

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

**Whole-School Evaluation
REPORT**

**Gaelscoil Chluain Dolcáin,
Nangor Road, Clondalkin,
Dublin 22
Roll Number: 19855P**

Date of inspection: 8 March 2012



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

1. Introduction

Gaelscoil Chluain Dolcáin is an all-Irish, Catholic school under the patronage of the Archbishop of Dublin. It is situated in Clondalkin, adjoining an all-Irish secondary school and in a community rich in Gaelic culture. At the time of the evaluation, there were 293 pupils enrolled in the school and the majority had a good attendance rate. 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 of management, principal and in-school management team provide effective leadership to the school.
- An atmosphere of openness and positive parent-teacher relationships are fostered in the school.
- Very good provision is made for the pastoral needs of pupils.
- An effective system is in place for analysing standardised test results and for implementing strategies to improve these results.
- Very successful work is undertaken in Physical Education, particularly in sport and athletics.

The following **main recommendations** are made:

- It is recommended that a systematic programme for oral Irish be devised and implemented on a whole-school basis.
- A whole-school approach to the development of pupils' oral and writing skills in English should be implemented.
- The school's policy and practice for pupils with special educational needs should be developed to reflect the continuum of support.

3. Quality of School Management

- The board manages the school very effectively. Members display an understanding of the school's ethos and of ways of conserving it. Meetings are professionally organised and very good attention is paid to important issues such as staff recruitment, policy development and the management of resources. The board's action plan for its term of office is commended. As part of this plan, the board is developing its means of communication with the school community. In this context, it is advised to devise an agreed report on every meeting, to disseminate it to the school community and to explore means of communicating regularly with the school patron.
- The in-school management team is proficient. The principal is competent and works diligently in the interest of the school community. The in-school management team meets regularly and has a clear leadership role in the school. All members have curricular

responsibilities, as required. In fulfilling these responsibilities, they are advised to ensure that the content of the schools' curricular plans is in line with the content objectives of *The Primary School Curriculum* and that the attainment of these objectives is monitored carefully.

- The parents' association greatly enhances school life through assisting with school events, through fundraising and through supporting sporting activities. This year the association decided to extend its role through implementing strategies, such as paired reading, which would afford parents an opportunity to participate in learning activities. They are commended for this and encouraged to fulfil it.
- Good communication is fostered between parents and teachers. Parents feel that they are welcome to discuss with teachers issues that may arise, at a convenient time. Parents receive a broad range of information on school life. The results of parent questionnaires reveal that the vast majority of them are very satisfied with a broad range school matters, including the atmosphere, equipment, management and teaching.
- The school resources are very well managed. Very stimulating learning environments are created throughout the school and in all individual classes. There is a broad range of teaching and learning resources, including information and communication technology equipment, available, which is very well utilised.
- Very good provision is made for the pastoral needs of pupils. Everyday routines are managed very effectively and a high standard of discipline is evident in the school. The results of pupil questionnaires, administered during the evaluation, indicate that the majority of them are very satisfied in the school, that they are treated fairly and that they get on well together.
- The strong link between the school and the Gaelic community in Clondalkin is acknowledged. This has a positive impact on the implementation of the school's ethos.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- The school's planning process is effective. The established planning targets are commended, as are their distribution to the parents' association and the board of management, and the fact that they are readily accessible to the school community.
- The school has a comprehensive set of administrative policies which are of a very good standard.
- The quality of curricular plans varies. The Physical Education and Mathematics plans are very good. They give clear guidance on key aspects of these subjects and facilitate continuity in both subjects. The Irish plan incorporates planning for the development of language skills but it should include a clearer link between the content of the plan and the content objectives of the curriculum. In the English plan, it would be worthwhile planning for skill development across all curricular strands. It is also recommended that closer attention be paid to appropriate methodologies in Irish and English.
- All teachers fulfil planning requirements. Planning outcomes would be enhanced if it were based on specific curricular objectives and if teachers planned more specifically for pupils' language development. The arrangement whereby the principal meets with teachers once a term to discuss their schemes merits particular praise.

- Very general objectives are established for pupils with special educational needs in the Individual Profiles and Learning Programmes. Objectives, based on their learning needs, as identified by the results of diagnostic tests, should be drawn up for these pupils.
- A creditable beginning has been made to the school's self-assessment process. The results of standardised tests are analysed annually, there is a system in place for tracking pupils' progress throughout his / her years in school and questionnaires are distributed to teachers to identify strengths and weaknesses in teaching and learning.
- 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

