An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Saint John's Junior National School
Rathmullen, Drogheda, County Louth
Uimhir rolla: 19479N

Date of inspection: 15 January 2015

AN ROINN OIDEACHAIS AGUS SCILEANNA | DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND SKILLS

1. Introduction

Saint John's Junior National School is a junior co-educational school in Rathmullen, Drogheda that operates under the patronage of the Roman Catholic Bishop of Meath. The school is included in Band 1 of the School Support Programme of Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS), the action plan of the Department of Education and Skills for educational inclusion. Currently, there are 437 pupils enrolled in the school, including a significant number for whom English is an additional language (EAL). Although attendance levels for most pupils are good, a small number had relatively high absence patterns during the past school year. The school has set very clear targets for pupil attendance in its DEIS plan and is actively pursuing a range of approaches with success in meeting this challenge. During the whole-school evaluation, inspectors observed teaching and learning in thirteen mainstream class settings, eight support-teaching settings, the special class for pupils with a Specific Speech and Language Disorder (SSLD) and in one Early Start setting. Provision for Irish, English, Mathematics and Science 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:

- The school is very well run. The board of management and the in-school management team are highly commended for their commitment and hard work.
- The leadership of learning in the school is very successful. The principal demonstrates the skills of very strong curricular and organisational leadership and inculcates shared responsibility among all teachers for continuous improvement in pupils' learning.
- The teachers' ongoing professional development and learning, their committed professional reflection and their implementation of a valuable range of child-centred methodologies are worthy of high commendation.
- The management of pupils is exemplary. Highly affirming and respectful interactions between teachers and their pupils were in evidence during the evaluation.
- Pupil attainment on standardised tests of English reading and Mathematics is of a high standard. This achievement by the school community is highly praiseworthy.
- Teachers' commitment to planning and practical preparation for teaching and learning is very good. They maintain very high-quality *cuntais mhíosúla* (monthly progress records).
- The quality of provision in the Early Start setting and the use of the *Aistear* framework in infant classes provide a very strong foundation for pupils' learning.
- Teaching approaches for pupils with special educational needs (SEN), through team teaching and in special education settings, ensure very high levels of pupil engagement in learning activities.

The following **main recommendations** are made:

- There is need for more use of specific diagnostic testing for pupils with EAL in order to inform target setting and specific teaching approaches to best meet their language-learning needs.

- While assessment practices are comprehensive, there remains scope for a more consistent level of detail to be maintained in all classroom assessment records for forward planning for lessons and in supporting differentiation.

- Some individual education plans (IEPs) outline goals rather than specific targets for learning. Targets need to be more measurable, specifically linked to priority needs and time-bound to best support individualised forward planning and the recording of progress made.

3. Quality of School Management

- The quality of the work of the board of management is very good. The board is effective in carrying out its duties and its members have a very clear shared vision for the continued development of the school. The board meets frequently and minutes of meetings are maintained carefully overall, providing a good record of the discussion and decisions taken. There is good communication between the board and the parents' association.

- The quality of the work of the in-school management team is very good. The principal demonstrates the skills of very strong curricular and organisational leadership and inculcates shared responsibility among all teachers for continuous improvement in pupils' learning. The members of the in-school management team collaborate very well enabling the efficient management of the school and the effective development of curricular leadership. They work very hard to ensure that pupils are looked after very well. When next the roles of the members of the in-school management team are reviewed, the pastoral aspects of assigned responsibility might be considered further. The work of the school's ancillary staff contributes to the smooth running of the school. Almost all parent questionnaire responses stated that the school is well run.

- The quality of the management of resources is very good. A broad range of resources is available to support learning and teaching across the curriculum. Individual classrooms are very well resourced with a wide array of learning materials. The overall quality of classroom and school displays in support of learning is very good. The deployment of teachers is very good, ensuring that teachers gain a very broad experience of the range of classes and settings. The current school building is maintained with care. The teaching staff, ancillary staff, board of management and the pupils are praised for the manner in which it and its grounds are maintained. The anticipated move to a new school building, the construction project having recently commenced, should contribute further to pupils' educational experiences.

