An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Saint Mary’s Boys National School
Island Road, Limerick
Uimhir rolla:20185D

Date of inspection: 2 March 2010
WHOLE-SCHOOL EVALUATION

A whole-school evaluation of St Mary’s Boys National School was undertaken in March 2010. This report presents the findings of the evaluation and makes recommendations for improvement. The evaluation focused on the quality of teaching and learning in English, Irish, Mathematics and History. 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.

INTRODUCTION – SCHOOL CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

St Mary’s Boys NS is situated in a richly historic part of Limerick city, close to King John’s Castle and St Mary’s Cathedral. The school opened in 2003 on foot of the amalgamation of St Mary’s Junior Boys NS and St. Senan’s Boys NS. Enrolment levels have remained consistently around the current figure since the school was founded. The school is designated as a Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) Band 1 school. The school also participates in the School Completion Programme and the Home-School-Community Liaison Scheme. Concerted efforts are made by the school to encourage and reward regular attendance and to reduce levels of long-term absence. Through careful daily monitoring of attendance, the analysis of patterns of absence, and increased parental involvement, absenteeism has been reduced substantially over the period of the school’s DEIS plan. Pupils are commendably involved in monitoring their own attendance and each pupil records his daily attendance in a school attendance award booklet.

The following table provides an overview of the enrolment and staffing in the school at the time of the evaluation:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pupils enrolled in the school</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainstream classes in the school</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers on the school staff</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainstream class teachers</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers working in support roles</td>
<td>6 (2 job-sharing)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special needs assistants</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT

1.1 Characteristic spirit, mission or vision

St Mary’s is under the patronage of the Catholic Bishop of Limerick. The stated mission of the school is “to take each child from where he is and strive to enhance his life by providing learning experiences, knowledge and training in a warm, caring and safe environment, thus enabling each individual to achieve his full potential in all facets of his life.”

There is clear evidence of a very strong commitment to this vision in the effective leadership of the school, in efforts made to provide a stimulating curriculum, and in the dedication of staff to strive continuously towards improving educational provision.
1.2 Board of management
The board of management is properly constituted and, under the guidance of an experienced chairperson, manages the school very effectively. Well-maintained records presented for this evaluation indicate the board’s commitment to adhering to correct procedures and illustrate very good practice in the administration of its affairs. Systems and procedures have been put in place to deal effectively with the many challenges inherent in school life. The chairperson visits the school frequently and works in close co-operation with the school principal. In the relatively short period since the school was founded, the board has discussed and approved a range of policies, it has developed the school building and has raised the educational provision to its present commendable standard.

1.3 In-school management
An experienced and highly capable principal provides exemplary leadership across the many facets entailed in guiding a school community. She exhibits a deep knowledge of, and strong commitment to, the community served by the school and constantly strives to maximise parental involvement in their children’s education. The principal has prioritised instructional leadership as a key aspect of her role, ensuring that programmes are reviewed and evaluated regularly and that action plans for improvement are implemented effectively. The promotion, by the principal, of positive and respectful relationships at all levels of the organisation has been a contributory factor in the success of the school. Leadership in the school is meaningfully and purposefully distributed among staff members in a manner which promotes continued growth in the learning organisation and in its capacity to effect continuous transformation.

In addition to the post of principal, the in-school management team comprises seven additional posts of responsibility. The posts include a deputy principal, an assistant principal, a privileged assistant and four special duties postholders. Postholders carry out their duties diligently and thoroughly. Each post holder has a meaningful role in a specified area of curricular leadership. Postholders provide the board of management with yearly plans for their work and the principal monitors progress of these plans on an on-going basis. Each postholder has regular opportunities to facilitate and lead part of a staff meeting when issues pertinent to the particular post are under consideration. All teachers on staff are commended for taking responsibility for various initiatives.

