

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna  
Department of Education and Skills**

**Whole School Evaluation  
REPORT**

**St Columbanus NS  
Loughlinstown, Dun Laoighre  
Co. Dublin  
Uimhir rolla: 20218P**

**Date of inspection: 29 September 2012**



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

## 1. Introduction

St. Columbanus NS is a co-educational vertical school under the patronage of the Catholic Archbishop of Dublin. At the time of inspection there were 107 pupils on rolls. The attendance of a significant number of pupils is poor. Further analysis of trends in attendance is required and renewed efforts to improve attendance should be put in place. The school participates in Band 1 of DEIS, has the services of a Home-School-Community Liaison (HSCL) co-ordinator and participates in the School Completion Programme. 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:

- St. Columbanus NS is a welcoming, inclusive school and pupils feel safe and secure. Significant attention is given to the care and well-being of each child.
- Staff members are highly committed to the school and the pupils. The teachers are competent and work very hard. There is very good capacity amongst the in-school management members and the teaching staff to improve learning outcomes.
- There is a good level of awareness among staff members of the challenges facing the school and good beginnings have been made to address some of these challenges.
- The building is warm and welcoming and provides a secure and supportive learning environment for the pupils.
- The school is very well resourced in terms of personnel, teaching equipment and facilities.
- Some overall improvements in the learning outcomes in Mathematics and have been noted in the past year.
- Effective strategies are in place for managing pupil behaviour.

The following **main recommendations** are made:

- It is recommended that the board lead the development of a clear vision and plan for the school's future and share this with the whole-school community.
- School priorities should be agreed at a whole-school level and the principal and in-school management team should ensure these priorities underpin all educational and organisational decisions.
- Formal collaborative structures should be put in place to enable staff members to work effectively together, to share good practice and to develop their own teaching skills and expertise.
- The deputy principal and the post-holders should have delegated areas of responsibility that would reflect a shared leadership approach and facilitate the effective implementation of whole-school approaches.
- All teachers are encouraged to use a wider range of active learning methodologies to ensure that pupils are effectively and regularly engaged in their learning.

### 3. Quality of School Management

- The board of management meets regularly. The members are supportive of the school and the chairperson visits with the pupils and is available to meet with parents. It is recommended that training from the CPSMA be sought, to inform board members of their roles and to support them in carrying out their duties. While some draft plans and policies are presented to the board for discussion, it is important that board members ensure that all mandatory policies comply with Department regulations. As the board has a central role in managing the future of the school, it is recommended that a clear vision and plan for the school's future be put in place and shared with the whole-school community.
- During the course of the evaluation, there was little evidence of a cohesive approach to curriculum planning, implementation or monitoring. A sense of shared purpose is absent from the overall management and leadership of the school: leadership is not distributed and the role of the in-school management team has not been clarified. Structures which would facilitate and enable the principal and staff to work effectively together are not in place. While individual classroom teachers work conscientiously to address learning needs, effective leadership from the principal and the in-school management team is required to bring cohesion and focus to the work of the school.
- The board of management, the principal and in-school management team should ensure that the school operates in a cohesive and purposeful manner to address the varied learning needs of the pupils. School priorities should be agreed at a whole-school level and the principal and in-school management team should demonstrate their clear commitment to these priorities by ensuring that they underpin all educational and organisational decisions. Formal collaborative structures should be put in place by the principal and the in-school management team to enable staff members to work effectively together, to share good practice and to develop their own teaching skills and expertise. The deputy principal and the post-holders should have delegated areas of responsibility that would reflect a shared leadership approach and facilitate the effective implementation of whole-school approaches.
- The school is very well resourced in terms of personnel, building and teaching resources.
- The principal operates an open-door policy for parents and has created a welcoming atmosphere in the school. A wide range of processes is in place to ensure good links between home and school. The principal and staff members communicate directly with parents through class meetings, annual parent-teacher meetings and informal consultations. Questionnaires, administered for the evaluation, indicate that parents hold the school in high regard and value the sense of community fostered by the school and its personnel.
- School management and staff have put in place some good strategies for managing pupil behaviour and during the evaluation pupils were very well behaved and engaged very respectfully with each other and with the teachers. Pupils, through their responses to the questionnaires, affirmed the positive relationships that exist between themselves and their teachers. Pupils feel they know the school rules and feel safe and secure in the playground. However, the findings also indicate a need for structured opportunities to be provided for pupils to develop personal opinions and decision-making skills.