- The quality of relations with the school community is very good. The parents' association provides valuable practical support to the school. In a meeting with the reporting inspector, the officers of the parents' association commended the school's attention to the needs of individual pupils, the quality of teaching in the school, the openness of the principal and staff and the quality of reports on pupils' progress. The responses of parents who completed a questionnaire as part of the evaluation show some lack of certainty in respect of the content of the school's relationships and sexuality education (RSE) policy. A small number parents indicated that they were not aware of the school's anti-bullying policy. These findings should be explored further by the school. Valuable links have been established with a broad range of external agencies and institutions that contribute to the educational experiences offered in the school.

- The management of pupils is exemplary. Highly affirming and respectful interactions between teachers and their pupils were in evidence during the evaluation. The quality of supervision of pupils in evidence during the evaluation was very good. Almost all of the parents who completed a questionnaire as part of the evaluation reported that their child feels safe and well looked after in school. A very high percentage reported their child enjoys school. Pupils demonstrated very clear enthusiasm for the range of learning experiences available to them.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- The quality of the school planning and self-evaluation process is commendable. The school self-evaluation (SSE) process has been undertaken very successfully. A thorough and systematic approach is evident. Pupils' learning achievements in literacy and numeracy have been analysed and discussed. Good sources of evidence and teacher reflection and debate have informed the focuses for improvement as part of the school's DEIS plan. The school's experience of the DEIS planning process overall has been positive and has resulted in measurable improvements in targeted areas.

- The quality of organisational plans in the school plan is good overall. However, a few need to be updated. Many curricular plans are of a very good standard, detailing choices made by the school and identifying topics for the different class levels. A few would benefit from review to include more specific guidance for the different class levels. Future reviews of the curriculum plans for Mathematics and Irish, for example, should seek to encapsulate more purposefully for classroom use the choices made by the school that have resulted in the good practices that are evident. More prominence to shared teaching approaches, skills' development, practical applications and linkage between strand units is advocated.

- The implementation and impact of school planning and self-evaluation are very good. Teachers' individual classroom planning is of a very good quality. Comprehensive long-term planning is provided and teachers maintain well-detailed short-term planning. Teachers' commitment to the practical preparation of rich visual and physical resources for teaching and learning is deserving of great commendation.

- 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, na foghlama agus ghnóthachtáil na ndaltaí sa Ghaeilge go han-mhaith. Is inmholta an obair atá ar siúl le linn ceachtanna Gaeilge chun foghlaim na teanga a chur chun cinn. Ba léir le linn na meastóireachta go mbaineann na daltaí taitneamh as na ceachtanna Gaeilge agus go bhfuil dearcadh an-dearfach i leith na teanga cothaithe sa scoil. Aithrisíonn na daltaí cnuasach an-bhreá dánta, rannta agus amhráin le dea-fhoghraíocht. Múintear an Ghaeilge go hábalta agus baintear úsáid as raon d'acmhainní oiriúnacha chun cumas comhrá na ndaltaí a fhorbairt. Ta sé go maith ar chumas na ndaltaí abairtí agus frásaí a struchtúrú le muinín ag léiriú caighdeán oiriúnach dá rangleibhéil. Mar thacaíocht don chomhrá seo agus chun muinín sa bhreis a chothú sna daltaí, moltar aithris ranga agus aithris ag leibhéal an ghrúpa a chuimsiú níos mó sna ceachtanna ó bhéal laethúla. I measc na gcleachtas maithe a bhí á léiriú le linn na gceachtanna a breathnaíodh, cleachtadh tréimhse réamhchumarsáide saibhir agus baineadh an-úsáid as scéal na maidine ar bhonn uile-scoile. Is maith iad na cleachtais atá bunaithe sa scoil ar mhaithe le heispéiris sa luathléitheoireacht agus tús na scríbhneoireachta Gaeilge a chur chun cinn.
- *The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in Irish is very good. The work done during Irish lessons to progress learning of the language is highly commendable. It was evident during the evaluation that the pupils enjoy Irish lessons and that a very positive disposition to the language has been developed in the school. The pupils recite a very fine collection of poems, rhymes and songs with fine pronunciation. Irish is taught ably and use is made of a range of appropriate resources to develop pupils' conversational ability. Pupils are able to structure sentences and phrases confidently at a standard commensurate with their class levels. As a support for conversation, and to encourage further confidence among the pupils, it is recommended that class imitation and group imitation of modelled language should be included more in daily oral language lessons. Among the good practices that were demonstrated in the lessons observed, a rich pre-communicative phase was practised and very good use was made of 'scéal na maidine' at whole-school level. The practices established in*