1.4 Management of relationships and communication with the school community
Strenuous efforts are made to raise parental expectations and to maximise parental involvement in the life of the school. The school does not have a parents’ association despite efforts to facilitate the formation of such a group. Members of the evaluation team met with a group of parents who expressed their full support for the work of the school. The school places considerable emphasis on communicating with the home. To facilitate this, annual school reports are issued to parents and school newsletters, letters and notes are distributed regularly. Annual parent-teacher meetings are held and additional meetings between parents and teachers are arranged if necessary. Many parents accompany their children to and from school and avail of frequent opportunities to dialogue with teachers. Parents have become involved in a range of school-based initiatives, including Maths for Fun, Science for Fun and family reading sessions. They assist with fundraising, various celebrations and sports activities.

1.5 Management of pupils
The management of pupils in St Mary’s is very good and is based on developing mutually respectful relationships. The creation of a safe and welcoming environment for pupils is prioritised at all times. During the evaluation pupils were well-behaved and co-operative. Policies on supervision, behaviour and anti-bullying are carefully drafted to comply with statutory and
best practice guidelines and are implemented consistently. The rationale for each school rule is clearly enunciated and explained to pupils. The school has contacts with a variety of agencies and participates in a range of beneficial programmes aimed at enabling pupils to fulfil their potential and develop their self-esteem. Programmes include Incredible Years, which is co-ordinated by Paul Partnership Limerick and a music project in association with the University of Limerick. Fruitful relationships have been developed with local second-level schools, and the staff is vigilant and thorough in its efforts to ensure that the transition to second level is successful for all sixth class pupils. Dormant account funding is used to provide a variety of extra-curricular activities for pupils.

2. QUALITY OF SCHOOL PLANNING

2.1 Whole-school and classroom planning
The quality of whole-school planning is very good. Through involvement with DEIS and with the assistance of planning facilitators over time, a commendable capacity to engage effectively in the planning process has been developed in this school. Clearly drafted and well-researched policies, both organisational and curricular, are presented to the board of management for consideration and ratification. These policies reflect accurately the needs of pupils and the context of the school. Post holders take responsibility for various sections of policy. Evaluation and review are ongoing features of the planning process. Effective strategies for gathering of data contribute to planning for realistic goals and the careful evaluation of outcomes.

The quality of classroom planning is very good. Teachers plan and prepare conscientiously for their work. Common approaches have been agreed to planning and recording of monthly progress. Monthly progress reports feature informative and thought-provoking reflections on work undertaken with the pupils.

2.2 Child protection policy and procedures
Confirmation was provided that, in compliance with Department of Education and Science Primary Circular 0061/2006, the board of management has formally adopted the Child Protection Guidelines for Primary Schools (Department of Education and Science, September 2001). Confirmation was also provided 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 line with the requirements of the guidelines.

3. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

3.1 Language

Gaeilge
Rinneadh athbhréithniú ar an bplean scoile don Ghaeilge sa bhliain 2008. Fuair an fhoireann cabhaimh suntasach ó chuiditheoir Ghaeilge chun athbhréithniú a dhéanamh ar chúrsaí Gaeilge sa scoil agus chun dhríú isterach ar na tosaíochtaí saibhreasachta. Go príomha i measc na tosaíochtaí sin ná timpeallacht dearfach a chruthú don Ghaeilge agus go mbeadh na daltaí in ann fiorchumarsáid shimplí a dhéanamh trí Ghaeilge ag fáilil na scoile dóibh. Tá méid áirithe tionscnamh roghnaithe chuigh leas na teanga a chur chun cinn. Glacann daltaí páirt i gcomórtais Phéile Lúimní. Tá Seachtain na Gaeilge eagraithe i mbliana ina mbéidh tráth na gceist, aithris
dánta agus amhráin, agus damhsaí Gaelacha i measc na n-imeachtaí. Is léir ón méid iarrachta a chuireadh isteach sa tionscadal seo go bhfuil foireann na scoile tiomanta don fhís atá leagtha síos don teanga. Ag an am chéanna tuigtear go bhfuil easpa cáspla suime na ndaltaí sa Ghaeilge dúshlánach.