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

- Plans for Literacy, Numeracy, Attendance and Parental involvement are outlined in the school DEIS action plan. Some of these plans are focused and include clear targets for improvement and strategies for whole-school action. It is recommended that the school self-evaluation process now be used to inform all DEIS planning for improvement.
- Curriculum plans in English, Mathematics, Irish and SPHE have been recently reviewed and provide an overview of current practice in the school. It is recommended that further clarity be provided in these plans on the development of learning programmes from class to class. Teachers should also reflect on, and review their approaches to differentiation and the most appropriate methodologies to be used in their teaching. The link between the DEIS action plan and the various curriculum plans should be made explicit.
- All teachers prepare long and short-term planning with some very good written planning noted. Teachers should ensure that learning objectives are always linked to the agreed whole-school programmes and are very specific.
- Confirmation was not provided that the board of management has formally adopted the Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-primary Schools (September 2011) without modification. The school is compliant with the requirements of Primary Circular 0061/2006.

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

- Some very good examples of team-teaching and effective pupil engagement were observed during the evaluation. In the main, good questioning skills were used by teachers and overall lessons were well structured and well resourced. Classroom environments are very attractive. Pupils presented as enthusiastic learners. Almost all parents indicated in the questionnaires that they were happy with the teaching in the school and felt that their children were making good progress. Similarly, the pupils acknowledged the good teaching skills in use. However, the pupils' questionnaires also indicate that a significant number of them do not like school and don't enjoy their lessons. These findings should be explored further by the in-school management and staff.
- It is recommended that all programmes of learning, particularly in Literacy and Numeracy, be matched to pupil learning needs. Team-teaching and group teaching should be extended as modes of practice. While active learning approaches were observed during the evaluation, it is recommended that a wider range of active learning methodologies are used so that pupils are more effectively and regularly engaged in their learning.
- In the last year, formal assessment information has been collated by the learning-support personnel and commendably an analysis of this data has taken place. Teacher-designed tests, checklists and samples of work are also used to monitor progress. Results from the assessment carried out in the last year indicate that while learning outcomes have improved somewhat, overall pupil attainment is still quite low. This information was used to inform the introduction of various teaching interventions such as *Reading Recovery*, *Power Hour*, and *Maths Recovery* and the withdrawal of particular pupils for learning support. While some baseline information has been established, ongoing tracking of individual pupil attainment will be necessary to provide a complete picture. It is also recommended that *Assessment for learning* approaches become an integral part of every teacher's practice.

- **Gaeilge**

Úsáideann na hoidí an Ghaeilge mar mhodh theagaisc agus tá raon maith d'áiseanna acu mar thaca den fhoghlaim. Tugtar deiseanna do na daltaí páirt a ghlacadh sna ceachtanna agus deineann siad an-iarracht comhthéacsanna réalíocha a úsáid chun na daltaí a spreagadh chun cainte. Ach, níl na hoidí sásta leis an gcaighdeán foghlamtha atá á bhaint amach ag na daltaí sa Ghaeilge. Ba chóir dóibh clár cuimsitheach a leagan amach ina bhfuil leanúnachas léirithe ó rang go rang agus an nasc idir an Gaeilge ó bhéal, an léitheoireacht agus an scríbhneoireacht a shoiléiriú agus a threisiú. Moltar, áfach, an cultúr Gaelach a úsáid mar chur chuige freisin.

*Irish*

*The teachers use a good range of resources to support their teaching and use Irish as the mode of communication when teaching the lessons. Pupils are given opportunities to take part in the Irish lessons and a good effort is made to use real contexts for the learning the language. However, the teachers themselves are not satisfied with the learning outcomes of the pupils in Irish. It is recommended that a comprehensive programme in Irish be drawn up where development from class to class is evident and a clear connection is made between oral, reading and writing in Irish. Irish culture and tradition could also be used as a context for teaching Irish.*

**English**

- Teachers have planned to introduce a comprehensive oral language programme into the school in an effort to improve oral language skills and competence. The use of the *Aistear* framework as a support to oral language development in the infant classes would be very helpful and is therefore recommended.
- The teaching of particular aspects of reading is very good. Some early intervention approaches, elements of the *First Steps* reading programme and some team-teaching initiatives are in place and are being implemented in an effective manner. Formal assessment information indicates that overall pupil achievement in English reading is low. On further analysis it is evident however, that there has been an improvement for the pupils achieving at the lower levels. To ensure continued improvements at all levels, the reading programme in the school needs to focus on pupils' acquisition of a variety of reading skills combined with pupils learning to read for pleasure. This approach will have to be planned and implemented in a cohesive and incremental manner through the school. A collaborative approach between mainstream class teachers and the support-team will be critical in the development and implementation of this reading programme and should be actively facilitated.
- All teachers are using the *First Steps* writing approach which is providing a good structure for the teaching of creative writing. Pupils are being encouraged to engage in free writing also and some samples of pupils' work is attractively displayed. Teachers are satisfied that progress is being made. Good attention is paid to penmanship.

