

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

**Whole School Evaluation**  
**REPORT**

**Skerries Educate Together National School**  
**Skerries, County Dublin**  
**Roll number: 203070**

**Date of inspection: 20 November 2015**



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

## 1. Introduction

A Whole-School Evaluation was undertaken in Skerries Educate Together National School in November 2015. This is a vertical primary school catering for boys and girls, and it also provides early-years education for children with Autistic Spectrum Disorders (ASD). There are 299 pupils enrolled in the school; numbers have been increasing incrementally since the school opened in 2008. Attendance levels require attention as there are a group of pupils with a significant number of absences. The board is aware of this issue and appropriate measures are in place to improve attendance levels for these pupils. The school participates in Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (Band 2), which is an action plan of the Department of Education and Skills for educational inclusion. The school has been recently allocated the services of a full-time home-school-community liaison (HSCL) teacher. During the whole-school evaluation, provision for Irish, English, Mathematics and Social Personal and Health Education was inspected.

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 **key findings**:

- A strong sense of collaboration exists within the school community, successfully directed towards providing a well-resourced school and providing pupils with a broad range of learning experiences.
- There is evidence of an effective, strategic approach to the on-going development of the school.
- The overall quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement is good, with improvements required in some aspects of teaching and pupil achievement.
- Tá cáilíocht an teagaisc agus na foghlama sa Ghaeilge measartha le scóip chun forbairt i roinnt ranganna go háirithe maidir le foghlaim na ndaltaí. *The quality of teaching and learning in Irish is fair with scope for development in some classrooms particularly in terms of pupils' attainment.*
- Standards of pupil attainment in Irish and English reading should be higher in the middle and senior classes.
- The quality of teaching, learning and pupil attainment in Mathematics is very good across the school.
- While there are some examples of very effective provision for pupils with special educational needs (SEN), additional attention should be given to ensuring that there is coherency and focus within this provision generally.
- Provision for pupils with ASD is of a very good quality.

The following **main recommendations** are made:

- Moltar machnamh de bhreis a dhéanamh faoi mhúineadh na Gaeilge chun a chinntiú go n-ardófar na caighdeáin sna scileanna teanga uile. *The teaching of Irish requires review in order to raise the standard in all the language skills.*
- Higher expectations should be set in respect of overall attainment levels in English reading in the middle and senior classes.
- There is a need to review the co-ordination of provision for pupils with SEN in order to create more focused and coherent learning experiences for pupils.
- The decision taken by the school management to deploy a teacher allocated for support purposes to mainstream teaching duties, whereby they are responsible for teaching Mathematics to a mainstream class, must be reviewed without delay so that there is compliance with Circular SP ED 02/05.

### 3. Quality of School Management

- The board of management demonstrates a very good understanding of its role. It makes very good provision for creating a collaborative framework in which all partners in the school community can work coherently towards the on-going development of the school.
- The principal adopts a measured approach to leadership which is effective in progressing the development of the school in a suitably incremental manner. The in-school management team has clearly defined responsibilities encompassing a broad range of areas of school-life. They have demonstrated effective leadership in these areas ensuring that their work in their curricular areas of responsibility is impacting usefully on teaching and learning in classrooms. The in-school management team should now seek to provide leadership in improving standards of attainment in Irish and English reading and bringing a greater sense of co-ordination to provision for pupils with SEN.
- The school presents as a clean, safe and very well-resourced learning environment for pupils. A particularly well-organised and attractive library has been set up with substantial support from parents.
- The management of pupils, as observed during the evaluation, is very effective. Clearly understood routines are implemented on a whole-school basis to create a well-ordered environment for pupils. However, in a few instances, classroom management requires improvement. In a questionnaire completed by teachers as part of the evaluation process, a significant minority of teachers stated that they do not believe that the school's code of behaviour is implemented consistently. This should be explored further.
- The management of communication with parents is very effective. There are clearly identified channels for communication between the school and parents generally and for parents to communicate with their child's teacher. In a questionnaire completed by a sample of parents as part of the evaluation process, the majority stated that they were satisfied with the quality of education and care being provided in the school. Some parents indicated that they were uncertain or dissatisfied with the amount of homework their child receives. This should be explored further.

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

- Whole-school curriculum plans and organisational policies are of a good quality. They have been developed in an appropriately incremental and collaborative manner to suit the context of the school.
- Almost all teachers are in compliance with rule 126 of the *Rules for National Schools* presenting short and long-term plans and monthly progress records. The board should now ensure that all teachers are in compliance with this rule. Long-term plans are focused and delineated into appropriate time-bound units. While almost all short-term plans are suitably focused on identifying learning objectives and activities, there is scope for further elaboration of how the range of pupil ability levels will be addressed and on how continuity and progression in pupils' learning will be optimised. Short-term plans which span a period of a month are not appropriate. It is recommended that, as Rule 126 specifies, short-term plans be of a week or a fortnight's duration. The present system of annotating short-term plans to record monthly progress, as used by the school, is not effective in creating an easily accessible record; more focused monthly progress records should be provided.
- An appropriately collaborative approach is being taken to the development of a school self-evaluation process. To optimise the impact of this process on pupils' learning, targets

that have been set by the school should figure more prominently in teachers' planning and lessons.