- The standard of teaching in the school is good. Teachers' generic teaching and classroom management skills are well developed. Very effective use of differentiated group work was observed. This is very good practice which should be developed throughout the school. It is recommended that teachers evaluate the appropriateness of some textbooks, in the context of pupils' learning needs.
- Certain aspects of Irish are taught well while others could be improved. Very valuable work is done in listening through establishing specific objectives for lessons and through linking listening with worthwhile learning activities. The fostering of reading skills is addressed systematically and a broad range of reading is undertaken by pupils at all levels. Writing skills are well developed and pupils write in a range of genres. Conversation lessons are taught at all levels. It is recommended that a much greater emphasis be placed on language teaching in these lessons. In the junior level, pupils should receive language inputs which would enable them to meet their basic communicative needs. As pupils progress through the school, they should be enabled to engage effectively in real communication in the language. In order to achieve this, it is recommended that a systematic programme for oral Irish, that would meet the learning needs of pupils at the various levels of the school, be devised and implemented.
- Overall there is scope to improve the quality of teaching and learning in English. Reading is taught well. The school is commended for successfully promoting a reading culture and for implementing a variety of targeted initiatives designed to improve pupils' reading ability. A comprehensive phonics programme is implemented at infant and junior level and a remediation programme is available to specific cohorts of pupils. Throughout the school all pupils read a wide variety of materials and a good range of reading strategies is taught. While oral English is covered at all levels in the school, these lessons should focus on developing specific oral competencies based on curriculum objectives and on enriching pupils' language. Greater links should also be forged between oral activities and writing. Pupils at infant and junior level require extended opportunities in writing for expression and communication. At middle and senior levels a more systematic approach to writing genres and a greater emphasis on writing processes is recommended. Increased emphasis should also be placed on pupils' handwriting so that by senior standard, pupils are enabled to write in a good cursive script.
- Effective practice was observed in Mathematics. Lessons are well structured. A proper emphasis is placed on oral Mathematics and attention is paid to the language of Mathematics. Skilful use is made of games to reinforce concepts. In many classes lessons are based on real-life situations, which is commendable practice. For the most part, learning activities are organised in small groups, differentiated according to ability.

This practice should be consolidated throughout the school. It would also be worthwhile providing pupils with experience of a range of estimation strategies. The attainment of pupils in Mathematics is carefully monitored through analysing standardised test results and through administering a monthly Mathematics test to pupils. This is praiseworthy and teachers are advised to devise these tests based on real-life problem solving.

- Teaching and learning in Physical Education are of a good standard. The school has very good facilities which are used effectively. Overall lessons are well structured. Pupils are afforded opportunities to play individually, to work in groups and to play in teams, and their skills are developed across all strand units. A broad range of activities is undertaken on a whole-school basis, particularly in sports and athletics. Closer attention should be afforded to *Understanding and appreciation* in Physical Education and to enabling pupils to discuss their learning.
- The whole-school approach to assessment is commended. As part of this, regular assessments in a range of subjects are administered, pupil profiles are maintained and pupils complete self-questionnaires. There is a specific system in place for recording and transferring this information. The practical, profile card, devised for the assessment of Physical Education, is commended. In order to build on this good practice, it is recommended that assessment for learning strategies be implemented.

6. Quality of Support for Pupils

- The school's policy and practice for pupils with special educational needs should be developed to reflect the continuum of support and to place a greater emphasis on early-intervention strategies and on strategies to prevent learning difficulties.
- At present in-class support is available for some pupils and others are withdrawn for support, as recommended in the *Learning Support Guidelines*. The in-class support is effective as it operates in the context of differentiated group work. In the withdrawal settings, too great an emphasis is placed on the revision of material already covered in class. Learning programmes should be devised and implemented for these pupils to develop the literacy and numeracy skills they require in order to access the curriculum independently.

Appendix

SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

Submitted by the Board of Management

Area 1: Observations on the content of the inspection report.

Overall I was quite satisfied with the report on the whole school evaluation that was carried out in March. All schools have strengths and weaknesses, and this evaluation will help us deal with the weaknesses mentioned in the report. We have already taken steps to implement the inspectors' recommendations and inspectors should see progress when they visit the school in the future. It is important to recognise the strengths in a whole school evaluation and I hope that readers of this evaluation will not focus on the weaknesses alone. We have a good school here, a school that I am very proud of. My teaching colleagues and I work diligently on behalf of every pupil here and it is very important to recognise this work in the whole school evaluation.

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

Irish: Immersion education has commenced in junior infants in 2012 / 2013. The 'Aistear' programme has commenced in infant classes. Infant teachers will be attending a course on the 'Aistear' programme in the Dublin West Education Centre before Christmas. The Irish conversational programme 'Séideán Sí' is now taught in every class. A much greater emphasis is placed on language teaching in these lessons. We are adding to the structured programme for oral Irish and representatives from PDST are assisting us.

English: We are working hard at present to enhance our programme for oral English. We have a new reading scheme in place 'Wonderland' and a good oral programme accompanies this. We are developing writing processes in the school and representatives from PDST will assist us in rewriting and developing our scheme. The 'Power Hour / Station Teaching' scheme has commenced in Rang 1 from the beginning of this school year. This is an early intervention scheme that will assist us greatly in the future.

Learning Support: 40% of our learning support will be in-class for the school year 2012 / 2013. The learning support teachers will be putting a lot more emphasis on developing pupils' literacy and numeracy skills. These teachers will be establishing clear objectives for each pupil under their care.

This is a translation of the school response submitted by the board of management.