

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

**Whole School Evaluation
REPORT**

**Gaelscoil Uí Earcáin
Finglas, Dublin 11
Roll number: 20220C**

Date of inspection: 16 March 2010



WHOLE-SCHOOL EVALUATION

A whole-school evaluation of Gaelscoil Uí Earcáin was undertaken in March, 2010. The evaluation focused on the quality of teaching and learning in English, Irish, Mathematics and Drama. This report presents the findings of the evaluation and makes recommendations for improvement. 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.

INTRODUCTION – SCHOOL CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

Gaelscoil Uí Earcáin is a co-educational all-Irish school which is registered under Foras Pátrúnachta na Scoileanna Lán-Ghaeilge. It has a catholic ethos. The school was founded in 2005 on a temporary site in West Finglas. Finglas, Ballymun, Glasnevin, Santry and Tyrrelstown are the principal areas from which pupils come to the school. The school achieved permanent status in the year 2008 and, in September of that year, the school moved to its present site on Glasanaon Road in Finglas. A large boys' school was located on this site up until 2007, when it was closed down. The De La Salle Order is the owner of the school building and site and the patron of Gaelscoil Uí Earcáin has a contract with the Order to lease the building. Because the school now has permanent recognition, the Department of Education and Skills pays ninety-five per cent of the cost of the lease.

Gaelscoil Uí Earcáin is given recognition as a school in a disadvantaged area and additional services and resources are available under the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) project.

The following table provides an overview of the enrolment and staffing in the school at the time of the evaluation:

	Number
Pupils enrolled in the school	113
Mainstream classes in the school	6
Teachers on the school staff	9
Mainstream class teachers	6
Teachers working in support roles	3
Special needs assistants	2

The school is growing on an annual basis and fourth class is the most senior class in the school at present. The attendance of most of the pupils is very good. The staff and the board of management make admirable efforts to promote good attendance.

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT

1.1 Characteristic spirit, mission or vision

It is outlined in the school's mission statement that the school aims to support learning and development by means of providing the highest standards of education, through the medium of Irish, for all pupils of the school. Considering that most of the pupils come to the school with English only, the staff merits special praise for its efforts in establishing Irish as the language of

the school. The language has a central place in the life of the school and the principal and staff are deemed to be successful in establishing a positive Irish atmosphere in the school. The board organises Irish classes for parents and for people of the area also. There is good demand for these classes and it is considered that Irish is used socially in a positive way among the school community.

1.2 Board of management

The board of management is constituted according to the procedures and the rules of the Department of Education and Skills. The board holds a meeting at least once a term. Minutes of the meetings are kept and a report from the principal and the treasurer is presented at these meetings also. Statutory, curricular, and pastoral policies, as well as policies relating to the administration of the school, have been approved by the board and are being implemented on a regular basis.

It is a priority for the board that the school would have permanent occupation of the building in which it is accommodated at present. Continual renovation is being carried out on the building and there is regular communication on accommodation issues between the De La Salle Order, the board and the Department.

During the evaluation, members of the board stated that they were satisfied with the standard of education being provided in the school. Their aim is to ensure that the school is a happy place, where the needs of the pupils in particular and subsequently those of the school community generally are met.

1.3 In-school management

There are three teachers on the in-school management team: the principal, the deputy principal and a teacher with a post of responsibility. There are vacancies for two other posts but the school has not been granted permission to fill these posts of responsibilities because of the total prohibition on filling posts in the public service.

The principal is functioning in her role from 2005, when the school was established. She cultivates a happy atmosphere among the school community and she likes to create an attractive learning environment for the pupils and the staff. There are very good relations between principal, staff, pupils, board of management and the parents and a positive spirit is discernible throughout the school. The principal organises the school's activities effectively. Suitable care is taken to maintain the school's chronicles accurately and neatly.

Particular duties are set down for teachers who have post of responsibilities. These duties generally relate to aspects of the curriculum and to administrative and pastoral responsibilities. During meetings which were convened with the in-school management team, they displayed that they are willing to fully support school development. They provide a report on their work at staff meetings and they provide a written report each term for the board of management.

