

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

**Whole School Evaluation
REPORT**

**St Laurence O'Toole's Girls' National School
Seville Place, Dublin 1
Uimhir rolla: 20228S**

Date of inspection: 19 September 2011



1. Introduction

St Laurence O'Toole's Girls' National School in Seville Place, Dublin 1 caters for pupils from junior infants to sixth class. In addition, it provides a preparatory class for pupils who are enrolled when they are four years of age. The school is under the patronage of the Catholic Archbishop of Dublin. The school is included in Band 1 of the School Support Programme of Delivering Equality of Opportunity to Schools (DEIS), the action plan of the Department of Education and Skills for educational inclusion. Currently there are ninety-eight pupils enrolled in the school.

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:

- The board oversees the organisation and operation of the school in a purposeful, efficient manner.
- The in-school management team works well together for the betterment of teaching and learning in the school.
- Parents are very supportive of the school; questionnaire results indicate their satisfaction with the way the school is run.
- Pupils' attendance is carefully monitored and effective strategies are in place to promote good attendance.
- Commendable approaches to the teaching of English are used in the school.
- The quality of teaching and learning in Mathematics is good.
- Pupils' handwriting and presentation of work in copybooks is particularly good.

The following **main recommendations** are made:

- It is recommended that the provision of the preparatory infant year be reviewed by the board in the light of the contents of Circulars 11/01, 24/02 and 32/03, and the parameters surrounding the allocation of resources to the school under the DEIS programme.
- There is scope for development in whole-school planning.
- In order to enhance the assessment system, it is recommended that greater attention be given to tracking the performance of individual pupils.
- It is recommended that greater emphasis be placed on implementing a play-based approach to developing children's language, cognition and social skills in the infant classes.
- It is recommended that teachers put greater emphasis on differentiating the learning programme across all classes to ensure that the more able pupils are sufficiently challenged in addition to providing support to those less able.

3. Quality of School Management

- The board of management is constituted in accordance with the regulations of the Education Act, 1998. It meets regularly and keeps a good record of meetings. Financial accounts are maintained appropriately and certified annually. The board oversees the organisation and operation of the school in a purposeful, efficient manner. It supports the development of school policies and, in addition to communicating effectively with state

agencies and community groups, it keeps parents informed about all aspects of the school's work.

- In 1999, the Department provided resources to allow the school to establish, on a temporary basis, a preparatory infant class to precede the normal two-year infant cycle. It is recommended that the provision of the preparatory year be reviewed by the board in the light of the contents of Circulars 11/01, 24/02 and 32/03, and the parameters surrounding the allocation of resources to the school under the DEIS programme.
- The school building dates back to the late nineteenth century. Following the recent announcement that the Dublin Docklands Development Authority (DDDA) would not provide funding towards a new school, the board renewed communications with the Department of Education and Skills to upgrade the existing building.
- There is a caring, supportive atmosphere in the school. All classroom interactions take place in a positive, professional manner.
- Pupils' attendance is carefully monitored and effective strategies are used to promote good attendance.
- The acting principal and deputy-principal were both appointed recently. The in-school management team works well together for the overall betterment of teaching and learning in the school.
- A professional relationship has been established with parents and the wider community. Teachers meet parents twice each year and annual progress reports are sent home at the end of June. Parents are very supportive of the school and questionnaire results indicate their satisfaction with the way the school is run. Parents believe that teaching is good and that their children get on well in the school. It is recommended that a parents' association, affiliated to the National Parents' Council, be established.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- The school has a satisfactory three-year DEIS action plan focusing on improving literacy, numeracy, pupil attendance and parental involvement.
- The school enjoys a close association with a third-level college and with other agencies in the locality. It frequently undertakes educational projects promoted by these organisations. It is recommended that the school evaluates any proposed educational initiative to ensure that it supports pupil achievement, particularly in literacy and numeracy, and that it dovetails with the school plan.
- The school conducts standardised tests in English and Mathematics each year. Results are analysed and class achievement is compared to normal bell-curve distribution patterns. In order to enhance the assessment system, it is recommended that greater attention be given to tracking individual performance, rather than exclusively reviewing whole class progress.
- There is scope for development in whole-school planning. While plans for each curriculum area have been compiled, they are not sufficiently contextualised or focused on the particular circumstances of the school. Effective school self-evaluation systems have been devised.
- All teachers prepare long-term and short-term plans for their classroom work. In the best examples, short-term plans describe appropriate learning objectives for each subject and

long-term plans set out coherent termly programmes. It is recommended that the approach to short-term planning be reviewed to enable teachers describe clear learning targets and to plan for the use of activity-based teaching approaches.

- School authorities provided evidence that, in compliance with Primary Circular 0061/2006, the board of management has formally adopted the Department's *Child Protection Guidelines for Primary Schools*. Evidence was provided to show 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.

