian chun caighdeán na Gaeilge sa scoil a fheabhsú. I mí Iúil, 2013, beidh cúrsa Ghaeilge ar siúl anseo do na múinteoirí agus tá gach duine ag déanamh sár iarracht caighdeán na Gaeilge a chur chun cinn. *[Teachers are working hard to improve the standard of Irish in the school. In July 2013, there an Irish course for the teachers is being organised in the school and everybody is making a great effort to advance the standard of Irish]*

