

An Roinn Oideachais agus Eolaíochta

Department of Education and Science

**Whole School Evaluation
REPORT**

**Holy Trinity Senior School
Donaghmede, Dublin 13
Uimhir rolla:19406J**

Date of inspection: 28 November 2008



**AN ROINN | DEPARTMENT OF
OIDEACHAIS | EDUCATION
AGUS EOLAÍOCHTA | AND SCIENCE**

WHOLE-SCHOOL EVALUATION

A whole-school evaluation of Holy Trinity Senior National School was undertaken in November 2008. This report presents the findings of the evaluation and makes recommendations for improvement. The evaluation focused on aspects of the school's provision including management, teaching and learning, planning and supports for pupils, with a particular focus on the provision of English as an Additional Language (EAL). The board of management was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the report; a response was not received from the board

INTRODUCTION – SCHOOL CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

Holy Trinity Senior National School, Donaghmede is a co-educational senior school that serves the local community of Donaghmede and adjoining areas. It is one of four primary schools established in the 1970s to meet the needs of Donaghmede parish. The school plays an important role in the local community and is used by a number of agencies on a regular basis outside of school hours. The school underwent extensive refurbishment in 2007 with further improvement planned for the future. The interior facilities are bright, warm, comfortable and well maintained.

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

	Number
Total number of teachers on the school staff	16
Number of mainstream class teachers	10
Total number of teachers working in support roles	5
Number of language support teachers	2
Special needs assistants	1
Total number of pupils enrolled in the school	287
Number of pupils with English as an Additional Language (EAL)	32

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT

1.1 Characteristic spirit, mission or vision

Holy Trinity Senior School is a Catholic school under the patronage of the Archbishop of Dublin. The school is committed to the holistic development of every pupil. A diverse range of cultural backgrounds is reflected in its population. The school endeavours to develop each pupil's unique academic, spiritual, physical, social and emotional talents within an intercultural and inclusive environment. Through daily school life and a range of extracurricular activities, most notably music and sport, the school displays commitment to accomplishing these aims.

1.2 Board of management

The board of management meets regularly and works collaboratively with the parents and the staff in supporting the administration and organisation of the school. The minutes of board meetings show that topics discussed are wide ranging and commonly relate to the day-to-day running of the school, its financial matters and policy development. Accounts are audited on an

annual basis and it is reported that the board discusses all proposed significant expenditures prior to approval. Through the principal's report, the board is well informed regarding ongoing educational initiatives such as the school orchestra and the organic garden project. Pupil participation in curricular and extracurricular events is also communicated to the board. The chairperson meets regularly with the principal between board meetings.

The board of management has overseen the development of many administrative and curricular school policies and, in the main, its involvement in their formulation has been at the level of ratification. It is recommended to the board that a review date be set for policies and that all ratified policies are signed by the chairperson. A strategic plan is in place for the refurbishment and maintenance of the building. With assistance from An Bord Bia, the development of the school's grounds and the extension of an organic garden has taken place. The board has identified the upgrading of the school's library and ICT facilities as priorities for future development. Communication with parents is supported and encouraged and abbreviated versions of the most pertinent policies are made available to parents when their children enrol.

1.3 In-school management

The principal uses his considerable experience and expertise to lead and manage the school effectively. He prioritises organisational, curriculum and pastoral needs skilfully and is committed to whole-school planning that leads to school improvement. The principal places considerable emphasis on promoting collegiality among staff and encourages leadership and teamwork so that all are empowered to contribute to school improvement. His attitude of concern for the welfare of all pupils is commendable and he ensures that a harmonious environment exists for the provision of an inclusive and holistic education for every pupil. He has led the development of a number of other valuable initiatives, most notably the recent formation of a school orchestra and the ongoing development of the school's organic garden.

The work of the principal is complemented by a committed in-school management team that comprises a deputy principal, an assistant principal and four special duties post-holders. Team members draft an annual action plan outlining their organisational, curricular and pastoral care duties and progress is reviewed at regular team meetings. The principal and present post-holders have led recent policy development effectively. While the duties of the post-holders reflect present school priorities, during the next review of posts, all curricular subjects should be shared among the team in order to monitor most effectively the success of existing curricular initiatives and to continue to meet the identified needs of the school.

