

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

**Whole School Evaluation
REPORT**

**Gaelscoil Osraí
Loughboy, Co. Kilkenny
Roll number: 19856R**

Date of inspection: 7 March 2013



1. Introduction

Gaelscoil Osraí was founded in Kilkenny City in 1984. It is an all-Irish co-educational school, under the patronage of the Catholic Bishop of Ossory. There are 448 pupils on the rolls at present and the attendance record of the majority of the pupils is very good in general. 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 is committed to the school.
- The parents and the parents' association give great support to the work of the school.
- In general, the quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement is good, with examples of excellent practice in certain classes.
- In English, the quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement is very good.
- The quality of provision for pupils who have learning difficulties or special educational needs is good and the whole staff succeed in maintaining an all-inclusive atmosphere effectively.
- A stimulating learning environment is created in the classrooms and the various resources in the school are very effectively managed.
- The management of pupils is very good and the pupils undertake learning tasks with enthusiasm and interest.

The following **main recommendations** are made:

- It is recommended that the board initiate a review of the code of professional conduct for the whole school staff, to ensure that it is still appropriate and effective, and that it is being systematically implemented.
- The principal should develop his extremely important role as instructional leader and should direct his attention to the on-going development of teaching and learning, in consultation with the in-school management team and the school staff.
- The members of the in-school management team should develop their roles as curriculum co-ordinators and, to that end, they should monitor the implementation of the various subjects systematically throughout the school, in consultation with the principal.
- It is recommended that a more systematic programme for oral Irish be designed and implemented on a whole-school basis, to reinforce the use of Irish as the school's main language of communication and instruction.
- The teachers should implement a whole-school approach to the development of the writing process in Irish and in English.

3. Quality of School Management

- The members of the board of management work diligently to support the school. Minutes of meetings are kept and the school accounts are certified annually, in compliance with the requirements of the Education Act (1998). A code of professional conduct was drawn up for the whole school staff a couple of years ago. It is recommended that the board review that code of conduct, to ensure that it is still appropriate and effective, and that it is being systematically implemented. In this context, the board should monitor the frequency and effectiveness of staff-meetings and of meetings of the in-school management team. This will help in the implementation of a clear, cooperative system in decision making.
- The principal shows pride in the school and he presents a definite vision for the future of the school. He organises the events of the day with energy but it is recommended that he ensure that all of his administrative duties, for example, recording in the register, are carried out as required. Along with this, he should develop his extremely important role as instructional leader. In consultation with the in-school management team and the school staff, the principal should direct attention to the on-going development of teaching and learning in order to add to the good standard of practice in certain classes.
- The members of the in-school management team work enthusiastically at carrying out the responsibilities assigned to them. It is recommended that these responsibilities be reviewed annually, to ensure that they are still relevant to the current needs of the school. The members should also develop their roles as curriculum co-ordinators and, to that end, they should monitor the implementation of the various subjects systematically throughout the school, in consultation with the principal. It would be worth reviving the practice of holding regular structured meetings of in-school management to promote these priorities.
- The school building appears comfortable and well-kept. A stimulating learning environment is created in the classrooms and throughout the school, with a wealth of print and examples of pupils' work on display. The ancillary staff give invaluable support to the school. The various school resources are very effectively managed. A commendable effort is made to secure a good provision of library resources and there are plenty of books in English and Irish available in the school.
- The parents' association gives good support to the school and parents play an active part in various aspects of school life. There is regular contact between the school and the parents and they are kept informed about school matters through the newsletter, text-messages, e-mail messages and the school website. The work of the school in maintaining this effective communication is commended. The answers in the questionnaires indicate that the majority of parents are satisfied with the school and that they are welcomed there.
- The teachers manage the pupils with understanding. The pupils behave politely and they engage in their learning tasks with enthusiasm and interest. A good number of extra-curricular activities are provided for the pupils and the teachers who take part voluntarily in organising some of these activities are commended. It is evident from the answers in the pupil questionnaires that the majority of the pupils feel safe and secure at school and that they get on well with the other pupils in the school.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- The quality of planning in the school is satisfactory. A good start has been made on some of this work. A range of administrative policies and curriculum plans is provided. The administrative policies provide appropriate guidance for the work and organisation of the school. The curriculum plans should now be reviewed to ensure that there is an emphasis on pupil learning and on the implementation of approaches that guide improvements and classroom practice.
- A good start has been made on school self-evaluation. A worthwhile analysis of the results of the standardised tests is carried out and appropriate priorities are identified. This report should be used to help this process in the future.
- The teachers provide both short- and long-term preparation, as well as monthly reports on the progress of the learning. There is variety in the effectiveness of this planning. To promote continuity of learning through the school, it is recommended that, in collaboration with the principal, the teachers initiate an agreed system, with an emphasis on clear learning objectives.
- Confirmation was provided by the school authorities 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