- 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

- Tá cáilíocht an teagaisc agus na foghlama sa Ghaeilge measartha le scóip chun forbairt i roinnt ranganna go háirithe maidir le foghlaim na ndaltaí. Ó thaobh an teagaisc de, tá caighdeán maith ag gabháil le cleachtas i roinnt ranganna áit in a bhfuil clár faoi leith á leanúint go céimniúil agus go struchtúrtha. Tá raon leathan d'acmhainní súl ar fáil. Tá cinnteacht bhreá ag baint leis an teanga atá le múineadh agus baintear úsáid mhaith as modhanna teagaisc gníomhacha. Úsáidtear raon leathan de Ghaeilge leanúnach i múineadh na gceachtanna seo. Ní bhaineann sé seo, áfach, le cleachtas i ngach rang. I roinnt ranganna, in ainneoin an dea-theagasc, ní léiríonn na daltaí eolas maith ar an méid a mhúineadh nó ní raibh go leor saibhris ag gabháil leis an méid a bhí ar eolas acu. Téann sé dian ar chuid mhaith de na daltaí an teanga a chumadh as a stuaim féin, a léamh le tuiscint agus le foghraíocht cheart agus í a scríobh le líofacht agus le cruinneas. Mar sin de, is gá do na múinteoirí raon níos leithne Gaeilge a mhúineadh go rialta do na páistí. B'fhiu, freisin, do na múinteoirí níos mó béime a chur ar dhul siar go rialta ar cad tá ar eolas ag na daltaí.

*The quality of teaching and learning in Irish is fair with scope for development in some classes particularly in terms of pupils' learning. From the perspective of teaching, good practice is evident in some classes particularly where there is a specific programme being followed in a structured and incremental manner. A good range of visual resources is available. Language content is clearly identified and good use is made of active learning approaches. A good range of continuous Irish is used in the teaching of these lessons. This good practice is not evident, however, in all classes. In some classes, despite good teaching, the pupils do not demonstrate a good knowledge of what has been taught and there is a lack of richness in what they know. It is difficult for a good number of pupils to use the language independently, to read with understanding and correct pronunciation and to write the language with fluency and accuracy. For this reason, teachers need to systematically teach pupils a greater range of language. Teachers also need to place a greater emphasis on regular revision with pupils of what has been learned.*

- The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in English is good, with scope for developing attainment levels in reading. The pupils' phonological awareness skills are developed systematically in the infant classes. Some very effective initiatives are in place to support the teaching of reading in the infant and junior classes. Comprehension strategies are taught in a commendably focused manner. The reading fluency and attainment of some pupils, particularly those in the middle and senior classes, could be of a higher standard. This will require more focused and appropriately targeted teaching. In questionnaire responses, almost all pupils state that they are making progress in their reading. All parents state that the school is helping their child to progress in reading. These findings should be explored further, particularly in terms of the appropriateness of the level of text being read currently and the levels of fluency being demonstrated. The teaching of handwriting is undertaken systematically and there are many examples of pupils producing a legible script. Pupils are exposed to a range of writing genres in a systematic manner. Their writing demonstrates a good understanding of the features of writing. However, more focused planning by teachers, which takes on-going account of pupils' progress, will ensure that pupils' attainment in writing will develop in a suitably

incremental and progressive manner. Pupils' written work needs to be monitored in greater detail by teachers. Pupils bring confidence to their oral language communication. According as teachers seek to develop these skills further as part of the school self-evaluation process, there is a need for teachers to identify specific oral language skills more explicitly in their planning and assessment practices.

