

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

**Whole School Evaluation
REPORT**

**Divine Mercy Senior National School,
Balgaddy, Lucan, Co. Dublin
Uimhir rolla: 20187H**

Date of inspection: 22 March 2015



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

1. Introduction

Divine Mercy Senior National School is a large co-educational school under the patronage of the Catholic Archbishop of Dublin. The school serves as a focal point in this culturally and socially diverse community. The successful implementation of the school's attendance strategy promotes high levels of attendance for many pupils. The board, however, is monitoring the recent increase in the rates of absenteeism of some pupils, and is considering what further supports may be needed by these pupils and their families. 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.

During the whole-school evaluation inspectors observed teaching and learning in twelve mainstream class settings and seven support teaching settings.

2. Summary of Findings and Recommendations for Further Development

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

- The board of management and the parents' association are very supportive of the work of the school.
- The school is led by a highly dedicated and committed principal.
- Teachers have high expectations for their pupils and they create very organised and highly stimulating learning environments.
- Pupils are highly commended for their enthusiastic engagement in their learning activities.
- The school has been very successful in steadily improving pupils' learning outcomes in reading and Mathematics, and commendable standards are achieved overall.
- The quality of teaching and learning in Music is very good.
- The school provides very good supports which are focused on enhancing pupils' wellbeing and facilitating their full participation in school.

The following **main recommendations** are made:

- The school should place a greater focus on the incremental development of pupils' oral language skills in both Irish and English.
- The curriculum leadership role of individual post-holders should be developed.
- Whole-school curricular planning should be reviewed and consolidated so that agreed whole-school approaches can be disseminated and implemented effectively in all classrooms.
- The delivery, implementation and review of interventions and learning programmes should be underpinned by the use of assessment data.

3. Quality of School Management

- The board of management displays commitment to the school and is commended for its insightful awareness of its role in supporting the school's priorities. Meetings are convened regularly, and when required, committees are established to actively progress particular tasks and projects.
- The in-school management team is led by a highly dedicated and committed principal. The holistic development of the pupils, and a relentless focus on providing a wide range of rich learning experiences, is central to his vision for the school. He is capably supported by an effective and dynamic deputy principal. The in-school management team diligently undertakes an appropriate range of duties. Their role in curriculum leadership and implementation should be developed further so that the school might benefit from their individual expertise. All members of the team should meet formally to collaboratively advance identified school priorities. It is recommended that team members prepare an annual action plan for their post and that they submit a summary of achievements to the board at the end of each school year.
- The school building is maintained to a very high standard. A wide range of resources is available to support teaching and learning. In particular, the provision of a range of musical instruments for teaching and learning is highly commended. In all learning settings, teachers have created very organised and highly stimulating learning environments. The caretaker and secretary contribute to the smooth running of the school.
- Regular contact between home and school is well developed. In their responses to questionnaires administered by the Inspectorate, the majority of parents indicated very high levels of satisfaction with the work of the school. The school benefits from the support of a very active parents' association whose endeavours enhance resourcing for curricular and co-curricular activities.
- The management of pupils is of a very high standard. Their positive attitude to their school experience is reflected in their responses to questionnaires administered during the evaluation. In particular, the school is commended for its approach to managing some pupils with challenging behaviour. While the *Green Schools* programme provides valuable opportunities for pupil involvement in decision-making, there is potential to explore how the voice of pupils could be reflected in other aspects of school life.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- The quality of whole-school organisational planning is good. Policies reflect the specific context of the school, and provide clear guidance on a wide range of school activities.
- The quality of whole-school curricular planning has scope for development. To ensure consistency and progression at a whole-school level, curricular planning should be reviewed and consolidated so that agreed whole-school approaches can be disseminated and implemented effectively in all classrooms.
- A strong culture of planning underpins the work of the teachers. Collaborative approaches to classroom planning have evolved across the school. There is a need, however, to contextualise these plans to suit each class on an annual basis.

- School self-evaluation has been undertaken in a number of curricular areas. To optimise the outcomes from this work, a school improvement plan should be devised which sets out measurable and time-bound targets in identified areas. In addition, the agreed strategies for the achievement of these targets and the specific actions to be taken by all teachers at class level should be documented.
- 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*. While the school's policy indicates the implementation of the *Stay Safe* programme, nevertheless, the policy should clarify for teachers the timing for its delivery.

