An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Gaelscoil na Bóinne
Trim, Co. Meath
Roll Number: 20051F

Date of inspection: 25 March 2015

1. Introduction

Gaelscoil na Bóinne is an Irish-medium primary school under the patronage of An Foras Pátrúnachta. It is situated in Trim, Co. Meath. The school was founded in 1996 with 22 pupils and one teacher. There are currently 224 pupils, 10 teachers and one special needs assistant in the school. 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 board of management, the principal and the in-school management team provide very good leadership to the school.
- The pupils are courteous and discipline in the school is very good.
- A very positive relationship exists between parents and teachers.
- High quality teaching was observed during the evaluation.
- The quality of teaching and learning in Mathematics is very good.
- Very effective supports are provided to pupils with special educational needs.

The following **main recommendations** are made:

- Pupils in senior classes should receive specific lessons in oral Irish with defined language inputs and with varied opportunities to practice the language
- A whole-school approach to the development of pupils' oral language skills in English should be implemented.
- Teachers are advised to apply the skills of the Science curriculum in a systematic way throughout the school.
- Teachers are advised to identify and teach the essential elements of language necessary for subjects in Social, Environmental and Scientific Education.

3. Quality of School Management

- The board of management provides very effective governance to the school. The board has the ability to fulfil their duties capably and all members of the board show interest in the school's development. In particular, their work in developing an agreed vision for the school's future is highly commended. The board is advised to share more information about its work with the school community.

- The in-school management is of a high standard. The principal places a strong emphasis on teaching and learning and on the pastoral care of the school community. The other members of the in-school management team have definite duties which are fulfilled thoroughly. The school is advised to review the formally assigned duties of the in-school management team to ensure that they reflect the school's priorities across the curricular, administrative and pastoral domains.

- The resources of the school are managed very well. The school is an attractive learning environment and optimum use is made of its physical resources. Very good investment has been made in teaching and learning resources.

- The management of pupils is of a very good standard. The majority of pupils confirm that they like school. Discipline in every class is very good. A very positive relationship is evident between the pupils and between pupils and teachers in the school. The efforts made to gather the opinions of the pupils on school procedures are commendable and should be further developed.

- The school has a very good parents' association. Its members show an interest in the school and their work enhances school life greatly. While parents are involved in the process of policy development, the school should now build on this practice through affording a formal role in this process to the parents' association.

- Parents are welcomed in the school and are provided with very good information on the school and on their children's education. The parents' representative praise the ease with which parents can make contact with teachers to discuss issues relevant to the school life of their children. Among the positive findings from the questionnaires completed by parents was that the vast majority of them confirmed that they felt welcome in the school and that the school is well-run.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- The administrative plans and the whole-school curriculum plans are of a high standard. The administrative plans fulfil the statutory requirements for schools and they provide very good guidance to the school community. Comprehensive and relevant material is available in the curriculum plans. The school should now carefully monitor the implementation of the curriculum plans in the various learning settings.

- The individual educational plans for pupils with special educational needs and the plans for early intervention and for team teaching are of a very high standard.

- There is scope to improve the existing short-term plans of the mainstream teachers to include more comprehensive planning for the development of the pupils' skills, including language skills and skills in subjects such as Science. Plans should also identify the essential vocabulary to be taught in Social, Environmental and Science Education.

- A creditable beginning has been made to the school self-evaluation process. Teachers, pupils, and parents are involved in the process and an appropriate report and improvement plan is available. The emphasis placed on the implementation of the agreed actions in individual classes and the specific goals contained in the improvement plans are commended.

- 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

- The overall quality of teaching is good with excellent practice observed in certain settings. In the best lessons, the teacher had challenging but attainable expectations for each pupil and active learning was emphasised. In these lessons also the essential language was taught carefully and each pupil was given extended opportunities to speak. In other settings, teachers were advised to employ teaching methods more suitable to the curriculum and to ensure that the lesson material was sufficiently challenging for pupils' abilities.

- *Aistear* is implemented very effectively in infant classes. There is specific focus on language development and on skills; a thematic approach and equipment are used very well and learning is reinforced capably.

