

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

**Whole School Evaluation
REPORT**

**Gaelscoil Bharra
Faussagh Avenue, Cabra,
Dublin 7
Uimhir rolla: 200470**

Date of inspection: 12 May 2011



1. Introduction

Gaelscoil Bharra is an all-Irish primary school which was founded in 1996. It is a Catholic school which operates under the patronage of the all-Irish Schools Patronage Foundation. The school is situated in prefabricated classrooms on the site of St.Finbarr's Gaelic Athletic Association's clubhouse in Cabra, in the north of Dublin city. There are 213 pupils enrolled in the school at present. 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:

- There is a fine, positive spirit in the school, as regards the promotion of the Irish language and culture.
- There is a nice relationship between the teachers, pupils and the school community.
- The school receives full support from the board of management and the parents.
- There is a fine range of educational equipment and accessories provided in the school and these resources are used to advantage.
- A good standard is achieved in English reading.
- The quality of teaching and learning in Physical Education is good.

The following **main recommendations** are made:

- It is recommended that the board of management reviews the child protection procedures and ensures that they are fully compliant with *Child Protection Guidelines for Primary Schools*, as set down in the Primary Circular 0061/2006.
- It is necessary to review the whole-school plan for Irish, in order to place greater emphasis on the central role that the language has in the school and to develop the skills of the pupils progressively.
- The varied learning needs of the pupils in the learning programme should be addressed, in Mathematics in particular, by means of organising group work and mini-lessons on a regular basis.
- It is recommended that the operation of the in-school management team be placed on a more formal basis and that the responsibilities associated with each post be reviewed with reference to Primary Circular 07/03.

3. Quality of School Management

- The composition of the board complies with the Department of Education and Skills procedures and rules. Meetings of the board are convened regularly but it is recommended that more comprehensive records be kept of the meetings and that the chairperson signs the minutes of every meeting. The chairperson and members of the board give very generously of their talents and time, on behalf of the school. There is regular communication between the chairperson and the school staff and the board ensures that Irish has a central role in the life of the school. The provision of a permanent schoolhouse is a priority for the board and excellent work has been done over the years to provide a new building. It is recommended that the board conducts regular maintenance on the prefabricated rooms that are in use at present, in order to ensure the safety of the pupils.
- The principal cultivates a happy atmosphere among the school community. He is successful in his objective to develop the self-confidence and self-esteem of the pupils. The members of the in-school management team fulfil their duties enthusiastically and they give appropriate support to the principal. They displayed that they are happy to accept additional responsibilities, as need requires. It is recommended that the operation of the in-school management team be placed now on a more formal basis. Meetings should be convened regularly and a system put into effect to record the fulfilment of duties. Also, a review should be conducted on the responsibilities associated with each post and reference should be made to Primary Circular 07/03 in this regard.
- There is a fine range of educational equipment and accessories provided in the school and these resources are used to advantage.
- Good relations are cultivated between home and school and a regular newsletter and website are provided. The parents are kept informed about the progress of their children. The parents' association gives appropriate support to the school. There is a pleasant relationship between teachers and pupils. The pupils are commended on their good manners and their efforts to learn.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- There are administrative, pastoral and curricular plans provided in the school plan. A start has also been made to school self-assessment practices. For the effectiveness of the process, these practices should be widened and placed on a more formal basis. It is especially recommended that actions plans be developed that would address priority areas of development for the school.
- It is recommended that the curricular plans be developed, in order to provide more definite guidance for teachers in the implementation of the curriculum. It would be useful to appoint co-ordinators to take leadership of the various subjects. It would be useful also to strengthen the input of parents and of the board in the whole-school planning process.
- All teachers provide long-term and short-term plans for their work. In the best practice that was observed, specific learning objectives were clarified in the various areas of the curriculum. This approach is recommended to the entire staff.

- The school authorities did not give evidence that, in compliance with Primary Circular 0061/2006, the board of management has formally adopted the *Child Protection Guidelines for Primary Schools*. Procedures have been devised by the school but they are not fully in agreement with aforementioned official guidelines. The board of management should review the procedures and formally adopt them. It is recommended that the attention of the board of management, the school staff and the parents be directed to the revised protection procedures for child protection, that a copy of the procedures be provided to all members of staff (including new staff) and that it is ensured that the entire staff understands the procedures to be followed. A designated liaison person (DLP) and a deputy DLP have been appointed in line with the requirements of the guidelines.

