

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

North Dublin Muslim National School
Cabra, Dublin 7
Uimhir rolla: 20152L

Date of inspection: 8 November 2012



A N R O I N N | **D E P A R T M E N T O F**
O I D E A C H A I S | **E D U C A T I O N**
A G U S S C I L E A N N A | **A N D S K I L L S**

1. Introduction

The North Dublin Muslim National School is a co-educational primary school under the patronage of the Islamic Foundation of Ireland. The school serves the Muslim community that resides mainly in North, South and West Dublin and there are currently 206 pupils enrolled. The school is run by two co-managers, one of whom is designated by the Islamic Foundation of Ireland and one by the Department of Education and Skills. The co-managers are working to improve levels of pupil attendance as there is a high level of pupil absences exceeding twenty days during the school year. During this whole-school evaluation, provision for Irish, English, Mathematics and Music was evaluated. 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:

- A major strength of this school is the committed and focused leadership of the principal. With the support of most teachers, she has been very successful in initiating and overseeing the development and implementation of systems and initiatives to ensure the smooth running of the school and the promotion of good-quality teaching and learning. This has resulted in a substantial improvement in the quality of education being provided in the school since the last Whole School Evaluation was carried out in 2008.
- The co-managers are to be commended for the purposeful, strategic and collaborative way in which they have sought to improve standards of teaching and learning and to improve school facilities.
- The principal and co-managers are being well served in their efforts to improve standards of education in the school by the majority of teachers, whose teaching skills and collaborative approach towards optimising learning for pupils are commended.
- An air of courtesy and respect permeates interactions between pupils and staff and among the pupils themselves. Pupils demonstrate a keen eagerness to learn.
- Tá foclóir breá ag na daltaí sa Ghaeilge agus léiríonn siad go bhfuil raon maith de bhriathra ar eolas acu agus go bhfuil siad in ann iad a úsáid i gceart. *Pupils have a good vocabulary, know a broad range of verbs and demonstrate that they are able to use these correctly.*
- Pupils demonstrate a good ability to write within a broad range of genres in English and a particular approach devised by teachers to develop pupils' oral language skills has been successful.
- The quality of pupils' mental and written computational and procedural skills in Mathematics is good. A particular initiative developed by the teachers themselves to improve pupils' problem-solving skills is resulting in pupils approaching problems with enthusiasm and confidence.

The following **main recommendations** are made:

- To support the functioning of the in-school management team, meetings of the full team should be scheduled to facilitate collective decision-making.
- While school policy promotes a common template for teachers' long and short-term planning and monthly progress records, the required level of detail also needs to be discussed, agreed and adopted for use by all teachers.
- There is an over-reliance on ability grouping for the teaching of English and Mathematics which limits pupils' opportunity to engage with the full range of learning experiences of the curriculum in both these subject areas. A more balanced approach to grouping is required.
- Overall, there is scope for development in respect of teaching and learning in English. In particular, a more systematic approach to the development of key literacy skills is necessary.
- There is a need to review provision for learning support particularly in terms of the criteria for determining support, the procedures for recording where pupils are placed on the continuum of support and the criteria for discontinuing support.
- While the co-managers and the principal have had many successes in improving school facilities and the standards of teaching and learning within the school, examples of poor teaching remain. This report strongly urges the co-managers to continue to address this issue in order to ensure that all pupils receive a good-quality education.

3. Quality of School Management

- The quality of the work of the co-managers is very good. They are to be commended for the purposeful, strategic and collaborative way in which they have sought to improve standards of teaching and learning within the school and to improve school facilities.
- The quality of the work of the school principal is very good. Through her committed and focused leadership, she has been very successful in initiating and overseeing the development and implementation of systems and initiatives to ensure the smooth running of the school and the promotion of good-quality teaching and learning in a number of areas of curriculum provision. Specific tasks have been identified for the post-holders within the in-school management team. It is good practice that there are clear procedures directing the implementation of these tasks. In addition to fulfilling their task responsibilities, there is scope for post-holders to develop the leadership dimension to their role. To support the functioning of the in-school management team, meetings of the full team should be scheduled to facilitate collective decision-making.
- The quality of the school building is good, providing pupils with sufficiently spacious, clean, bright and safe accommodation. The securing of a permanent site and permanent building for the school is a matter of priority for the co-managers.
- There are effective routines in place to ensure the safe and ordered management of pupils within the school. Classroom management is generally good. Where classroom management is particularly effective, teachers use a wide range of strategies to optimise pupils' concentration and engagement in learning activities. In these instances, the link between very effective classroom management and very good quality teaching is

particularly notable. Such practices need to characterise all teaching and learning settings.