5. Quality of Teaching, Learning and Pupil Achievement

- The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in the settings observed is commended. Teachers have high expectations for their pupils. Pupils are interested and eager learners. In their responses to questionnaires, most pupils report that their teachers explain things clearly and that they enjoy their lessons and learning. The school has been very successful in steadily improving pupils' learning outcomes in reading and Mathematics, and commendable standards are achieved overall. The quality of pupils' penmanship and presentation is worthy of very high praise.
- Tá cáilíocht an teagaisc agus na foghlama sa Ghaeilge go maith. Úsáidtear réimse leathan de straitéisí agus raon d'áiseanna chun suim na ndaltaí a chothú. Léiríonn formhór na ndaltaí go bhfuil siad in ann abairtí a struchtúrú agus ceisteanna a fhreagairt le muinín. Ins na seomraí ranga ina raibh an cleachtas an-éifeachtach, leag na múinteoirí béim chuí ar na scileanna teanga a chomhtháthú agus chuir siad fócas soiléir ar roghnú agus ar mhúineadh teanga nua ar leith. Moltar an cleachtas seo a chur i bhfeidhm i ngach rang agus deiseanna a sholáthair do na daltaí na frásaí nua a chleachtadh le chéile i suímh réalacha. Í ranganna áirithe, tá samplaí de scríbhneoireacht chruthaitheach na ndaltaí le moladh.
- *The quality of teaching and learning in Irish is good. A wide range of strategies and a variety of resources are used to foster pupils' interest. The majority of pupils display an ability to structure sentences and answer questions with confidence. In the classrooms where practice was very effective, teachers placed an appropriate emphasis on the integration of the language skills, and had a clear focus on the selection of and teaching of specific new language. This practice should be implemented in all settings, and opportunities for pupils to practise new phrases together in a more realistic context is recommended. In particular classrooms, samples of pupils' creative writing are worthy of praise.*
- The quality of teaching and learning in English is commendable. Writing standards are very high, and pupils have ample opportunities to write for a variety of purposes. Pupils are encouraged to participate and contribute to lessons orally. Notwithstanding this, and in the context of pupils' diverse language backgrounds, a more comprehensive programme of language provision should be implemented systematically at a whole-school level. The pre-teaching of subject-specific language and the incremental development of an extensive range of oral language skills are recommended. The principles underpinning the good work observed in the language-teaching intervention should be used to inform teachers' general practice.

- Good quality teaching, learning and pupil achievement in Mathematics are evident. Teaching is characterised by the delivery of well-structured and suitably resourced learning activities. Some good examples of co-operative learning activities were noted in particular classrooms. To ensure that there is progression in the school's chosen priorities for Mathematics, teachers should research and consistently implement agreed specific methodologies and strategies in these areas.
- Teaching, learning and pupil achievement in Music are of a very high quality. Teachers provide a broad and balanced programme which fosters pupils' enjoyment and enthusiastic participation in a range of musical experiences. The school's involvement in the *Primary Strings Project* (PSP) captures and nurtures the musical potential of the pupils in terms of performance, appreciation and the enjoyment of music. Song-singing in particular classes is of a very high quality.
- The quality of assessment is acceptable overall. Consistent use of standardised and diagnostic assessment is evident. However, approaches to assessment vary considerably at class level. Where practice is well-established, teachers employ a balanced range of strategies, and they record pupils' progress in a consistent manner. This practice should be extended. The school has a range of interventions underway to support the pupils' learning in English and Mathematics. It is recommended that assessment data should be used to plan for and to evaluate the effectiveness of these interventions. Most teachers closely monitor pupils' work and provide constructive feedback.

6. Quality of Support for Pupils

- The quality of provision for pupils in receipt of additional supports is good. A skilled and motivated team provides support through a range of suitable approaches. Teaching is characterised by the use of highly effective methodologies and the provision of stimulating tasks. Overall, individual learning plans (IEPs) are well developed. However, there is scope in some instances to ensure that the recommendations provided by professionals are fully reflected in these plans. To optimise the effectiveness of additional support, it is advised that team meetings are used to ensure a higher level of consistency in some aspects of practice. The custom of releasing support teachers to teach mainstream classes should be reviewed in order to ensure that they are solely deployed to respond to the learning needs of identified pupils. The work of the special-needs assistants (SNAs) supports the integration and participation of pupils with particular needs.
- A pro-active and sensitive response to the needs of particular pupils and their families is evident in the work of the school. Teachers are commended for their commitment to pupils' wellbeing and for supporting their full participation in school life. Very comprehensive strategies have been devised to support pupils during the transition to post-primary school.

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 Divine Mercy SNS would like to acknowledge the affirmation received in this Whole School Evaluation Report. The Board welcomes the recognition of the high quality of teaching and learning, the improving learning outcomes, the high satisfaction ratings of parents and pupils and the strong culture of care which permeates throughout the 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 Board of Management welcomes the report's recommendations and endeavours to continue to build on current good practice in the highlighted areas in order to further improve the quality of teaching and learning throughout the school. The board wishes to affirm the teaching staff for the progress made to date in these areas of recommendations. The recommendations will inform the continuing process of self-evaluation and planning in the school.