5. Quality of Teaching, Learning and Pupil Achievement

- There are certain aspects of the quality of teaching, learning and the attainment of pupils in Irish that are good. A pleasant atmosphere pertaining to cultural awareness and the learning of Irish is cultivated in the school. The pupils are able to communicate fluently in the language. There is, however, a lack of accuracy and a dearth of vocabulary in their speech and often their sentences do not have the correct Irish structure. Language exemplars and structure should be taught progressively on a whole-school basis to improve the pupils' oral ability and language accuracy. It is recommended, also, that their cognitive language be developed to enhance their learning ability in the other subjects through the medium of the second language. Certain reading skills are developed and some pupils read accurately and with understanding. A wide range of reading material is provided. It would be worthwhile, however, to make a decision regarding the graded text that will be used for the teaching of reading. A range of tasks is practised to advance the writing ability of the pupils. It is recommended that this work is built on and that the pupils are given further experience of the writing process from the early year onwards. The school plan should be reviewed to give further guidance to the teachers, as regards the teaching of Irish.
- In English, opportunities to develop pupils' oral language competencies are provided from senior infants' class onwards. It is recommended that oral language skills be developed more systematically through the provision of discrete lessons based on the objectives in the curriculum. In English reading, a good standard is achieved by the majority of pupils. It is recommended that definite targets be set in planning and teaching to develop the range of reading skills, especially comprehension strategies, in a systematic way. Commendable samples of personal writing were observed. It would be worthwhile to include further direction on process writing in the school plan. Further opportunities should also be provided to pupils to practice writing in different genres and to put a system of process writing in place on a whole-school basis. It is also recommended that the handwriting style in the school and the presentation of work in copybooks be developed further.
- In Mathematics, there is variation in the quality of teaching, learning and the attainment of pupils. In general, effective class teaching is practised and the concepts are explained accurately. In some of the classes profitable use is made of concrete materials to teach and consolidate the concepts. Some pupils are successful in gaining a good understanding of the concepts and in achieving mastery of the memorisation of basic number facts. Continuous analysis and monitoring of the attainment of pupils in Mathematics would be worthwhile. Greater attention should be directed to the varying abilities of the pupils and to differentiating the learning material accordingly. It is recommended, also, that collaborative teaching be practised, so that suitable learning activities may be organised to serve the varying learning needs of the pupils. It would be

worthwhile to adopt a common approach to mathematical terminology and to give the pupils regular practice at the language, so that they will be able to use it accurately.

- The quality of teaching and learning in Physical Education is good. A comprehensive school plan has been provided and well-organised lessons, with good provision for pupils, were observed. The school is allowed to use St. Finbarr's Club's hall during the day and this is a fine resource for the physical education lessons. In addition, the club has an all-weather pitch and the school makes use of this facility to provide hurling and football for pupils in the morning and at lunchtime. External tutors are employed to teach dance and athletics. It is recommended that this system be reviewed to ensure that the work which is done with the pupils in the dance and athletics classes is fully in line with the curriculum.
- There is a pleasant relationship between the teachers and the pupils in this school and they are successful in cultivating a tranquil learning atmosphere. Class teaching, in the main, is practised but in certain classes use is sometimes made of attractive activities with groups and with individual pupils to enhance learning. In general, the teaching is effective and use is made of various assessment methods. Records are maintained, as appropriate, of work progress.

6. Quality of Supports for Pupils

- Appropriate provision is made for pupils with special learning needs. It is recommended that the school ensures that the support teaching is based on the graded approach. The pupils with learning needs are taught in groups and individually in the rooms of the support teachers. It would be worthwhile to place greater emphasis on the co-ordination of the support and that some of the teaching be done in collaboration with the mainstream teachers, so that a range of agreed teaching strategies may be put into effect.
- The support teachers provide profiles and individual programmes for each pupil with special learning needs. However, it should be ensured that the learning targets are suitable for the ability level of each pupil and achievable within a certain period of time.
- A positive learning atmosphere is discernible during the lessons. Use is made of active teaching methods to develop the pupils' literacy skills. It would be worthwhile to review the school policy so that the needs of pupils with learning difficulties in Mathematics will be served.

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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

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

Referring to pg 1, paragraph 2 of the school WSE report, the Board of Management has comprehensively reviewed the School Child Protection Policy and now it fully complies with the Child Protection Guidelines laid down by the Department of Education and the National Guidelines "Children First - National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children" as laid out in Circulars 65/2011 & 061/2006.

Gaelscoil Bharra was one of the first schools in the country to implement the RSE/Stay Safe programme and has been vigorous in its implementation of child protection since the founding of the school in 1996. Everyone is welcome to examine any school policy.