- The management of relationships with parents is very good. In a meeting with the inspectors held as part of the whole-school evaluation, parent representatives reported strong levels of satisfaction with the effectiveness of the principal in developing the school particularly in terms of its smooth running, the incorporation of the Islamic ethos as required into certain aspects of curriculum provision and the good-quality education being received by their children. This satisfaction is also echoed in a questionnaire completed by parents as part of the evaluation although there is a significant minority of parents who state that they are unsure as to school policy in certain areas, most notably Relationships and Sexuality Education.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- The quality of organisational planning is very good. Organisational policies are clearly written and are very successful in addressing the specific context of the school. While the school has engaged in a number of worthwhile activities to improve school attendance, there is a need to formally develop an attendance strategy to address the high level of pupil absences. There is scope to involve the parents' association in the development of this policy. The quality of curriculum planning is generally good. Where these plans are most successful, they document practices specific to the school context, particularly in terms of its Islamic ethos, and how provision is made to ensure progression in learning as pupils proceed through the school. The school is to be commended for its approach to school self-evaluation, particularly in terms of setting priorities and identifying and implementing actions to address these priorities.
- The quality of teachers' individual planning is generally good. All teachers provided long and short-term planning together with monthly progress records in accordance with Rule 126 (revised, 2005) of *The Rules for National Schools*. Where teachers' planning is particularly effective, it focuses primarily on concisely identifying specific learning objectives and learning outcomes. All teachers are urged to adopt a similar focus and to also ensure that monthly progress records document pupils' learning clearly and succinctly. While school policy promotes a common template for teachers' long and short-term planning and monthly progress record, the required level of detail needs to be discussed, agreed and adopted for use by all teachers.
- 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

- Tá cáilíocht an teagaisc agus na foghlama sa Ghaeilge go maith. Léiríonn na daltaí suim i bhfoghlaim na Gaeilge agus baineann siad taitneamh agus tairbhe as na gníomhaíochtaí éagsúla a eagraítear go cumasach i bhfórmhor na seomraí ranga. Éiríonn le formhór na ndaltaí raon leathan foclóra a úsáid agus léiríonn siad cumas sasúil in úsáid na mbriathra. Ó thaobh na léitheoireachta de, moltar béim a choimeád ar fhorbairt na foghraíochta chomh maith le tuiscint na ndaltaí. Tá iarracht láidir déanta ag an scoil chun an scríbhneoireacht chruthaitheach a chur chun cinn agus léirigh na daltaí cumas réasúnta maith i scríobh altanna as a stuaim féin. An an iomlán, chun an dea-chleachtas a bhí le feiceáil i bhformhór na gceachtanna a fhorbairt, b'fhiú, sa phlean scoile, an t-

ábhar teagaisc a chéimniú a thuilleadh ó mhí go mí agus ó bhliain go bliain. *The quality of teaching and learning in Irish is good. Pupils are enjoying and benefiting from the learning activities that are organised competently in the majority of classrooms. The majority of pupils succeed in using a wide range of vocabulary and demonstrate a satisfactory competency in using verbs correctly. With regard to reading, it is recommended that the development of pupils' pronunciation be emphasised in addition to pupils' understanding. The school has made a good attempt to develop pupils' creative writing and pupils demonstrated a reasonable level of competence in writing independently. Overall, in order to advance the good practice that was in evidence in most of the lessons, it would be beneficial in the school plan to outline topic content in a progressive way from month to month and year to year.*

- While the overall quality of teaching and learning in English has scope for development, this report notes some good quality approaches being implemented by teachers that are proving successful in bringing about improvements in attainment levels. Considerable attention has been given to the development of oral language through a series of language activities effectively delineated for each class level. However, while pupils engage in these activities with enthusiasm and demonstrate a good command of an appropriate level of vocabulary, there remains scope to extend the range of contexts within which pupils practise the language. There is evidence of an incremental improvement in pupils' attainment levels in reading over recent years. To continue this improvement the teaching of reading requires development, particularly in terms of teaching comprehension skills systematically and matching books more carefully to pupils' reading abilities. These recommendations should be incorporated into the school's recently-launched paired reading initiative. The quality of pupils' attainment in writing is good. The whole-school approach to the development of writing ensures appropriate opportunities for pupils to write in a variety of genres. The promotion of editing check lists and pupil self-assessment rubrics will further enhance the quality of pupils' writing. It is commendable that spellings are differentiated in accordance with pupils' abilities. Penmanship and the presentation of work is good in some settings but not in others and therefore requires attention on a whole-school basis.
- The quality of teaching and learning in Mathematics is good particularly in terms of mental and written computational and procedural work. A particular whole-school initiative, developed by the teachers themselves, has been put in place to improve problem-solving skills and this is having a positive impact on pupils' confidence and ability to approach both mental and written problem-solving. While some effective links are made with pupils' daily lives and the school environment there remains scope to enrich the mathematical experience within some classes. There is scope to optimise pupil engagement in hands-on mathematical activities, to provide greater opportunity for more participation in whole-class and group discussion and to see other curriculum areas as opportunities to develop pupils' learning. The grouping of pupils by ability for lessons in Mathematics on an on-going basis militates against this richer exploration of Mathematics and a more flexible approach to the grouping of pupils is required.
- Good provision is made for the teaching and learning of Music within the parameters of the Islamic ethos of the school. Pupils participate in music lessons with enthusiasm and demonstrate good sense of pulse and pitch. Song singing is tuneful.
- The quality of teaching ranges from very good to poor. Where best practice was observed lessons were well structured, appropriately focused and effectively paced to ensure optimum pupil engagement in learning activities. These lessons were also closely aligned with pupils' abilities. This very good practice needs to be extended to all lessons and settings. School management is strongly urged to continue efforts to ensure high standards of teaching and learning in all classrooms. It is recommended that the