1.4 Management of relationships and communication with the school community

A parents' association, which is called Cairde Ghaelscoil Uí Earcáin, is active in the school. The association is not affiliated formally to the National Parents Council, but a request has been submitted for membership of that organisation.

The parents indicate great interest in school events and its advancement. They organise social activities often for the school community, in order to fund various initiatives. The parents'

association is active on sports days and on special occasions in the school also. For example, they provided practical assistance when the school was acquiring the new building. They renovated the classrooms and they cleaned the school's surrounds on a voluntary basis.

The school shares information with parents effectively. Text messages are sent to them in emergency cases; newsletters are published on a regular basis and bilingual notes are sent home, when necessary. As well as this, there is a special notice board for parents in the school.

The parents indicated their satisfaction with the management of the school, with the teaching that is being provided and with the communication between school and home. It was stated that they get suitable information on the progress of their children through the parent-teacher meetings which are convened once every year and through an annual written report which is sent home.

1.5 Management of pupils

An assembly of pupils and teachers is held every morning in the school. By means of this system, a positive, welcoming atmosphere is cultivated and emphasis is placed on the rules of the school and on the code of behaviour. In the classrooms, positive relations between teachers and pupils are observed and a pleasant atmosphere of learning is created throughout the school. There is admirable emphasis on good behaviour and the pupils are commended on their good manners and their efforts in learning.

2. QUALITY OF SCHOOL PLANNING

2.1 Whole-school and classroom planning

Good work has been done by the staff on preparing a range of policies which relate to the administration of the school and to the implementation of the curriculum. In the plan, the needs of the school in its entirety are addressed and an action plan is outlined for each school year. An account is given in the action plan of the objectives and the priorities for the year and a good effort is made to implement these plans faithfully.

Staff meetings are convened once a month and planning matters are timetabled for these meetings. The priorities of the school at the moment are to review the code of behaviour, school communication and the development of technology. As the school grows, part of the action plan includes a review of the curricular plans.

The teachers provide short-term and long-term preparation for their work in the classrooms. Where best practice was observed, specific teaching objectives were clarified under the strands of the curriculum. This approach is recommended to the entire staff. The teachers prepare monthly accounts of the progress and the principal keeps the records in a central area. In order to provide the monthly reports, the teachers place ticks beside the items in their short-term plans which they have implemented. Then, the principal retains copies of all the plans in the office. It is considered that there is too much paperwork involved in this system and it is recommended that it be reviewed.

2.2 Child protection policy and procedures

Confirmation was provided that, in compliance with Department of Education and Science Primary Circular 0061/2006, the board of management has formally adopted the *Child Protection Guidelines for Primary Schools* (Department of Education and Science, September 2001). Confirmation was also provided that these child protection procedures have been brought to the attention of management, school staff and parents; that a copy of the procedures has been

provided to all staff (including all new staff); and that management has ensured that all staff are familiar with 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.

3. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

3.1 Language

Irish

The teachers undertake the teaching of Irish enthusiastically and with commitment and the progress they have made is commendable. The majority of pupils has achieved a satisfactory standard of Irish, with some pupils achieving a very good standard. Irish is used as a language of instruction and communication in the daily classroom activities. Themes are based on the areas of interest and on the needs of the pupils themselves and use is made of the resources in *Séideán Sí* to advance the language. The pupils are encouraged to speak the language in realistic contexts and situations. Their enjoyment and understanding is furthered by means of using songs, rhymes and stories. Good attention is directed to teaching the structure of language and true communication is practised during the oral activities. The pupils display a very good understanding of the wide range of language being used by the teachers.

There is plenty of print material in the environment and reading is taught progressively through the school. A fine range of textual material is available and additional resources are organised by the teachers to support the teaching of reading. A graded programme is followed and the pupils display a satisfactory understanding of the contents of the texts. In the lower classes, use is made of flash cards, reading charts and reading games to give the pupils practice in reading word stores and short sentences. Each pupil keeps a list of the books they have read, however, it would be worthwhile to establish a central recording system in each class so that the teacher knows what books have been read by the pupils.

The pupils are enabled also to develop basic writing skills. In the lower classes, the written work is based on the the content of the conversation and reading lessons and the pupils write simple news and short stories. In the middle classes, the pupils are given suitable practice in written work, both functional and creative, and the results of their efforts are interesting.