Ó thaobh múineadh na teanga de feictear go bhfuil an-iarracht á dhéanamh ag na hoidí go léir cur chuige struchtúrtha na dtreimhsí cumarsáide, atá molta sa churaclam, a chur i bhfeidhm. Caitear dua suntasach le híchurch spreagúil teanga agus úsáidtear raon mhaith teicníc chun an fhoclóir is mó toilteach a bhaint as púipéid i ranganna Gaeilge. Cúitsear scileanna éisteachta trí úsáid thairbheach a bhaint as púipéid i ranganna áirithe agus úsáidtear raon mhaith teicníc le linn an fhoclóir agus eiseamláirí na bhfeidhmeanna teanga a mhúineadh. Ó thaobh múineadh na teanga de feictear go bhfuil an-iarracht á dhéanamh ag na hoidí go léir cur chuige struchtúrtha na dtreimhsí cumarsáide, atá molta sa churaclam, a chur i bhfeidhm. Caitear dua suntasach le híchurch spreagúil teanga agus úsáidtear raon mhaith teicníc chun an fhoclóir is mó toilteach a bhaint as púipéid i ranganna Gaeilge. Cúitsear scileanna éisteachta trí úsáid thairbheach a bhaint as púipéid i ranganna áirithe agus úsáidtear raon mhaith teicníc le linn an fhoclóir agus eiseamláirí na bhfeidhmeanna teanga a mhúineadh. Ó thaobh múineadh na teanga de feictear go bhfuil an-iarracht á dhéanamh ag na hoidí go léir cur chuige struchtúrtha na dtreimhsí cumarsáide, atá molta sa churaclam, a chur i bhfeidhm. Caitear dua suntasach le híchurch spreagúil teanga agus úsáidtear raon mhaith teicníc chun an fhoclóir is mó toilteach a bhaint as púipéid i ranganna Gaeilge. Cúitsear scileanna éisteachta trí úsáid thairbheach a bhaint as púipéid i ranganna áirithe agus úsáidtear raon mhaith teicníc le linn an fhoclóir agus eiseamláirí na bhfeidhmeanna teanga a mhúineadh. Ó thaobh múineadh na teanga de feictear go bhfuil an-iarracht á dhéanamh ag na hoidí go léir cur chuige struchtúrtha na dtreimhsí cumarsáide, atá molta sa churaclam, a chur i bhfeidhm. Caitear dua suntasach le híchurch spreagúil teanga agus úsáidtear raon mhaith teicníc chun an fhoclóir is mó toilteach a bhaint as púipéid i ranganna Gaeilge. Cúitsear scileanna éisteachta trí úsáid thairbheach a bhaint as púipéid i ranganna áirithe agus úsáidtear raon mhaith teicníc le linn an fhoclóir agus eiseamláirí na bhfeidhmeanna teanga a mhúineadh.

Déantar iarracht mhaith scileanna léitheoireachta na ndaltaí a fhábhraithe. go háirithe ó rang a dó ar aghaidh. I gcomhthéacs na bhféidearthacha atá ann chun scileanna teanga a chur chuim cinn, éiríonn leis na hoidí caighdeánach maith a bhaint amach san obair seo. I ranganna áirithe úsáidtear an clár bán idirgníomhach ar nós leabhar mór agus moltar an cleachtas seo a pháirtigh sé. D’fhéadfá chomh maith sa lárthairbheas a bhaint amach le linn an fhoclóir agus eiseamláirí na bhfeidhmeanna teanga a chur chuim cinn. Déantar iarracht mhaith scileanna léitheoireachta na ndaltaí a fhábhraithe, go háirithe ó rang a dó ar aghaidh. I gcomhthéacs na bhféidearthacha atá ann chun scileanna teanga a chur chuim cinn, éiríonn leis na hoidí caighdeánach maith a bhaint amach san obair seo. I ranganna áirithe úsáidtear an clár bán idirgníomhach ar nós leabhar mór agus moltar an cleachtas seo a pháirtigh sé. D’fhéadfá chomh maith sa lárthairbheas a bhaint amach le linn an fhoclóir agus eiseamláirí na bhfeidhmeanna teanga a chur chuim cinn.

Irish

The school plan for Irish was reviewed in 2008. The staff availed of significant help from an Irish advisor to review the status of Irish in the school and to focus on the identified priorities. Chief among those priorities were the cultivation of a positive outlook towards Irish and that pupils would be able to effect some simple real-life conversation in Irish by the time they leave the school. A number of initiatives have been chosen to promote the language.