sustained grouping of children according to their ability is reviewed to ensure an appropriate balance of mixed ability grouping. While there are many worthwhile examples of assessment records being maintained by many teachers, in the majority of instances this assessment data could better inform classroom planning. In their interactions with the inspectors, pupils displayed a great eagerness to learn. In a questionnaire completed by pupils from third to sixth class as part of the evaluation, the majority of pupils report that they feel safe in school and that they are doing well in literacy and numeracy.

6. Quality of Support for Pupils

- The school is to be commended for the considerable attention it has paid to identifying and supporting pupils with particular learning needs in the areas of literacy, including English as an Additional Language, and numeracy with a worthwhile emphasis being placed on early intervention. Of particular note within support provision has been the liaison between the school and other support agencies together with the close co-operation between mainstream and support teachers. In the majority of instances, there is a good use of baseline data to inform teachers' planning. This planning, for the most part, is focused and aligns to pupils' needs. There are some good examples of well-planned and well-delivered in-class support although in some instances, consideration needs to be given to how best to optimise the impact of the support teacher. Interactions between all support teachers and pupils are affirming and support rooms provide, in the main, attractive and stimulating learning environments. Lessons are clearly structured and appropriate visual resources are used effectively to further pupils' learning. As the school proceeds to develop its learning support policy, there is scope to clarify the process by which pupils are selected for support, the criteria for discontinuing support and the procedures for recording where pupils are placed on the continuum of support advocated by the National Educational Psychologist Service (NEPS).

Appendix

SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

Submitted by the Board of Management

Area 1: Observations on the content of the inspection report

The management group welcomes the affirmations and the recommendations in the WSE report. The considerable improvements since the last WSE was conducted in the school are noted. While the role of leadership is acknowledged, the management group is also fully aware and deeply grateful for the commitment and the creativity with which many of the teachers on the staff have worked to bring about these improvements.

The management group acknowledges the thorough and professional manner in which the evaluation was carried out and is grateful for the clear and helpful list of recommendations contained in the report. The responses to these recommendations were discussed and agreed by the staff and then agreed by the school management group.

This team approach to the responses will help to ensure a collaborative approach to their implementation. In some cases the task of implementation has already begun. The implementation of other recommendations will take longer and in these cases the actions designed to bring about the recommended improvements will be incorporated into the annual school plan, the literacy and numeracy plans and the school self-evaluation process. . The responses to the six major recommendations are outlined in area 2 below.

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

1. The school is now implementing collective in-school management meetings. The in-school management team will be setting agendas and keeping minutes of each meeting.
2. It is the school's intention to standardise all planning formats and monthly progress report templates, prior to the commencement of the 2013-14 academic year. Following agreement on the formats, there will be a discussion and agreement on the required level of detail.
3. The school recognises the benefits of mixed ability groups and while it has been employing mixed ability groups within the Paired Reading and Early Intervention programmes, as well as other curricular areas, it is now intended to adopt a more balanced approach to grouping in the teaching of English and Maths. We envisage using mixed ability grouping more regularly. At times, however, teachers may still need to group pupils by ability for certain topics, depending on the specific needs of the children.
4. Based on the previous year's standardised tests in English, the school identified reading as an area for improvement. The school introduced a new Paired Reading programme in November 2012 to address this area of concern. This was in addition to other initiatives, such as; Oxford Reading Tree books, The Early Intervention programme, local library and librarian visits, themed oral language lessons, World Book Day activities and the yearly book fair. The school chose Literacy this year as its focus for year 1 of The School Self Evaluation Programme and is currently at the *Information Gathering* stage of this programme.
5. The school is currently formulating the SEN policy. This will address criteria for determining support, the procedures for recording where pupils are placed on the continuum of support and the criteria for discontinuing support. In addition to using

standardised test results and SEN team designed base line testing in English and Maths to determine support, we intend to utilise other tests going forward that may enable us to ascertain the specific needs of our diverse student body.

6. The school participates in the National Induction Programme for Newly Qualified Teachers and has introduced a timetabled mentoring programme. As part of this programme, Newly Qualified Teachers have been given the opportunity to observe fully probated teaches in a wide variety of curricular areas. All teachers participate in team teaching on a daily basis, teaching and planning collaboratively and also identifying areas for development, such as the Green Schools Programme, currently being undertaken. Going forward, we acknowledge the individual talents and strengths of our teaching staff and endeavour to further utilise this resource to assist the continuing professional development of all teachers.