the school that are progressing experiences in early reading and the commencement of writing in Irish are commendable.

- The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in English is very good. Across the school, teachers work collaboratively to develop pupils' literacy skills and team teaching is practised with very good success. Purposeful oral language activities are undertaken well. However, some classroom planning would benefit from more explicit focus on the content intended to expand pupils' oral vocabulary and on receptive language development. The provision of discrete lesson time across the school for receptive language development should be considered. Pupils demonstrate very good phonemic awareness and their skills of reading are being developed in a very structured way. Differentiated reading books are used very successfully. A very high percentage of parents who completed a questionnaire felt that the school is helping their children to progress in reading. Pupils' attainment levels on standardised tests of English reading indicate that they are achieving in line with national norms and that many are achieving extremely well. The ongoing improvement in reading standards is worthy of high praise. Writing skills are developed purposefully and there is good-quality writing in copybooks and in classroom displays. The school might consider creating writing stations in every classroom to provide further opportunity for early writing. Personal spelling notebooks should feature more as a writing tool during free-writing lessons.

- Overall, provision for Mathematics is commendable and the quality of pupils' learning in Mathematics is very good. Pupils' attainment is facilitated by well-structured lessons and a worthwhile emphasis on the use of concrete resources to scaffold learning. Very good-quality early years mathematical learning is taking place and a broad range of active learning methodologies is used to assist conceptual understanding. Team teaching to support pupils' learning is a notable feature of teachers' practice. Where best practice was seen during the evaluation, lesson content was pitched at an appropriately challenging level that fully accommodated the breadth of pupil-ability levels. In a few of the lessons observed, however, content could have been at a more challenging level in line with pupils' observed abilities and also to challenge more able pupils. Further use of class-based assessment data to help pitch lesson content is advocated. Pupils' attainment levels on standardised tests of Mathematics indicate that they are achieving in line with national norms; many are achieving extremely well. The ongoing improvement in the standards being achieved is worthy of high praise. Almost all parents who completed a questionnaire felt that the school is helping their children's progress in Mathematics.

- The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in Science is very good. Lessons observed were of a high standard and suitable emphasis was placed on the development of scientific skills as well as on developing understanding and conceptual knowledge. Very good preparation of a suitable variety of resources enabled the creation of stimulating and appropriately challenging learning experiences. Well-structured opportunities were provided for pupils to work as scientists. The children are knowledgeable about what they have learned.

- The quality of overall teaching, learning and pupil achievement is very good. Teachers use a range of pedagogies successfully to ensure that pupils engage positively in their learning. Skilful and enthusiastic teaching was in evidence during the evaluation. Clear explanation characterised all class teaching. It is evident that collaborative teaching methodologies have been established successfully throughout the school and this is praiseworthy. Pupils demonstrated consistently high levels of engagement in learning activities. The rich learning experiences provided in the Early Start classes provide pupils with a very strong foundation in emergent literacy and numeracy. The incorporation of the *Aistear* framework in the infant classes is of a very high standard. Teachers made good use of information and communications technology during demonstration and explanation in lessons and also enabled its use by pupils in a number of lessons. A very high percentage of parents who completed a questionnaire praised the quality of teaching in the school.