- The standard of teaching and learning in Irish is good, with specific aspects for improvement. The school fosters a positive environment for Irish. In listening, good quality lessons with clear aims and an emphasis on active listening were observed. In oral Irish, infants receive very good language inputs and communicative, interactive teaching and learning is emphasised. In the middle classes, pupils still receive high quality language inputs, however they require more frequent opportunities to consolidate the language. The teachers in senior classes should further develop the communicative abilities of the pupils. In this regard, specific classes in oral Irish with defined language inputs and with extended opportunities to speak this language are required. Good work is done in reading and writing. Pre-reading and pre-writing skills are taught very well. The reading material is suitable to the pupils' levels of ability and the pupils understand what they read. In most of the classes, the pupils write in a wide variety of genres. There is scope for more effective integration between the four language skills throughout the school.
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- The quality of teaching and learning in English is good. The school's early intervention programme is highly commendable. It is well structured and content is effectively differentiated. Pre-reading and pre-writing skills are taught very well and information and communication technology is used effectively to support learning. Very good use is made of station teaching to teach the three strands of the English curriculum. All teachers are now advised to make further use of this methodology to promote differentiation in their teaching. Pupils follow an individualised reading programme in infants and middle standards and good use is made of the novel in senior classes. All pupils are exposed to a range of writing genres and appropriate emphasis is placed on writing processes. Poetry is integral to class programmes and most pupils know a range of poems. In oral English lessons teachers are advised to ensure that their lessons are informed by specific curriculum-based objectives. Teachers should also ensure that pupils' oral language skills are enriched and developed as they progress through the school.

- Teaching and learning in Mathematics is of a very high standard. Whole-school approaches to many aspects of Maths are evident. In the lessons observed, appropriate attention was afforded to the language of Maths, to Maths skills, such as problem-solving and good use was made of concrete materials. For the most part, pupils worked in pairs or in small groups but further emphasis could be placed on co-operative learning. Good assessment strategies are used to track pupils' achievements in Maths and their achievements are of a high standard in accordance with the learning outcomes of the curriculum.

- There is scope to develop the quality of teaching and learning in Science. During the evaluation lessons aimed at fostering pupils' interest and on encouraging their investigation skills were observed. The school has a school garden, cultivated by pupils from one of the senior classes. During the evaluation pupils from this class were able to talk confidently about aspects of Science such as planting, measuring and recycling. However teachers should ensure that the skills of the Science curriculum, such as designing and making and working scientifically, are explicit and central to Science lessons and applied systematically throughout the school. They should also ensure that pupils have a satisfactory understanding of important concepts of Science such as fair testing and variables and are enabled to talk about their learning in Science with confidence. In addition, teachers should explicitly teach the essential language for Science and provide pupils with good opportunities to record and reinforce their learning.

- The standard of assessment in the school is very good. In infants, the assessments strategies in *Aistear* and in early intervention are commended. Throughout the school, good quality assessment strategies are employed in Mathematics, in literacy and in other subjects such as Art. The means of keeping parents informed of their children's progress using the assessment copy is commended. Teachers are now advised to build on this good work by placing a greater emphasis on assessment for learning strategies.

6. Quality of Support for Pupils

- Very good support is given to pupils with special educational needs. Teaching is very well prepared for, focused, encouraging and directed at pupils' priority learning needs. The various approaches recommended for children with special needs are applied effectively in the school and very skilful use is made of lower-order and higher-order questions to encourage answers from the pupils.

- The Continuum of Support is implemented in the school and the support system is well organised. The communication fostered between support teachers and mainstream teachers is commended.

Published June 2015

Appendix

SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

Submitted by the Board of Management

This is a translation of the school response which was submitted in Irish

Area 1 Observations on the content of the inspection report

Area 1

The Board of Management welcomes the very positive findings of this report and the affirmation of the high standard of work being carried out by the staff and by the pupils and parents. We particularly acknowledge the very high degree of confidence expressed by the pupils and parents via the evaluation questionnaires. The Board is very pleased that the Inspectorate acknowledges the very positive relationships that exist between both the pupils and teachers and parents and teachers.

The Board is heartened that the management of pupil's positive behaviour is recognised as a significant strength and that discipline in every class is very good. Gaelscoil na Bóinne has always prioritised the educational and developmental needs of all its pupils and we greatly appreciate the praise attributed to the support given to pupils with special educational needs. The report confirms the board's opinion that the standards of teaching and learning in the school are very high.

The Board appreciates the acknowledgement of the attractiveness of the physical environment of the school and of the effective management of our resources.

Particular affirmation must be attributed to the teachers who are dedicated to providing the best education possible for the pupils in our school. The Board is particularly heartened with the findings that the teaching and learning of Mathematics is of a very high standard. This is attributed to the consistent engagement by the staff in the School's Self Evaluation process.

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 Board of Management welcomes the recommendations in the report and the feedback from the Inspector.

In the short time since the evaluation and publication of the report the staff has made significant progress on 3 of the recommendations as follows:

- A whole school oral Irish phrase dictionary, based upon the ten themes.
- A science experiment catalogue for each class, identifying the skills and the language being taught in each experiment.
- A whole-school glossary of terms for subjects in O.S.I.E./S.E.S.E.

The Board has begun to implement all the recommendations as part of the annual review of the School Self Evaluation process.

The Board of Management would like to thank the parents and the pupils for making Gaelscoil na Bóinne the lovely school it is.