English

The quality of teaching and learning in English is generally good. In infants and junior classes, particular emphasis is placed on pupils' oral language development. Traditional rhymes, poems, stories and large-format books are used appropriately as starting points for talk and discussion. Pupils at all levels are questioned effectively and encouraged to retell stories and events from different perspectives as an aid to developing comprehension and higher-order thinking skills. Pupils are exposed to a range of age-appropriate poetry in English at each class level.

Reading materials are carefully chosen to match abilities and to foster confidence and competence. A suitable stock of books is available in every classroom and teachers plan effectively for the development of reading in their planning notes. A systematic whole-school approach is taken to teaching phonics. The *Reading Recovery Programme* is delivered effectively with very good outcomes for individual pupils. The staff has plans to introduce a Literacy Lift-off initiative in the school. This will involve the learning-support teachers and class teachers working co-operatively in a team-teaching approach during English lessons in classrooms. The school is urged to implement these plans as soon as possible.

The active engagement of parents and members of the wider community in reading is promoted and the school is involved in a One Finglas, One Book initiative whereby parents and adults in the community are encouraged to read and share ideas about a particular book.

Pupils in all classes experience a print-rich learning environment and they are provided with many opportunities to write freely about their ideas and experiences. Their written work is carefully monitored and teachers appropriately scaffold pupils' efforts when necessary. The school is involved in the *First Steps Writing Programme*. Samples of writing in different genres were evaluated and the standard was generally satisfactory. It is recommended that pupils' written work should normally be kept in their copybooks and less reliance on worksheets and individual pages for writing is recommended.

3.2 Mathematics

In general, the pupils achieve a satisfactory standard in Mathematics and the majority of them display a good understanding of the appropriate concepts. Two programmes for Mathematics are in use in the school – *Maths Recovery* and *Ready, Set, Go, Maths*. The teaching programme is graduated suitably from class to class. Diagrams and textbooks are used thoughtfully during the lessons. Oral work is practised regularly to connect understanding with learning. Activity methods and mathematical games are used in some classes. The pupils record the written work carefully. Assessment is conducted through teacher observation, standardised examinations, self-designed tests and the regular correction of the pupils' work.

3.3 Drama

A school plan for drama has been set down which gives guidance to the staff on the implementation of the drama curriculum. In the teachers' plans, provision is made for breadth and for balance between the strands and the strand units of the curriculum. In the drama activities which were observed, clever use was made of story as a stimulus to develop the ability of the pupils to function in role. The co-operative skills of the pupils are suitably nurtured during the activities and their participation in discussion and questioning sessions, to promote their understanding of characters, is cultivated. The expansive school hall is a fine resource and full use is made of it to provide lessons. Particular aspects of arts education and drama are linked creatively.

3.4 Assessment

Suitable assessment strategies have been laid out in the school plan and they are being implemented on a regular basis in the classes. Use is made of questioning, teacher observation, examinations in spelling and other informal strategies to assess the pupils' learning. As well as this, regular assessment is done in various subjects by using school-based examinations and standardised tests. Careful monitoring is done on copybooks and on the written work of the pupils in all classes. As regards pupils who have learning difficulties, diagnostic tests are conducted on them at an early stage to identify specific difficulties. The progress of the pupils is recorded at the end of the school year and a suitable report is sent to the parents in a professional manner. Copies of these reports are retained in the school.

4. QUALITY OF SUPPORT FOR PUPILS

4.1 Pupils with special educational needs

Effective provision is made for pupils who have difficulties in literacy and numeracy. Three teachers are engaged in special education in the school, two language learning-support teachers

and one person providing support in Mathematics. The support teaching is based on the graded approach. Clear learning targets are laid out in the individual education plans for particular pupils and the learning progress is recorded regularly. The learning targets of the pupils are reviewed, as appropriate, from time to time. There is contact and informal discussion between the support teachers and the mainstream teachers on a regular basis. The parents are kept informed about the progress of pupils and about ways in which additional help may be given to them at home. The openness of the communication that is perceived between the support team and the teachers in the mainstream classes and between the staff and parents is commended.

