

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Gaelscoil Phádraig,
Ballybrack, Co. Dublin

Roll number: 20056P

Date of inspection: 17 September 2013



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

1. Introduction

Gaelscoil Phádraig is an Irish medium primary school founded in 1995. It is a Catholic school, operating under the patronage of the Foundation for Patronage of All-Irish Schools. The school is based in pre-fabricated classrooms at a temporary location in Ballybrack, Co. Dublin. There is an enrolment of 147 pupils in the school at present and although the majority of pupils have a very good record of attendance, it is recommended that the board implement strategies to improve the overall attendance level. The board of management of the school 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:

- There is a pleasant relationship between the teachers, the pupils and the school community and there is a welcoming atmosphere in the school.
- The pupils are commended for their politeness, their harmonious relationship with one another and their pride in the Irish language.
- The board of management gives effective support to the school.
- The principal has a good vision for the development of the school.
- The teachers undertake their work with enthusiasm and show good ability in their teaching skills.
- The parents give great support to the work of the school.
- A good standard is being achieved in English reading and in aspects of Mathematics.
- The site and pre-fabricated classrooms are well maintained and the school community has created an attractive environment.

The following **main recommendations** are made:

- It is recommended that the board implement strategies to improve the status of Irish throughout the school and that they discuss education through the medium of Irish at a deeper level.
- To maximise pupils' learning and achievement in the various subjects and to develop the central position of the language, extra emphasis should be placed on the teaching and use of the language in every lesson.
- In the planned review of the whole-school plan for Irish, it is recommended that a systematic programme be drawn up, with benchmarks for the specific skills at each class-level.
- To ensure that the School Self-evaluation process influences both teaching and pupil achievement, it is necessary to set clear targets and to implement a monitoring system.
- It is recommended that a whole-school approach be developed to improve the standard of writing in both Irish and English.

3. Quality of School Management

- The board of management operates effectively. Meetings are regularly held and the members have specific responsibilities. The board is committed to the development of the school and it has done great work towards providing a permanent building for the school. There is a good relationship between the board and the school community and the chairperson visits the school regularly to support the work. It is recommended that the

board implement strategies to improve the status of Irish in the school and that they discuss education through the medium of Irish at a deeper level.

- The principal promotes good communication and a positive atmosphere among the school community. She has a good vision for the development of the school and she fulfils her administrative responsibilities effectively. The deputy principal supports her enthusiastically. As a team, they show a clear understanding of the school's strengths and of the challenges it faces. The School Self-evaluation process will offer an opportunity to place extra emphasis on curriculum leadership.
- The site and pre-fabricated classrooms are well maintained and the school community has created an attractive environment. The work of the SNAs (Special Needs Assistants) is capably directed. A wide range of teaching aids is available in the classrooms. It would now be advisable to place extra emphasis on the use of information and communication technology (ICT) resources as a method of learning.
- Good communication between school and home is promoted and there is regular contact with parents. The parents give valuable support to the school and, in questionnaires, a large number of them commented that the school welcomes them and that the social and personal development of the children is looked after in school. To allow parents to take a more central role in their children's learning and to develop their communication skills in Irish, it would be worth devising opportunities for them to offer support within the classrooms.
- There is a pleasant relationship between teachers and pupils. The pupils are commended for their politeness, their harmonious relationship with one another and their pride in the Irish language.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- The standard of administrative and curriculum planning is good overall. The plans and policies are drawn up in a co-operative context. It is recommended that a plan of action be devised, to facilitate systematic review of the policies.
- A good start has been made on the School Self-evaluation process. To ensure that this process makes an impact on teaching and learning, it is necessary to set clear targets with specific actions and that a monitoring system be put in place.
- All the teachers draw up long-term and short-term plans for their work, on an agreed whole-school template. In the best practice observed, specific learning targets were set for the various curriculum subjects and it is recommended that this approach be adopted by the whole staff.
- 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

- A good standard is being achieved in certain aspects of the teaching, learning and pupil achievement. The teachers undertake their work with enthusiasm and show good ability in their teaching skills. In the examples of best practice observed, effective use was made of a wide range of teaching methodologies and there was an appropriate emphasis on the development of the pupils' language and on their independent-learning skills. In those lessons, there was a very clear relationship between the teacher's high levels of expectation and pupils' levels of participation and achievement. It is recommended that teachers build on this good practice and extend it throughout the school. To maximise pupils' learning and achievement in the various subjects, an extra emphasis should be placed on the teaching of the language and on its use, in every lesson.