A key strength of the school is the willingness of all teachers to undertake duties in a range of areas. This is evidence of the strong team spirit and the collegial attitude that is fostered by the principal. School records and official documents such as roll books and the attendance register are maintained very carefully.

1.4 The management of resources

The management of staff is very effective and a policy of teacher rotation ensures that pupils benefit from the range of expertise and experience available in the school. Support for EAL pupils is delivered through the withdrawal of pupils in small groups. Staff members have availed of a variety of professional development courses and plan to avail of the forthcoming EAL course being delivered by the support services. Further training in aspects of intercultural education would be beneficial at this point in time as the school is in the process of drafting its intercultural policy. The contribution of the secretary is noteworthy and she undertakes a range of

administrative, clerical and communicative roles in an efficient and practical manner. Newly-qualified teachers are supported by the principal and also through the National Pilot Project on Teacher Induction. The board is supportive of teachers' professional development and on a number of occasions, has provided funding for such courses. Daily cleaning and caretaking ensures that the school is well maintained internally and externally.

The quality of accommodation is of a very good standard, providing bright and comfortable educational and recreational facilities. In general, circulation areas are well used to display and celebrate pupils' work. A spacious hard play area provides a suitable recreational area and the recent yard marking enables pupils to participate in a variety of games at break time.

Central storage areas provide ready access to a range of good-quality resources across the curriculum. An up-to-date detailed list of these resources is maintained in the school plan. The board has been proactive in the development of a well-stocked, user-friendly resource library. The upgrading of ICT facilities has been identified as a resource development priority. Successful participation in *Cumann na mBunscol* games is ensured through the use of a large playing pitch at the rear of the school. The nearby location of the school's organic garden and participation in the Green Schools programme ensures that the pupils have a heightened awareness of environmental matters.

1.5 Management of relationships and communication with the school community

Good home-school links contribute to the quality of the relationship that exists between the school and the parent body. Opportunities to discuss pupils' progress are facilitated through annual parent-teacher meetings. When necessary, EAL parents are accompanied by translators from within their family circle when they attend school meetings. An annual report is furnished informing parents of their child's progress. Regular newsletters and notes are used to inform parents about school life and parents use homework journals frequently to communicate with the school. Parents' opinions are valued and the principal works closely with the parents' association and regularly attends their meetings. Over the years, the association has been involved in a range of fundraising activities and it has also arranged talks relating to bullying, self-esteem building, parenting and first-aid.

Parents are supportive of the school through their attendance at extracurricular activities and through their participation in school events, most notably open days, music recitals, sporting fixtures and religious celebrations. Parents praised the commitment of the principal and his openness to parents' ideas and suggestions. The school has established effective links with a wide range of community organisations including the local credit union, the local historical society, the public library and Croke Park. These links support all pupils and are of particular benefit to EAL pupils, most especially in developing their sense of place.

1.6 Management of pupils

Pupils are managed with care and skill and the principal and the staff are commended for the wide range of opportunities they facilitate to develop pupils' self-esteem and confidence. The work of the special-needs assistant supports pupils by promoting independence and enabling participation in class activities. The school rules are underpinned by the ethos of the school and are stated in a very appropriate, positive way. They contribute to the creation of a respectful caring community. This is further enhanced by the development of appropriate rules at individual class level. The success of this approach was evidenced by the very good behaviour observed during the evaluation. Pupils interact with their teachers and each other in a very positive manner and

engage enthusiastically in all their activities. A buddy system of support for EAL pupils is well-established and seating arrangements in classrooms are conducive to appropriate peer interaction during class activities.

The teachers involve the pupils in a wide range of sporting activities, most notably football, hurling and athletics. Many activities are organised by the teachers during lunch breaks. Pupils are encouraged to become involved in sporting and cultural events in the local community and their participation is celebrated in school through the display of photographs and trophies. The school has purchased a number of musical instruments which allow pupils develop their musical talents during and after school time. Through Comhairle na nDaltaí, (*Pupils' Council*) pupils' views are taken on board and the recent acquisition of bicycle racks resulted from pupils' suggestions. It is noteworthy that an EAL pupil represents the school in Dublin's Comhairle na nÓg.

Pupils' attendance is monitored effectively as part of the School Completion Programme (SCP) and attendance records are very satisfactory for the majority of pupils. Effective links with local post-primary schools have been established, among which is participation in Grange Community School science programme.