Pupils participate in Féile Luimní competitions. This year an Irish Week has been organised in which there will be a quiz, recitation of poems and songs, and Irish dancing among the activities. It is obvious from the amount of effort expended in this project that the staff is committed to its stated vision for the language. At the same time it is understood that the lack of interest among pupils in Irish is challenging.

In terms of teaching the language, it is apparent that all teachers make great efforts to implement the structured approach, involving communication periods, recommended by the curriculum. Significant effort is expended in the initial language input and a good range of strategies is used to teach vocabulary and language functions. Language games, the interactive whiteboard and a good amount of helpful materials are used in this work. Most teachers use the Irish language exclusively in Irish classes. Listening skills are fostered through beneficial use of puppets in certain classes, as the pupils listen to and follow the directions of the puppet. Whole-class teaching and pair work are used in the conversational period of lessons. It is recommended that further time be given to pair work to give pupils more opportunity to broaden their conversational skills. Rhymes, poems and songs are emphasised in praiseworthy fashion and it would be appropriate to ensure, as far as possible, that pupils are active while engaging with this aspect of the work.
A good effort is made to develop pupils’ reading skills, especially from second class onwards. In the context of the possibilities for the advancement of language skills teachers achieve a good standard in this work. The interactive white board is used in the manner of a large format book in some classes and it is advised that this practice be extended. It should also be possible to provide a series of simple and attractive books to promote interest in reading. Writing exercises, for the most part, are based on workbooks and readers.

**English**

English is very well taught throughout the school through the implementation of a broad programme in the strands of oral language, reading and writing. The school has adopted aspects of the *First-Steps* resource to support pupils’ development in literacy.

There is evidence that the comprehensive whole-school plan for oral language has impacted positively on the teaching of discrete oral language lessons throughout the school. Many pupils express themselves clearly, and pupils in the senior classes speak confidently using a good range of vocabulary. All teachers place commendable emphasis on optimising opportunities for pupil engagement and contribution. Lessons, which are based on story, poetry, rhyme and age-appropriate themes are presented in a stimulating manner and pupils respond well to teachers’ skilful, well-focussed questioning. At most class levels poetry is well explored. Pupils engage regularly in language games and discussions in pairs and groups, and it is evident from the quality of these interactions that listener-speaker relationships are very well developed. Particularly good practice is noted at some class levels, where teachers use the contexts of play and improvisational drama as a basis for lessons. It is advised that this practice be used more extensively throughout the school in order to afford pupils more opportunities to develop language skills in a manner which is conducive to immediate and practical use in their every-day lives. It is also advised that in order to advance its overall aim of language development, the school should increase the cross-curricular emphasis which is placed on language, by explicitly identifying, teaching and revising topic-specific terminology as it arises in the course of lessons.

The school strives to develop a culture of reading and teachers adeptly advance pupils’ interest in books by providing a range of reading materials and experiences. Reading for pleasure and information is promoted through initiatives including DEAR (drop everything and read) time, buddy reading and paired reading. Print-rich environments are created in most classrooms and these feature well-stocked libraries and attractive reading corners. Teachers model the reading process very well and the conventions of print are explored during reading sessions. Developing pupils’ comprehension skills has been identified by the school as a priority and at all class levels teachers use appropriate strategies to expand the skills of prediction, deduction and analysis, and evaluation of texts and characters. In some classes, pupils benefit from well-organised *Literacy Lift-off* sessions during which intensive work is carried out with small groups of pupils on aspects of the literacy programme. Throughout the school, many pupils read with fluency, and have good phonological awareness and word-attack skills. Their progress in reading is assessed very regularly using a variety of appropriate assessment modes. Pupils’ individual records indicate that many pupils are making good progress in reading.