- In general, the quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement is good, with examples of excellent practice in some classes. Teachers use various, effective teaching methodologies with an emphasis on co-operative participation in some classes. Good examples of differentiation, integration and of group or pair-work were observed. It is recommended that the use of these good practices be extended throughout the school and that the value of some textbooks be considered, in the context of the pupils' learning needs.
- The quality of assessment is good in the school. The teachers monitor and assess the pupils' progress in the various subjects. It is now recommended that a broader range of assessment instruments be used. Assessment of skills in Irish, in particular, should be done as laid out in the assessment system *Comharthaí Cumais na Gaeilge* (Indicators of Ability in Irish). It is also recommended that the assessment outcomes be systematically used to enhance differentiation in class.
- In general, the standard of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in Irish is good. There is an appropriate emphasis on informal and formal listening activities and the pupils show a good understanding of the subject matter. The range of strategies used to encourage the pupils is commended. To improve pupil skills in authentic communication and to enrich their Irish, it is recommended that a more systematic oral Irish programme be designed and implemented, a programme that will serve the language needs of the pupils at every level in the school. In some classes, there is an emphasis on teaching reading skills systematically. It would be worthwhile to extend the use of this good practice throughout the school, and to begin and to progress reading skills formally at an earlier stage. The pupils write in a range of different genres. A structured approach to writing and to process writing should be implemented, to further develop the standard.

- In English, the quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement is very good. Pupils communicate confidently and competently and their oral language skills are developed purposefully through structured activities in most classes. They read with appropriate fluency and accuracy, and both supplementary readers and novels are used systematically throughout the school. The implementation of successful programmes, such as station teaching and specific approaches to comprehension development, is having a positive effect on literacy standards. Results of the pupil questionnaire indicate that most pupils consider that they are doing well at reading. The standard of the pupils' writing throughout the school is commendable. A whole-school approach to the writing process would further enhance the quality.
- The quality of teaching and learning in Mathematics is good. Some pupils achieve a very high standard. Concrete material is used productively during lessons and the pupils are given worthwhile practice in problem-solving. Good examples of effective work on oral Mathematics and of the language of Mathematics being systematically developed were observed. It would be worth extending this good practice throughout the school. In some classes, good use is made of in-class support, group-work and pair-work, to serve the various levels of pupil ability. It is recommended that these strategies be developed on a whole-school basis and that the teachers reflect on the practice used in some classes, where pupils are grouped according to ability for the whole Mathematics programme.
- The quality of teaching and learning in Geography is good. Effective use is made of talk and discussion and of illustrative material to present concepts. Pupils' understanding of the various topics is developed in a balanced way. Interesting projects on different aspects of Geography are undertaken and the pupils love to discuss them. It is now recommended that a more central role be accorded to local Geography and to the systematic development of Geography skills throughout the school. Pupils participate enthusiastically in the work of the Green Schools Committee.

6. Quality of Support for Pupils

- The quality of provision for pupils with special needs is good. There is a beneficial relationship between the support teachers and the pupils, and the school succeeds in maintaining an inclusive atmosphere to the benefit of all. Good use is made of a range of teaching strategies, including effective in-class support, and a range of suitable teaching-aids is available. Some teachers keep precise records of pupil progress. Individual education plans have been drafted, in consultation with parents. The teaching objectives listed in the learning programmes could be clarified still further and it is recommended that an agreed system of recording pupil progress be initiated.
- The school has a comprehensive whole-school plan for special education and the step-by-step approach which operates in the school is clearly set out. There should now be a discussion of the current system of making decisions on the provision of extra support, especially for Irish.

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 management of Gaelscoil Osraí accept the recommendations in this report and we extend thanks to the inspectors for their professionalism with us.

We especially accept the recommendations in relation to extending our practice in the area of immersion, especially the recommendation regarding reinforcement of the programme for spoken Irish and also the development of a systematic scheme for writing. We welcome the recommendation that there will be support in Irish for those who require support in language.

In terms of the staff, we accept that there is a need for further development of these questions and this work has already been started by the board, the principal, the in-school management team and the staff.

We especially welcome the confirmation from the inspectors and from the questionnaires that were distributed, of the level of satisfaction of the children and the parents of the school with the work of the school, especially the high quality of learning and care that we offer.

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

We have initiated an Improvement Plan arising from the recommendations with the following developments included:

1. Visits to other Gaelscoileanna undertaken in Dublin, Cork and Ennis
2. Changes made to the pupils' book lists with careful examination of the suitability of the books in terms of language content.
3. Regular meetings of the middle management have re-commenced.
4. Learning support for Irish has begun.
5. The 'Forbairt' course begun by the principal and the deputy principal.
6. Examination of the results of this year's standardised test results.
7. Have begun a review of the implementation of the Code of Professional Conduct for Staff.