2. QUALITY OF SCHOOL PLANNING

2.1 Quality of whole-school planning

The quality of school planning is very good and the school has developed a comprehensive range of organisational and curricular policies that are practical and user friendly. They contribute effectively to the smooth running of the school and the delivery of a broad and balanced curriculum. The work of the post-holders has made a noteworthy contribution to this collaborative process.

The quality of whole-school planning for English and Mathematics is very good. Both plans emphasise content to be taught, the centrality of language development, methodologies, skill development and the use of a wide range of appropriate resources. In the plan for English, the inclusion of guidelines on the development of a broader range of reading strategies would give specific guidance for classroom planning. In the Mathematics plan, a wider range of differentiation strategies would be of benefit to classroom teachers. The school is to be commended for its recent development of a two-year plan for numeracy in response to analysis of the results of standardised mathematics tests. The plan has identified mental Mathematics and problem-solving as key areas for development. Commendably, this numeracy plan has identified targets to be achieved within a time frame and is subject to regular review.

2.2 Quality of whole-school planning for EAL

The quality of whole-school planning for EAL is good. The plan outlines strategies for assessment, broad aims and methodologies used in teaching and details of the collaborative process between the EAL teacher and the classroom teachers. It sets out a range of strategies which respect linguistic and cultural diversity. The effectiveness of the plan would be further enhanced by clear guidelines for classroom teachers in relation to short-term planning, particularly for pupils during the silent phase, pupil induction and settling in to the new school environment. Clear guidelines on homework, home-school relations and a comprehensive list of resources would also be of benefit.

Cultural diversity is celebrated through display in most classrooms and especially the EAL support area. This good practice should extend to the main circulation areas of the school to celebrate the sixteen countries represented by EAL pupils. A draft intercultural policy, when brought to fruition, will bolster the many aspects of good practice observed in the school.

2.3 Quality of classroom planning including planning for EAL

The quality of classroom planning is good. All teachers prepare long-term and short-term plans diligently under the strands and strand units of the *Primary School Curriculum (1999)*. These plans clearly outline the content to be covered and resources needed in the delivery of lessons. In short-term planning, some teachers outline differentiated lesson objectives and a broad range of differentiated activities and assessment strategies. However, overall planning for differentiation and assessment needs to be more specific to detail how content will be differentiated and to describe further the methodologies through which differentiation will be achieved.

While good practice was observed in many classrooms, there is a need to outline in classroom planning how the needs of EAL pupils are being met. Consideration should be given to developing a standard template for all short-term planning which would allow teachers record the many aspects of good practice observed during the evaluation. Very effective methods of planning, preparation and recording of progress are in evidence in the support settings with detailed individual education plans (IEPs) and individual profile and learning programmes (IPLPs) prepared collaboratively. Communication between classroom teachers and support teachers is good but is informal for the most part. A more structured approach would support further the sharing of good practice. All teachers compile a monthly progress record which is stored centrally by the principal. Varying approaches are adopted in the formulation of these progress records. Consideration should also be given to devising an agreed template for the monthly progress record and this should be adopted at whole school level.

2.4 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 Teaching of English and English as an Additional Language

The overall quality of the teaching of English is good. All teachers place very good emphasis on the development of oral language skills. Pupils engage in discussion and debate in a variety of learning contexts. Teachers encourage EAL pupils to contribute to discussions and they monitor EAL pupils' involvement in oral language activities carefully. Teachers make good use of collaborative learning and in some classrooms, pair-work as well. It is recommended that greater use of pair-work be considered, particularly within oral language development contexts.

Overall, pupils read fluently and show a keen interest in their reading. They are making good progress in the development of reading skills. While the school plan does provide useful and clear guidelines on phonological development at different class levels, teachers should make greater provision for it in their planning and teaching. Teachers ensure that pupils experience a wide range of reading material and they encourage them to read books from both the school library and the local library. Individual class libraries are well stocked with a good balance of fact and fiction books. Very good use is made of book reviews. All teachers make suitable provision for the use of class novels and some creative integration with media studies, Drama, and Social, Environmental and Scientific Education (SPHE) was found during the evaluation. In some instances, very good provision is made for the analysis of features of the novel such as character and plot. In a number of cases, teachers provided differentiated reading material for their pupils and made effective use of grouping. Building upon existing good practices, the school should examine wider opportunities to use these approaches. School corridors and individual classrooms are well presented as print-rich environments, with many samples of the pupils' work on display. In a few cases, the further development of the classroom as a print-rich environment should be considered.

