

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

**Whole School Evaluation
REPORT**

**Gaelscoil Átha Í
An Tom Ard, Átha í, Co Chill Dara
Roll Number: 20192A**

Date of inspection: 4 March 2015



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

1. Introduction

Gaelscoil Átha Í is a co-educational, interdenominational primary school under the patronage of Foras Pátrúnachta na Scoileanna Lán Ghaeilge Teo. It is situated on a school campus with three other schools in Athy. The school was founded in 2004 and moved into a permanent building in 2009. At the time of the inspection there were 219 pupils on the roll and attendance was commendable overall. The Whole School Evaluation (WSE) focused on the quality of teaching, learning and achievement of pupils in Irish, English, Mathematics and Science. During the inspection the inspectors evaluated the provision in eight mainstream classes and in three learning support settings. 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:

- The Gaelscolaíocht or Irish-medium schooling ethos is strong in the school and interest in Irish culture and in the language is effectively encouraged by the principal and the staff as a whole.
- The board of management fulfils its legal duties efficiently and operates effectively in the administration of the school according to the rules of the Department.
- The parents' association is very active in the school and supports the board and the whole staff for the good of the school.
- The principal directs the work of the school with competence, openness and energy. She succeeds in creating a positive school atmosphere where learning is the main aim.
- All teachers have a wealth of fluency in the language. A range of teaching strategies are used to increase pupils' interest in learning and the quality of teaching, learning and pupils' achievement is of high standard.
- The pupils behave politely, they are very co-operative and they concentrate on the learning tasks without difficulty.

The following **main recommendations** are made:

- A closer link should be ensured between the learning objectives in the individual teacher's plans and the school plan to clarify continuity and progression of pupils from class to class.
- A structured programme should be created and implemented for the new language which is to be taught at every class level to broaden the learning skills and the language skills of the pupils across the curriculum.

3. Quality of School Management

- The board of management takes a very active role in school management and operates effectively according to the Department's rules. Members have particular responsibilities and they give generously of their time. Board meetings are organised professionally and issues central to school life are discussed.
- It is clear that the school community respects the principal as someone who is open, welcoming to visitors, kind to pupils and empathetic to her colleagues. She fulfils her leadership and organisational duties with energy and professionalism. The principal has a central role in the promotion of Irish as the main language of communication in the school and has a commendable vision for the development of the school. The deputy principal provides very professional assistance. She operates capably in her curricular, administrative and pastoral duties, responding to the ongoing needs of the school.
- The parents' association is very active in school life and totally supports the board and the staff. The parents' representative praised the openness of the school and the practices implemented by the principal to communicate with parents. The school diary and school notes are used to communicate with them. The use of the website is recommended to strengthen contact and inform parents about the policy and work of the school. According to the results of parents' questionnaires a high number of parents considered that a good atmosphere prevails in the school and that the school environment is safe for pupils.
- Pupils are very well managed and their positive behaviour supports the stimulating learning environment which is evident in the school. A good, co-operative, and purposeful atmosphere is perceived between the teachers and the pupils in the classrooms. According to questionnaire results a high number of pupils consider that they get on well with other pupils in the school, that teachers explain things clearly to them and that this is a good school.
- The school is decorated with attractive displays of art and pupils' work. The school participates in a broad range of curricular, co-curricular and extra-curricular activities to enhance the work of the school. The secretary and the special needs assistants work capably to support the running of the school.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- The comprehensive collection of organisational plans give clear direction to the school community. An action plan is prepared to identify school priorities and to guide a review of policies. This is an inclusive process with input from staff, the board and parents. There is a whole school plan for the school based on the subjects of the primary school curriculum.
- The teachers provide appropriate individual planning for their teaching. A closer link should be ensured between the learning objectives in the individual teacher's plans and the school plan to clarify continuity and progression of pupils from class to class. Work progress is recorded monthly and the principal keeps these records in a central store.
- It was noted that the school self-evaluation process has begun and that it is directed principally at teaching and learning in literacy and numeracy. It is clear that the school used a range of evidence to identify goals of improvement.