- A positive, pleasant atmosphere is created for the learning of Irish and the promotion of Irish culture and aspects of the teaching, learning and pupil achievement are of good quality. The pupils are confident in using the language and a good number of them are capable of sustained communication through the medium of Irish. In general, however, a lack of accuracy and a limited vocabulary are evident in their use of the language. The teaching staff realise the challenge they are facing in trying to improve the pupils' oral Irish and some strategies have been implemented, including *Aistear*. It is recommended that regular opportunities be provided for pupils to use the Irish they have learnt. In teaching reading, the programme *Séideán Sí* and a good selection of novels are used. Many of the pupils read with interest and appropriate phonetics and in some classes, there is a commendable emphasis on the formal teaching of reading skills. It would be worth extending this good practice throughout the school and using *Séideán Sí* and independent reading more systematically. There is scope for development in the pupils' writing skills. It is recommended that extra emphasis be placed on pre-writing, that a wider range of genres be explored and that regular free-writing opportunities be provided. In the planned review of the whole-school plan for Irish, it is recommended that a whole-school systematic programme be drawn up, with benchmarks for listening, speaking, reading and writing skills at every class-level.
- In English, the introduction of a whole-school approach to oral language instruction is praiseworthy. While many pupils express themselves with suitable confidence, there is a need to improve their ability to elaborate and to argue their points and to enhance their active listening skills. Some good use of poetry and rhyme is in evidence. Pupils achieve a good standard in reading with a praiseworthy minority achieving a very good standard. In their response to questionnaires, most pupils believe they are doing well in reading. Aspects of good practice include the use of a graded reading scheme, class novels, a structured phonics programme and the planned implementation of literacy stations in some classes. To build on this work, further attention should be given to the development of reading fluency, comprehension, vocabulary and word attack skills. In writing lessons some effective use is made of the linkage of oral and writing skills, teacher modelling and scaffolded learning. Overall, however, there is scope for development in the pupils' writing skills. To this end, a whole-school systematic approach to the writing process across a range of genres is recommended.
- On the whole, the quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in Mathematics is good. Good use is made of concrete material, active learning methods and concepts are clearly explained. It is evident from the analysis done on the results of the standardised tests that there should be a greater emphasis placed on the language of Mathematics and on problem-solving. In some classes, oral Maths and problem-solving are an integral part of every lesson. It is recommended that this good practice be extended on a whole-school basis and that the use of the language of Mathematics be systematically stressed.
- Overall, the quality of provision in Geography is good. Impressive practice was observed which focused on developing the pupils' knowledge and understanding of human and natural environments. Regular opportunities are provided for the pupils to work actively as geographers. It is evident that the pupils are interested in the subject and the majority of them display an appropriate knowledge and understanding of the subject-matter they have covered. Although attention is paid to explaining the vocabulary of the lesson, it is necessary to develop the pupils' command of the language of Geography and to provide regular opportunities for them to practise the cognitive language of Geography, in order to engage fully with the programme. The school benefits from its participation in the *Green Schools Project*.
- The members of staff are commended for their work in recording pupils' progress and for the start made on developing pupils' skills as independent thinkers. To build on this valuable work, it is recommended that pupils' progress in Irish be assessed as laid out in

the assessment system *Comharthaí Cumais na Gaeilge* (Indicators of Ability in Irish). To raise the standard of pupil achievement, regular emphasis at a whole school level should be placed on *assessment for learning*. The results of assessments should be systematically used to serve the range of ability among the pupils.

6. Quality of Supports for Pupils

- Pupils with extra needs participate fully in the life of the school and they are well catered for. The newly appointed team demonstrate many good practices and various appropriate teaching methodologies are employed to develop the pupils' literacy, mathematical and social skills. Pupils are supported in various situations, including in-class support. To derive the greatest benefit from this co-operative work, it is recommended that learning activities which are more clearly differentiated be provided.
- Individual education plans have been drafted co-operatively by staff-members, with parental input. The input of pupils in the senior classes in this process is commended. To enhance this work, clearer, achievable teaching targets should be set in the learning programmes.
- In the review of special education needs policy to be undertaken by the school, more wide-ranging support should be provided for Irish.

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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, teachers and all of the partners of the school welcome this positive WSE report.

The board is very pleased that the school's strengths were recognised in the report, including:

- the pleasant relationships between teachers, the good communication and the positive atmosphere
- the pupils' politeness and their harmonious relationship with one another
- the diligence and skills of the teachers and the principal
- the support of parents for the work of the school
- the good standard in English reading

The board is pleased that the pupils' confidence and pride in the Irish language are recognised. As the majority of the children do not hear or speak Irish during the summer holidays, it has to be said that it takes a while at the start of the school year to restore the pupils' fluency and accuracy in the language. The board is proud of the Irish that can be heard in the classroom and around the school. The board welcomes the evaluative finding, that a good standard is being achieved in English reading and in aspects of Mathematics.

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, in consultation with the staff and the school partners, is focusing on the recommendations to support the development of the school. The school is committed to continuing to build on the good work that is taking place. The recommendations are noted and have been added to the school's plan.

The board proposes to examine the attendance of the children during the year and to put strategies in place to add to the very good attendance of the majority of pupils.

The board will discuss education through the medium of Irish at a deeper level and a review of the whole school plan for Irish is on the agenda for this school year, as was previously agreed by the staff.

The recommendations to build on the good start that has been made in the School Self-Evaluation process will be addressed and we are looking forward to the first presentation from the inspectorate in this regard. A whole school focus on the standard of writing and the use of language in classes is being developed.