Pupils write in a variety of genres and for a variety of audiences. Good use of the writing process was found. In a number of classrooms, pupils write anthologies and mini-books both individually and collaboratively. This creative writing is commended and might now be investigated further, with a view to sharing strategies among the same grade level and up through the school. The use of ICT to present and display pupils' work is recommended at whole-school level. EAL pupils are fully integrated in all classroom contexts. Teachers differentiate their questioning and reading material to meet the needs of the different abilities of these pupils. It is recommended that classroom teachers work more closely with the EAL support teacher with a view to planning specifically for the revision and development of Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP). Teachers make suitable provision for the study of grammar and punctuation.

Very good provision is made for poetry appreciation. Very concerted and focused approaches were noted in a number of classrooms. Good provision was made for appropriate recitation and the specific study of poetic style and conventions. Opportunities for the development and wider dissemination of such practices on a whole-school basis should be explored.

3.2 Mathematics

Teaching in Mathematics is underpinned by the school's comprehensive mathematics plan and whole-school numeracy strategy. Teachers have put together a wide range of interactive and stimulating resources. This is commendable and the augmenting of resources of the same quality for certain strands is encouraged. Classrooms are well presented as mathematics-rich environments. It is recommended that circulation areas incorporate more mathematics-rich display. The development of mathematics trails would further enable pupils to relate the study of Mathematics to everyday experiences.

Teachers take care to link lesson content appropriately to pupils' experiences. Lessons observed had pace and direction and challenged the pupils who engaged enthusiastically in these lessons. Mental mathematics and mathematical games are emphasised strongly with some very creative use of them observed during the inspection. Collaborative learning and hands-on activities are used to very good effect. For the most part, good use is made of resources, most notably, concrete resources and some very commendable use of ICT was found. Some creative and effective use of a range of problem-solving strategies was observed; these developed the pupils' problem solving

skills and encouraged them to question and extended their understanding of concepts. The school should strongly consider using such methodologies further.

In some cases, very effective differentiation practices were noted. It is recommended that the school examines the manner and nature by which differentiation is practised at different class levels so as to more appropriately meet the needs of a broader range of learners.

In general, pupils show commendable knowledge of number facts and memorisation strategies. Pupils are making good progress for the most part, although there is some variance in standards across different class levels and different strands of the curriculum. Pupils complete their written work carefully and this is monitored on an ongoing basis. Overall, teachers make good provision for integration and linkage.

In-class support in Mathematics is well-delivered. This supports EAL pupils and high levels of collaboration are in evidence between the in-class support teachers and the classroom teachers. In classrooms where pupils work in collaborative groups, EAL pupils are enabled to interact confidently and access the curriculum at cognitively appropriate levels. The sharing of this good practice is encouraged. The recently-implemented numeracy strategy should be monitored regularly to assess its impact on standards. Also, the results of standardised tests need to be carefully monitored and analysed to further inform planning, teaching and learning.

3.3 Assessment

The school policy on assessment is of a high standard. In particular, it makes very clear the importance of the use of formative assessment in addition to the role of summative assessment. Teachers engage in assessment appropriately, with teacher observation, teacher-designed tasks and tests, sampling of the pupils' work, checklists and profiles being the primary mechanisms used. Some variety in assessment practices was found, however, and staff might profitably refocus on the useful guidelines in its assessment policy, discuss and disseminate some of the existing commendable assessment practices that different teachers practise.

Standardised mathematics and English reading tests are administered annually. Results of tests are recorded and communicated appropriately to parents. Consideration might be given to recording each pupil's results sequentially so that progress can be monitored over the pupil's entire attendance at primary school. In support settings, teachers administer a very broad range of diagnostic tests and assessment data is recorded carefully.

Assessment practices for EAL pupils are very good. The *Primary School Assessment Kit* is used to assess pupils' language proficiency and monitor their progress in the areas of listening, speaking, reading and writing.