- The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in Mathematics is very good. Lessons are very well structured. It was found that concepts were explained clearly and visual and concrete resources were used skilfully to enhance understanding. Open-ended questioning was effective in probing understanding and providing pupils with the opportunity to elaborate upon their thinking. A worthwhile whole-school programme for the development of pupils' mental skills in Mathematics has been developed by the school and implemented and reviewed in a systematic manner. There is evidence that this has led to improvements in pupils' attainment in Mathematics. In their questionnaire responses, some pupils indicated uncertainty or disagreement with the statement that they are making progress in Mathematics. It would be interesting for the school to explore this finding with pupils. The decision taken by the school management to deploy a teacher allocated for support purposes to mainstream teaching duties, whereby they are responsible for teaching Mathematics to a mainstream class, must be reviewed without delay so that there is compliance with Circular SP ED 02/05.
- The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in Social Personal and Health Education is good. The curriculum is implemented in a broad and balanced manner. Examples of well-structured lessons taught in an engaging and empathetic manner were observed. However, in some instances, organisational issues detracted from the delivery of a good-quality lesson. Pupils were keen to talk about their learning but, in a small number of instances, their responses did not indicate that they possessed a keen understanding of what they had learned. Structures such as a students' council and a Green Schools committee are effective in facilitating pupils to play an active role in the development of the school. However, in their questionnaire responses, a significant minority of pupils expressed a lack of certainty or agreement with the statement that they have a say in how things are done in the school.
- The overall quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement is of a good standard with improvements required in some aspects of teaching and pupil achievement. All teachers demonstrate an interest in providing pupils with a broad range of learning experiences. It was found that there was very good purpose, focus, pace and structure in the majority of lessons. A good range of resources was used to optimal effect to support teaching. There is a variety of practices in place with regard to assessing pupils' learning. Where very good practice was in evidence, teachers maintained a combination of useful class-checklists and individual pupil profiles that provided a very focused overview of a pupil's progress in learning. It is recommended that the school devise a policy for assessment that would ensure that these incidences of very good practice characterise assessment in all classes.

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

- The quality of provision for pupils with SEN requires development, particularly in terms of its co-ordination to ensure focused and coherent provision for pupils. Almost all observed lessons, in a withdrawal-setting, had clear objectives and were structured effectively and taught in an engaging manner. However, to optimise impact, closer alignment is required between priority learning needs and lesson activities. More focused target-setting will assist in this process while also assisting in monitoring pupils' progress more effectively. Provision for pupils also needs to be underpinned clearly by an understanding of why pupils are not achieving an appropriate standard. To assist with this, teachers should

engage in further diagnostic reflection on pupils' attainment levels. The current 'power-hour' provides a very good exemplar for designing and delivering appropriately targeted in-class provision. However, some of the other observed examples of in-class support for pupils with SEN were unsatisfactory as they were not sufficiently targeted and focused; a review of all such intervention initiatives should be undertaken.

- The provision for pupils with English as additional language (EAL) showed scope for development. While appropriate testing was undertaken to establish competency levels, inconsistency was observed in how provision was made for meeting the needs of pupils in a focused and suitably incremental manner.
- Some exemplary practices were observed with regard to meeting care-needs of pupils in a sensitive manner that fully realised the principle of inclusion. It is very commendable that the school considers and implements a broad range of practices to support pupils with behavioural needs in accessing the mainstream classroom. The special needs assistants were observed to work very effectively to support learning in the classroom with due regard to the principles of inclusion, fostering independence and respecting the dignity of pupils with additional care-needs.
- Teaching in the ASD classes is of a high standard, with clear and effective teaching strategies used and evidence of purposeful learning activities. A good mix of group work and individual work at work stations is helping to support the attainment of the learning goals specified in comprehensive individual educational plans. The ASD class is very well resourced and the physical layout very much promotes effective implementation of a range of teaching interventions. The child protection policy and the policy for information communication technology (ICT) should be amended to include specific reference to agreed protocols around the use of video logs. Although not observed during this evaluation, teachers from the ASD classes reported that the practice of reverse integration is effective in facilitating pupils to integrate with their mainstream peers.
- Discussions with teachers and observation of practice indicate that there needs to be more collaboration between the general SEN team and the ASD team. To maximise the potential of using the expertise of teachers in both contexts, teachers in the ASD classes should participate in SEN meetings on a regular basis. Going forward, school management should consider including the development of provision for ASD within the remit of the post of responsibility for SEN generally. According as children complete their learning in the early-years setting for ASD, there is merit in the board liaising with the National Council for Special Education and exploring the possibility of setting up an ASD class for older pupils.
- The school has recently been allocated the services of a full-time HSCL teacher. Appropriate activities are being planned and implemented currently.

# **Appendix**

**SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT**

**Submitted by the Board of Management**

### **Part A: Observations on the content of the inspection report**

The Board of Management of Skerries Educate Together National School accepts and welcomes the report resulting from the Whole School Evaluation. It is pleased that the efforts of the Board itself, staff and parents are affirmed in acknowledging the positive engagement of all the school community in its own development. It is pleased that the high standards achieved in Maths, in teaching and learning in Seolta, our ASD Preschool and in the implementation of Power-hour are recognized and affirmed.

The Board notes the recommendations made for further development and is committed to engage with these and address any suggestions or directions therein.

### **Part B: Follow-up actions planned or undertaken since the completion of the inspection activity to implement the findings and recommendations of the inspection**

The Board has read the report and commits to spending significant time analysing and discussing it and its recommendations. The Board will engage with ongoing deliberations both by itself and in conjunction with the teaching staff. An Action plan will be devised and all recommendations will be addressed with a view to supporting effective strategies and acquiring relevant resources. Through School Self Evaluation the teaching staff has already begun to look at areas such as reading fluency and has completed a full review of the schools English Curriculum policy. Any other areas will be addressed systematically with a view to full implementation of our WSE Action Plan.