- Comprehensive assessment practices are in place. A very high-quality format of monthly progress record (*cuntas míosúil*) is maintained, which provides very clear information on lessons taught. This has great strengths as a school-improvement tool. A range of formative and summative assessment records is in evidence. All teachers maintain assessment records

on pupils' learning in literacy and numeracy, with records of *assessment of learning* of an exemplary standard in evidence in some classes and settings. Well-detailed school-devised diagnostic tests are also used to support the assessment of literacy and numeracy learning needs in support settings. There remains scope for a more consistent level of detail to be maintained in all classroom assessment records and for it to be used more actively in forward planning for lessons and in supporting differentiation.

6. Quality of Support for Pupils

- Pupils receiving learning support engage in a range of learning activities linked to their identified needs. The teachers in support roles taught well-structured and interesting lessons during the evaluation. Lessons were paced well. Effective use was made of resources in developing pupils' phonemic awareness, comprehension, spelling and writing skills. *Reading Recovery* and *Maths Recovery* are practised with care in the school. The quality of teaching evaluated in the special class for pupils with Specific Speech and Language Disorders was highly commendable. Well-structured, effective lessons were observed with suitable priority paid to the promotion of pupils' communicative abilities and their confidence as learners.

- There is a very inclusive atmosphere in the school. Pupils with learning-support and special educational needs are progressing commensurate with their abilities. Individual education plans outline pupils' priority needs clearly, but in a number of plans targets are not specific enough and are presented more as goals. All targets need to be measurable, specifically linked to priority needs and time-bound to best support individualised forward planning and the recording of progress made by pupils. Some good use of specific diagnostic assessment tools to design programmes of learning for pupils with EAL needs was seen. There is need for more use of these specific diagnostic assessment tools in order to inform target setting and specific teaching approaches to best meet the language-learning challenges of pupils with EAL needs.

- The various initiatives implemented by the Home, School, Community Liaison Co-ordinator (HSCL), shared with the adjacent senior school, are worthwhile and are organised effectively. The courses organised for parents are very good. In seeking to further enhance the focus of this provision and optimise its full potential, it would be useful for the school to identify target families and record, for each of them, the full range of initiatives made available to the children within these families.

- The school's special needs assistants (SNA) are deployed to ensure that pupils are well-cared for in school. They contribute very well to pupils' personal and social development. In a small number of instances, there is scope to reflect further on their deployment in supporting the educational experiences and the independence of pupils.

- The quality of home-school partnership is very good. Frequent and meaningful consultation and communication with parents are facilitated through a range of formal and informal approaches. Strategies are devised to actively engage parents in the education of their children. Beneficial initiatives, programmes and supports are in place to ensure that all pupils can participate fully in school life. Parents' representatives, during a pre-evaluation meeting with the reporting inspector, stated that the school is very welcoming. They reported that they are very satisfied with the standards of learning across the curriculum in the school. A very high percentage of parents, in questionnaire responses, agreed that they were happy with the school.

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 of St John's Junior National School welcomes this public affirmation of the very high standards of teaching and learning across all subjects evaluated in the school, the highly commendable professional practice of the teachers, the very competent and professional manner in which the Board of Management and in-school management team supports the work of the school and the very high levels of satisfaction from the parent body which was evident from responses to questionnaires. The Board of Management is delighted with the recognition of Early Start as playing a key role in the continuum of education and the great value of Aistear as a teaching/learning methodology for young children. The Board would also like to acknowledge the key role DEIS initiatives have played in helping our school reach the very high standards which have been confirmed in this report. The Board are very happy that the core values of our school, as reflected in our mission and vision statements, are commended in this evaluation.

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 and teachers will continue to work closely together to implement the recommendations in this report. Since its completion, the teachers have met and have compiled a plan to address the three main recommendations of the report, all of which relate to testing and the use of diagnostic and baseline data to enhance the delivery of the necessary services to the children in our care. The parents' council has met and spoken about ways to ensure that all parents become familiar with policies that are in place and the Board has also begun a systematic review of all current policies with a view to completing this review over the course of the next school year. The Board will continue to support the school community in its efforts to develop further the already very good practices witnessed in action during the recent evaluation.