- The quality of planning in the learning support classes is good. In the areas where best practice was observed, learning goals are set out clearly for pupils and their progress is recorded regularly.
- 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

- Teachers' work demonstrated a high level of ability and professionalism during the inspection. Creative teaching methods are used and full participation of pupils in teaching and learning is encouraged. Information and communication technology is used effectively in the lessons, and the stimulating environment that has been created in the classrooms, the hall and throughout the school is commendable.
- The quality of the teaching and learning of Irish is good. In the infant and junior classes the immersion system and the *Aistear* framework curriculum are very successful in advancing the use of Irish. Teachers teach poems, songs and rhymes very capably. In order to add to this good practice a structured programme should be created and implemented for the new language which is to be taught at every class level to broaden the language and learning skills of the pupils across the curriculum. The teaching of reading is carried out enthusiastically. The development of pronunciation skills, the use of novels and the development of language accuracy is emphasised. A high standard of teaching in reading and in the writing process is perceived. Lessons are presented in a lively fashion and teachers use various equipment to support the teaching.
- The standard of teaching and learning in English is good. Oral language skills are developed using a variety of approaches, including drama, story, rhyme and poetry. To build on this good practice, specific oral language objectives should be developed and implemented for each class level. Reading skills are developed systematically throughout the school and the majority of pupils read with accuracy and understanding. The writing process is emphasised and pupils get experience in a wide variety of genres. There is scope for the implementation of a whole school approach to penmanship.
- The standard of teaching and learning in Mathematics is good. Teachers present subject matter to pupils in an enthusiastic manner and good use is made of concrete material and of active learning methodologies. The language of Mathematics is taught systematically. Concepts were clearly explained in the lessons and pupils were questioned judiciously. It is clear from standardised results that progress has been made in developing pupils' competence in Mathematics.
- The quality of work in Science is good. Pupils develop science concepts satisfactorily. Effective use is made of stimulating facilities, discussion and debate to present the concepts. A more central position should be given to the development of science skills and broader experience provided in scientific investigation skills such as questioning, reviewing, analysing and measuring, and opportunities should be provided for pupils to participate in suitable experiments.

- Staff are commended for recording the progress of pupils and it is clear that they thoroughly examine the pupils' achievements. A very good system of assessment is in place and the use of pupils' self-assessment folders has commenced at every class level. A high level of monitoring, correcting and giving of feedback on pupils' work has been reached in certain classes. Standardised test results in English, Irish and Mathematics illustrate that a good standard has been achieved by most.

6. Quality of Support for Pupils

- There is high quality provision for pupils with special educational needs. There is a comprehensive policy and a definitive system has been established to support pupils with learning difficulties. Individual educational plans and learning programmes are formulated which encompass measurable learning goals. The specific learning needs of pupils are tracked and appropriate support is organised in literacy, numeracy and in Irish based on those needs. The progress of pupils is recorded regularly.
- Capable teaching and a range of efficient interventions are evident in support teaching settings. In-class teaching is undertaken in a structured manner where necessary. Regular contact between mainstream teachers and support teachers and parents is ensured.

Appendix

SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

Submitted by the Board of Management

Area 1 Observations on the content of the inspection report

The Borad of Management of Gaelscoil Átha Í welcomes this very positive report. We commend the high standard achieved by the principal, the management and the entire staff of the school. We are very proud of the references made to the good practice, collaborative work of the pupils and the positive atmosphere in the school. The reference to the Irish ethos of the school, the interest and affection in the Irish culture, and the effective promotion of the language from the whole staff is praiseworthy.

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

It is proposed by the staff to implement a penmanship scheme the continues from from Junior Infants to sixth class. The developmental oral language scheme, will focus on improving English throughout the school.