5. Quality of Teaching, Learning and Pupil Achievement

- Múintear an Ghaeilge go seasta tríd an scoil agus is léir go bhfuil fonn ar na daltaí an Ghaeilge a úsáid. Tá go leor áiseanna foghlama ar fáil i ngach seomra ranga agus baintear leas fóinteach astu chun foclóir na ndaltaí a leathnú agus chun suim a mhúscailt. Cuireann na hoidí béim ar straitéisí a éascaíonn cumarsáid. Feictear roinnt mhaith Gaeilge scríofa timpeall na scoile. 'Sna bunranganna, cuirtear béim ar leathnú foclóra agus ar fhorbairt tuiscint na ndaltaí. Sna meán ranganna agus sna hardranganna, forbraítear an Ghaeilge labhartha, an léitheoireacht agus an scríbhneoireacht go córasach. Chun cur leis an dea-obair seo, moltar raon níos leithne de rainn bheaga, scéalta agus píosaí filíochta a mhúineadh, go háirithe 'sna bunranganna agus 'sna meánranganna. B'fhiú na scéalta, na rainn agus an fhilíocht a chuimsiú sa phlean scoile. Moltar freisin go mbeadh castacht mhéadaitheach sna cluichí teanga de réir mar a théann daltaí ar aghaidh tríd an scoil.
- *Irish is taught consistently throughout the school and pupils are obviously eager to use the language. There are good learning resources available in every classroom and good use is made of them to broaden pupils' vocabulary and to engender interest. Teachers emphasise strategies that facilitate communication. A good deal of written Irish is seen throughout the school. In the lower classes, emphasis is put on extending pupils' vocabulary and developing their understanding. In middle and senior classes, oral Irish, reading and writing are developed systematically. To build on this good work, it is recommended that a wider range of rhymes, stories and poems be taught, especially in the junior and middle classes. It would be useful to include the stories, rhymes and poems in the school plan. It is also recommended that there would be an increasing level of difficulty in the language games used as pupils progress through the school.*
- Effective approaches to the teaching of English are used. Teachers employ a range of strategies to develop pupils' competence in oral language, reading and writing. They monitor pupils' engagement levels and very good use is made of assessment in respect of pupils selected for the *Reading Recovery* programme. Guided reading strategies are used effectively. Classrooms are print-rich and libraries are well stocked. The quality of pupils' handwriting is very good. While suitable emphasis is placed on developing pupils' ability to write in a variety of genres, it is recommended that a more structured approach to the development of writing skills be used. In particular, there is scope for more attention to the writing process, with greater emphasis on editing and re-drafting.
- The quality of teaching and learning in Mathematics is good. Parental involvement and the use of initiatives such as *Maths Recovery* and *Maths for Fun* are features of the programme. There are good Mathematics displays in classrooms and particular emphasis is put on developing the language of Mathematics. Pupils have opportunities to engage in hands-on activities. Their work is well presented and carefully monitored by teachers.

- In Science, all strands of the curriculum are addressed. A number of interesting experiments have been undertaken and pupils are encouraged to discuss their findings productively. A *Discover Science Programme*, where parents are invited to the school to participate in science activities with pupils, is an important annual feature in the school calendar. To develop this work further, it is recommended that the school extends its stock of science materials and equipment to increase opportunities for hands-on experimentation during lessons.
- In the four subjects evaluated, lessons were well planned and delivered, with good pace and direction. Teachers used a range of resources effectively. Some good examples of self-evaluation strategies were observed and teachers monitored pupils' work carefully. Pupils were seen to be engaged and interested in their work. Their handwriting and presentation of work is particularly good. In order to build on this solid foundation, it is recommended that greater emphasis be placed on implementing a play-based approach to developing children's language, cognition and social skills in the infant classes. Secondly, it is recommended that teachers put greater emphasis on differentiating the learning programme across all classes to ensure that the more able pupils are sufficiently challenged in addition to providing support to those less able.

6. Quality of Support for Pupils

- Support for pupils with special educational needs (SEN) is provided in a well-structured and focused manner. Pupils' learning needs are identified through the use of appropriate assessment tools. Specific learning plans are devised and suitable targets are set. A highly commendable range of resources is provided and very effective teaching methods are used. Pupils' progress is reviewed systematically and learning targets are adjusted as required.
- *Reading Recovery* and *Maths Recovery* are used very effectively to provide targeted support for individual pupils. The use of *Power Hour* to develop literacy through in-class support is noteworthy and has prompted the school to plan for a similar approach to support numeracy.
- A Home-School-Community-Liaison teacher works effectively to foster links between school and home. Resources from the *School Completion Programme* are used to fund a range of suitable extra-curricular activities for pupils.
- The school has a small number of pupils for whom English is an additional language. These pupils are integrated appropriately in mainstream settings.

Appendix

SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

Submitted by the Board of Management

Area 1: Observations on the content of the inspection report

- The inspectors were impressed by the lack of discipline issues in our school. This comment was made by one of the inspectors on the day of our verbal report. Therefore we feel this should be mentioned as a strength of our school.
- The inspectors also commented on the warmth, support and team spirit that exist between our staff. This was observed during their visit. However, this was also omitted from our report.
- Finally, point 7 under the heading Main Strengths states “Pupils’ handwriting and presentation of work in copybooks is particularly good” – throughout the whole 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

Follow-up actions since our WSE include:

- Individual tracking of pupils’ performance
- Differentiating learning across all classes to ensure the more able pupils are sufficiently challenged has occurred. This has occurred through the implementation of a “Power Hour” model across all classes in the area of Maths and English.