**Mathematics**

- There are some very good practices in the school regarding the teaching of Mathematics. Excellent resources are available and there is a whole-school approach to teaching of the language of Mathematics. *Maths Recovery* is provided for individual pupils, effective team-teaching takes place in some classes and there is a good emphasis on problem-solving and the use of concrete materials at all class levels. Expertise in the teaching of Mathematics is also being developed among the staff. According to the school information, while overall attainment is low, there is evidence of some improvements in mathematical attainment in the last year.

- The staff members are aware that many pupils should be achieving at a higher level and that a significant number of pupils are struggling with basic mathematical concepts. It is recommended that the school clearly identify the factors that have brought about the current improvements and explore where further focused action needs to be taken. Further interrogation of assessment data and other evidence will help this process. It is important that the foundations in mathematical learning are given ample time in the infant and junior classes and that consolidation is a key element of all teachers' practice.

#### **Social Personal and Health Education SPHE**

- Very good approaches are used in teaching the SPHE programme. Pupils are encouraged to actively engage in well structured lessons and the content is made relevant to pupils' own experiences. The good relationships between pupils and staff members support the teaching in SPHE. The *Stay Safe* programme is implemented and an *RSE programme* is also provided. As the school continues to develop its programme in SPHE it may be helpful to focus on those skills, knowledge or dispositions that have been identified as priorities by the board, principal and in-school management.

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

- This is an open, welcoming school where all pupils are treated equally.
- Support for pupils with special educational needs is provided in a highly conscientious and caring manner. A range of supports is available, including *Reading Recovery* and *Maths Recovery*. Early intervention and station-teaching approaches have recently been introduced and are working well. In-class support for pupils is provided in conjunction with withdrawing pupils from class. Comprehensive and detailed planning is undertaken by members of the Special Education Needs (SEN) team. In light of the range of supports available to the pupils, a key challenge for the school is to co-ordinate the provision of support for pupils in a cohesive manner that avoids disruption of the pupils' learning during the school day. Collaborative approaches, including team-teaching arrangements, where practicable, should be further developed for all classes. In reviewing the school's policy for pupils with special needs, the processes for devising, implementing, and reviewing individual pupil programmes IEPs should also be improved.
- The HSCL co-ordinator carries out very good work in fostering home-school links and in encouraging and supporting parents to be involved in their children's education. A variety of programmes is available each year to parents to develop their own individual skills and a core number of parents have become very active and very visible in the school. It is recommended that the school continues to work towards involving those parents who find themselves unable to participate in the school community or indeed to cross the school threshold. It is commendable that a key target in this years HSCL plans, in line with the DEIS plan, is to further involve parents in literacy and numeracy initiatives within and outside school. A meaningful home-learning link in the schools' literacy and numeracy programmes would also be beneficial.

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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 Board of Management of St. Columbanus N.S. would like to thank the inspection team for:

- (a) its affirmation of the highly committed and competent staff members in the school,
- (b) its positive comments regarding the teaching of Mathematics in the school.
- (c) its suggestions and recommendations as to where improvements might be made.

The Board is pleased to see that the resources allocated to Maths Recovery materials and training are beginning to bear fruit.

#### **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 has formally adopted the Child Protection Procedure for Primary schools and the school is compliant with the requirements of primary circular 0061/2006.
- School priorities have been agreed at whole school level, setting targets for Numeracy and Literacy.
- The Board of Management has undertaken to update the school's vision and plan, bearing in mind the points outlined in the report.
- The Board is encouraging continued participation in on-going professional development of the staff and is supporting the staff to research suitable mentoring programmes where required.
- Formal, collaborative structures have been put in place, to enable staff to work effectively together by means of regular meetings.
- Teachers continue to use a wide range of active learning methodologies and are now more formally sharing these methodologies to promote further collaboration.

The Board notes the need to build on recent improvements in Numeracy and Literacy, to identify the factors that have brought about improvements and to explore where focused action needs to be taken. To this end, the following actions have been taken:

- The teaching staff has used “Croke Park Hours” to formulate attainment targets for each individual class.
- Maths Recovery has been extended to the Infant classes where team-teaching now takes place on a daily basis.
- The In-school management team are currently examining individual Sigma T results in an effort to isolate particular areas where further focused action needs to be taken to raise attainment in the school.
- Additional Literacy-related testing has been completed on pupils from 2<sup>nd</sup> -6<sup>th</sup> class.
- Results show that pupils are achieving high levels of literacy
- Following consultation with teachers and parents, differentiated programmes are in place for pupils in receipt of Learning Support.