Writing is well taught at each class level. In the junior classes, emergent writing skills and letter formation are taught through a range of approaches including tactile and kinaesthetic activities. The desire to write is fostered skilfully by allowing pupils to engage in worthwhile whole-class writing projects and free-writing sessions; practices which are implemented with considerable benefits at all class levels. Different writing genres are developed consistently throughout the school, and over the course of the evaluation some very good modelled writing lessons were
observed. Supportive materials which are jointly constructed by teachers and pupils are displayed in many classrooms. These materials include editing checklists and charts featuring lists of commonly misspelt words, synonyms, verbs and adverbs. Samples of the pupils’ written work are displayed and overall, the quality of this work is good. However, there is scope for the school to implement a more consistent approach to the development of pupils’ handwriting skills in order that each pupil will develop a legible, fluent style of personal handwriting.

3.2 Mathematics
The quality of teaching in Mathematics is very good. Co-ordination of planning in Mathematics is the responsibility of a post holder. Individual strands are discussed at whole-school level on an ongoing basis. Attention is also given to aspects of numeracy such as the language of Mathematics, problem solving strategies, assessment, resources to support Mathematics and the delivery of particular programmes such as Maths Recovery and Ready, Set, Go – Maths. An extensive bank of resources for Mathematics has been compiled and is available centrally to all teachers. While all teachers strive to provide stimulating learning environments that feature plentiful concrete materials and are print rich in the language of Mathematics, there is scope for further development in some classrooms.

The mathematics lessons observed were well structured and delivered with clarity and enthusiasm. Common approaches are employed to the teaching of problem solving and number facts, as well as to the use of agreed terms and approaches to mathematical operations. Adopting a common approach to problem solving has resulted in each pupil having a specially designed problem-solving bookmark. An appropriate focus on mental work was a common feature of these lessons. Teachers’ ability to question and probe issues is commendable. Concrete materials and key visuals are used effectively to aid comprehension and assimilation of concepts. Purposeful use of interactive whiteboards is a developing feature of presentations. The use of movement in the teaching of number is a commendable feature of work in the infant classrooms. In other classes, creative approaches were observed in the teaching of shape in the environment, the exploration of light and heavy objects and the teaching of time.

Progress made in attainment levels is good. Although a considerable number of pupils continue to experience acute problems with numeracy, overall levels of attainment show steady improvement in recent years. Careful analysis of standardised tests enables staff to focus on identified deficits in attainment at a whole-school level. In addition to using Sigma-T tests to monitor progress, the school has also administered a range of diagnostic tests. Results of these tests are used in the selection of pupils for inclusion in Maths Recovery and in the provision of additional help from members of the special needs team. Teachers use a variety of assessment modes in the ongoing assessment of pupils. These include teacher observation and questioning as well as teacher designed tasks and tests.

The staff might usefully consider the recently published report, Effective literacy and numeracy practices in DEIS schools (Department of Education and Science, 2009), as a source of ideas for further development of Mathematics teaching in St Mary’s.

3.3 History
History is well taught at all class levels. Throughout well-structured lessons, a very good range of resources and methodologies is used to present History in a thought-provoking, engaging manner. Strategies such as conscience alley and teacher-in-role are employed to develop empathy with historical characters. Maps, photographs, pictures and a good range of historical documents are displayed on interactive white boards. The use of interesting film clips and PowerPoint presentations enlivens lessons. Displays of interesting artefacts are featured in the school’s history
museum. For the most part, textbooks are used judiciously. It is advised that providing pupils with focussed questions in advance of reading passages from books will result in greater levels of attentiveness and engagement during lessons. In order to develop pupils’ sense of time and chronology further, a suitable timeline should be displayed prominently and referred to frequently at each class level.

In junior classes, story is used frequently as a basis for lessons in which the concepts of time and chronology are developed. At many class levels, active discovery is facilitated through the hands-on exploration of artefacts. The significance of these artefacts is discussed by pupils in groups and in pairs. In middle and senior classes, pupils have a good knowledge of aspects of international and national history. Many sites of historical interest are located within a short distance of the school. Commendably, pupils in junior and middle classes can identify these and some demonstrate a keen awareness of their importance in the area. In senior classes, pupils can discuss issues relating to local history and culture with confidence. They have very good understanding of how their immediate area has changed over time, demonstrating well-developed comparative and analytical skills. Pupils are encouraged to interview their grandparents as a means of gathering first-hand evidence and some pupils have had opportunities to visit sites of interest including the Hunt Museum. In order to fully realise the potential of this curricular area, opportunities should be harnessed to further develop pupils’ cognitive skills by exploring and challenging their preconceptions of the present and the past, particularly in relation to stereotypes and gender-related issues.