4.2 Other supports for pupils: disadvantaged, minority and other groups

The school participates in Band 1 of the school support programme to Deliver Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS). Financial and personal resources to reduce the effects of educational disadvantage are provided. Included in the initiatives funded in the school are swimming and dancing classes, the provision of additional books and subsidies to bring pupils on school trips. A home/school/community liaison co-ordinator works in the school for one day a week. Irish courses for parents are organised through this service and the classes are well attended. As well as this, the school co-operates with other home/school/community liaison co-ordinators in Finglas to organise common projects in schools in the area.

5. CONCLUSION

The school has strengths in the following areas:

- There is a very positive atmosphere discernible among the teachers, pupils and staff in the school.
- The diligence and effectiveness of the board of management are commended.
- The principal works very enthusiastically in fulfilling her duties and she gives clear and helpful leadership to the staff and the school community.
- The parents of the school are commended for the assistance and the financial and practical support they give to the school.
- The teachers display great interest in the development of the school and they co-operate together effectively as a team.
- The best of attention is devoted to the promotion of Irish in the school.
- The pupils are commended on their good manners and their efforts in learning.

The following key recommendations are made in order to further improve the quality of education provided by the school:

- The development of the process approach to writing in English should be commenced at an earlier stage and copybooks rather than worksheets should be used more systematically to record pupils' efforts.
- It is recommended that the staff should organise a new template to record the monthly progress in the classes.

Post-evaluation meetings were held with the staff and board of management where the draft findings and recommendations of the evaluation were presented and discussed.

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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 of Management would like to thank the inspectors for the professional manner in which they conducted their Whole School Evaluation, as well as for the comprehensive report they compiled which gives an accurate and positive insight into the excellent work carried out by the Principal, Staff, Parents/Guardians and the school community since Gaelscoil Uí Earcáin opened its doors for the first time in September 2005, which shows a deep understanding of the specific circumstance of the school, and which makes helpful recommendations for the future.

We welcome the inspectors' recognition of the school's strengths – recognition in particular of the positive outcome of the ongoing work of the staff with regard to fostering and promoting the Irish language. The strengths recognised by the inspectors are based on the vision we have for the school, a vision that is a foundation for the exceptional work carried out continuously by the entire school community.

The complimentary and positive report which has been presented to the Board is a source of great pride for the school.

With reference to the recommendation in *Section 5 - Conclusion - Recommendations, bullet point 1*, the pre-literacy skills are developed in the usual manner through the primary language of the school, i.e. Irish. The pre-literacy skills acquired by the pupils from junior infants onwards are transferable from Irish to English. The recommendation that the pupils' copybooks rather than worksheets are used to record their work is accepted.

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 recommendation in *Section 5 - Conclusion - Recommendations, bullet point 1*, that the pupils' copybooks rather than worksheets be used to record their work is accepted and a system to that effect is now in place.

Referring to the recommendation in *Section 5 - Conclusion - Recommendations, bullet point 2*, that the staff should agree a template to record the monthly progress in the classes, a system is now in place in which each member of the teaching staff prepares fortnightly and monthly plans, as well as monthly reports, all of which are compiled electronically. These documents are forwarded to the Principal, through the email system, for her approval.

Growth and Development in Gaelscoil Uí Earcáin

Since the completion of the Whole School Evaluation (WSE) the school has continued to grow and develop. The table below sets out the up-to-date information with regard to staff numbers and registered students as of September 2010:

	Márta 2010	Meán Fómhair 2010
Pupils on the school roll	113	143
Mainstream classes in the school	6	7
Teacher(s) on the school's staff	9	10
No. of mainstream Teacher(s)	6	7
Teachers working in support roles	3	4
Special needs assistants	2	3

The *Literacy Lift-off* programme is available this year to pupils in first class. This scheme comprises close cooperation on a team teaching basis between class teachers and learning support teachers. Great emphasis is placed on this cooperation between staff in general in the school in the interest of promoting best practice and for the benefit of the children.

The staff show great interest in the opportunities for professional development under the DEIS scheme, as well as interest in formally adding to their qualifications through third-level courses. It is expected that these schemes will be offered in Gaelscoil Uí Earcáin in the near future:

- First-Steps Reading;
- First-Steps Listening and Speaking;
- Incredible Years.