4. QUALITY OF SUPPORTS FOR PUPILS

4.1 Pupils with special educational needs

The school has a detailed whole-school policy on provision for special educational needs (SEN). It is contextualised to the school and outlines the roles of the principal, support teachers and the classroom teachers clearly. The SEN teachers are experienced and express commitment to delivering a high quality service to SEN pupils. High quality IEPs and IPLPs clearly outline pupils' strengths and learning targets in literacy, numeracy and social skills. The support rooms

are well-presented, warm and welcoming and provide a supportive and stimulating setting for all pupils.

The quality of teaching in the support setting observed during the evaluation was of a very high standard. Where groups of pupils were withdrawn, lessons were well-planned and highly-structured to promote pupils' development as independent learners. A good balance between the development of literacy and numeracy is provided through in-class support. The quality of in-class support teaching was very good, reflecting the quality of the collaborative working relationship between the classroom and support teachers. Progress is monitored and recorded effectively.

To maximise the potential of the teachers working in a support role, the school should consider some reorganisation of the existing deployment of support teachers. By forming a special education support team as proposed in Departmental Circular letters 24/03 and 02/05, support teachers could be assigned to particular class levels. This restructuring would reduce the necessity for pupils to attend a number of support teachers.

4.2 Pupils with English as an additional language

The school has two EAL teachers, one of whom is shared on a full-time basis with the junior school. At present, some of the eighteen pupils receiving support are still in the silent phase. Progress reports indicate that other pupils have moved from the silent phase and are enabled to participate well in classroom activities. Teachers seek to develop language acquisition incrementally and this is supported through the use of the thirteen themes devised by Integrate Ireland Language and Training (IILT). Support is delivered in a very comfortable print and visually rich learning environment. The school should profitably consider re-designating one of the vacant rooms at its disposal to enable circle-time to be practised and for greater display of pupils' work.

Very good practice is in place with regard to assessment and providing for the individual needs of EAL pupils. The *Primary School Assessment Kit* is used productively to establish initial language proficiency and to monitor progress thereafter. Individual profiles of proficiency record progress and achievement in the skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing. Lessons observed were well-planned and provided for active participation and effective communication by the pupils. Support at present is on a withdrawal basis. As many pupils are past the silent phase, the delivery of in-class support could be considered. This would help pupils to develop a broader range of language skills to further enable their academic language proficiency.

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

There is a strong commitment to meet the needs of all pupils in the school. Support for disadvantaged and for minority groups is provided in a caring and sensitive manner. The school has a full-time resource teacher for Travellers and this teacher teaches a full caseload in five local schools as there are no Traveller children currently enrolled in the school. Appropriate use is made of grants and contributions from local fundraising. The school participates in the School Completion Programme and, through lunch initiatives and the homework club, funding from this scheme is used to good effect. Structures developed in this programme have also established links with post-primary school to facilitate the transition of primary pupils to post-primary. The *Rainbows* counselling programme is active in the school, providing support for pupils who experience trauma or bereavement. This is facilitated by teachers and parents who have been specially trained.

5. CONCLUSION

The school has strengths in the following areas:

- The school has a well-informed and supportive board of management that contributes effectively to the smooth running of the school.
- Good communication between the principal, the staff, the parents and members of the wider community ensures a happy and supportive learning environment where pupils are affirmed.
- The school is led by a caring and committed principal who strives to empower and support colleagues in leadership roles.
- Through the leadership of the principal and the commitment of the in-school management team, progress has been made in devising a whole school plan and putting in place agreed policies and procedures.
- The school is commended for the organisation of extracurricular and co-curricular activities for the pupils.
- Resources are used effectively to promote pupil interest and enthusiasm.
- Very good teaching and learning strategies for pupils with special educational needs were observed during the evaluation.

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

- Short-term planning should be discussed at whole-school level and this planning should reflect a wider variety of differentiation strategies in the teaching of Mathematics.
- The creation of a mathematics-rich environment in the main circulation areas of the school and the development of Mathematics trails are recommended.
- It is recommended that the school adopts a more streamlined approach to the organisation of SEN teaching to maximise collaboration between classroom teachers and support teachers.
- It is recommended that consideration be given to formulating agreed templates at whole school level to facilitate the development of a consistent approach to the recording of short-term planning and the compilation of monthly progress records.

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

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