The whole-school plan should be reviewed to include an outline of the school’s approach to the teaching of local history at each class level. The inclusion of further detail in relation to local history trails to be engaged in by each class, would be of benefit to teachers. Teachers are also advised to document the manner in which the skills and concepts outlined in the history curriculum will be developed in conjunction with the content of lessons.

3.4 Assessment
There is ample evidence of the importance accorded to assessment as an integral component of teaching and learning in St. Mary’s. The assessment policy encourages the use of approaches which encompass assessment of learning and assessment for learning. A range of appropriate standardised assessment tests is judiciously used throughout the school to establish benchmarks in pupils’ learning at individual, class and whole-school levels. Micra-T and Sigma-T tests are administered annually and outcomes are carefully analysed and tracked over time to establish the impact of teaching in the key areas of literacy and numeracy. Analysis of outcomes is used to direct teachers’ efforts to address attainment deficits, in particular curricular strands, and to make decisions as to particular programmes worth implementing. Data are also used in the context of directing additional support to individual pupils and groups of pupils. Procedures for reporting test results to parents and a system for individual tracking of pupils’ progress have been agreed and implemented. The results of standardised tests and other diagnostic testing are used to identify pupils who require supplementary teaching. These tests include the Middle Infant Screening Test (MIST), the Belfield Infant Assessment Profile (BIAP), the Jackson Phonics Test and the Mathematics Recovery Individual Screening Test.

Class teachers evaluate pupils’ progress and learning needs on a regular basis using a variety of assessment methodologies. Pupils’ work is monitored and constructive feedback is provided. Pupils assess their own and each other’s work and are assisted in identifying further learning goals. Portfolios of pupils’ work in various curricular areas, teacher-designed tasks and tests, and teacher observation further illuminate the progress made by pupils. Checklists, including the Reading Recovery Observation Survey, the First Steps checklist and word tests on class readers.
are also used. To further enhance the very good practice evident, it is recommended that the staff continues to explore suitable and appropriate methods of assessment for learning in line with recommendations included in Assessment in the Primary School Curriculum: Guidelines for Schools (NCCA, 2007).

4. **QUALITY OF SUPPORT FOR PUPILS**

4.1 **Pupils with special educational needs**
The quality of planning in the area of special education in this school is very good. In accordance with Circular 09/05 the staged approach to addressing the needs of pupils is clearly outlined and the policy is grounded on the principles of early intervention, the prevention of failure and the allocation of resources to pupils in the greatest need. The respective roles and responsibilities of the board of management, the principal teacher, the learning-support coordinator and the class teachers in addressing the special education needs of pupils are clearly defined.

Almost all staff working in the special education area in the school has engaged in relevant professional development opportunities which include specific training in the areas of Reading Recovery, Maths Recovery and Incredible Years. Support is delivered in a variety of settings. Members of the SEN team also work collaboratively in classrooms to deliver the Literacy Lift Off programme. Pupils are withdrawn for intensive tuition both individually and in small groups. The school provides access to Reading Recovery for all pupils in senior infants who are assessed to be in need of this intervention. A similar approach applies to Maths Recovery in first class. Meetings between classroom teachers and staff occur informally on a monthly basis and the special education needs team meets at the beginning of each instructional term.

All teaching observed during the evaluation was delivered in a highly structured manner with a clear focus maintained on monitoring and evaluating pupils’ progress before and after specific interventions. It is clear from assessment documentation that pupil attainment is improving in the special education setting. Individual and group education plans were a feature of provision with all teachers. While these plans are well structured in general, it is advised that learning targets be further developed, in some settings, to ensure a focus is maintained on specific skills development in addition to the fulfilment of content objectives.

In addition to support in the areas of literacy and numeracy, effective interventions are also provided for pupils in the areas of social skills and fine and gross motor skills development in small group settings. The school is implementing the Incredible Years project and support staff work with the classroom teachers to implement the Dinosaur Social Skills and Problem Solving programme which aims to strengthen pupils’ social, emotional and academic competencies such as understanding and communicating feelings, using effective problem-solving strategies, managing anger, practising friendship and conversational skills, as well as using appropriate classroom behaviour.

4.2 **Other supports for pupils: disadvantaged, minority and other groups**
The school has the services of a shared home-school-community liaison (HSCL) co-ordinator who is highly committed to the role and works effectively to promote active co-operation between home, school and relevant community agencies to enhance the educational experience of the pupils. A variety of effective links has been formed with relevant agencies and work to include parents in a range of programmes such as Maths for Fun and Family Reading is highly commended. A variety of other initiatives such as the Active Mother’s group, Surf to Learn and Buddy Reading are all noteworthy features of the HSCL programme of activities. The HSCL co-
ordinator and a special needs assistant (SNA) also deliver the parenting module of the *Incredible Years* programme. The school avails of support from the *Dormant Accounts Fund*. This support facilitates the use of the school by pupils and the community beyond the confines of the formal school day. Activities in this programme include the introduction of extra music classes for pupils and plans are at an advanced stage to include parents in this initiative.

Support for pupils for whom English is an additional language (EAL) is provided by one teacher who is shared with two other local schools. Many aspects of the quality of support offered to pupils are very good and the teacher has developed a positive, affirming relationship with the pupils. While an inclusive, welcoming atmosphere permeates the school, it is advised that a policy for the provision of support to EAL pupils would be devised in order to document existing practices and to clarify the school’s approaches to aspects of EAL provision.

Pupils’ level of competence in the areas of speaking, listening, reading and writing are assessed using the *Integrate Ireland Language and Training* (IILT) materials. In addition to the use of the *Primary School Assessment Kit* worthwhile assessments and observations of pupils’ progress are also carried out in the mainstream classrooms, as a means of establishing the full extent of pupils’ needs. There is evidence of good, on-going consultation between the support teacher and the mainstream class teacher.

Individual pupils and small groups of pupils are withdrawn from the mainstream classroom for additional supports. The teaching environment is stimulating and reasonably well resourced with a range of charts and pictures. Large-format books, songs, games and information and communication technology (ICTs) are used to stimulate pupils to converse and to extend their range of vocabulary. It is advised that use of the external environment as well as the use of a broader range of resources including games and toys would greatly enhance pupils’ opportunities to acquire and use language more spontaneously. The school should consider the benefits of in-class support for pupils, in order to maximise opportunities for them to engage with their peers.

5. **CONCLUSION**

The school has strengths in the following areas:

- The vision and transformational leadership skills of the principal are significant factors in the success of the school.
- The staff members are very generous in their service to the school and highly committed to ongoing review and improvement.
- The atmosphere in the school is marked by respectful, co-operative and supportive relationships.
- Significant provision is made for extra-curricular activities and in a manner which benefits the pupils.
- The school, its grounds and facilities are maintained and managed in a manner which is conducive to the provision of a safe, stimulating and pleasant learning environment.
- The school has been successful in achieving significant improvement in literacy and numeracy standards over the period of the current DEIS plan.
- The board of management supports the school very well.

The following key recommendations are made in order to further improve the quality of education provided by the school:
• It is recommended that the development of pupils’ oral language skills be addressed as a central component of work carried out in all curricular areas.

Post-evaluation meetings were held with the staff and the board of management where the draft findings and recommendations of the evaluation were presented and discussed.
Appendix

School Response to the Report

Submitted by the Board of Management
Area 1 Observations on the content of the inspection report

We were very pleased that all the interventions and initiatives that are currently taking place in the school were acknowledged in a positive way. Staff morale was boosted and reinforced by the recognition of their dedication and commitment to the school by the inspectorate in the report. We were delighted with the overall report.

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

Oral Language
a) We have set up an early intervention programme in the Junior Classes “Language towards Literacy” with the Special Ed. Team involved in in-class Team Teaching.

b) In the Senior Classes we are using a new Programme called Speaking and Listening (Folens)

c) A separate slot has been allocated at each staff meeting to discuss the development of Oral Language Skills.

Writing
We decided to start Forward Together Prog. in Senior Infants and to introduce cursive writing at an early stage.