An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

St. Joseph's Girls' National School
Kilmacow, County Kilkenny
Uimhir rolla: 15632V

Date of inspection: 12 November 2010

AN ROINN OIDEACHAIS AGUS SCILEANNA | DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND SKILLS

1. Introduction

St. Joseph's Girls' NS, Kilmacow is an all-girls, rural, five-teacher, vertical primary school, with a current enrolment of eighty-five pupils. The school is under the patronage of the Catholic Bishop of Ossory. Attendance levels in the school are excellent. The board of management was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the evaluation, and the response of the board will be found in the appendix to 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 characterised by its positive school climate and co-operative working relationships are in evidence across the school community.
- The school enjoys the support of a dedicated and supportive board of management and parents' association.
- The quality of the physical environment of the school is very good. All classrooms are very well resourced and recently the school has made considerable investment in information and communication technology (ICT).
- The principal and staff are committed to the school.
- The pupils are very well behaved and display positive attitudes to learning.
- The pupils' interest in reading is actively encouraged and supported.

The following **main recommendations** are made:

- A more systematic approach to school development planning should be implemented.
- In English, there needs to be a more focused approach to oral language.
- The pupils' communication skills in Irish should be developed.

3. Quality of School Management

- The board of management is constituted properly and actively supports the work of the school. The board is committed to maintaining the very good links that exist between the school, the parents, other local schools and the community.
- The in-school management team comprises the principal and deputy principal. The principal is commended for his commitment and dedication to the school and for his cultivation of a positive school climate. He is supported by the deputy principal who works collaboratively with him and who carries out her duties diligently. It is recommended that the duties of the deputy principal be reviewed to ensure a focused curriculum leadership role.

- The quality of the school building and grounds is very good. All classrooms are very well resourced and recently the school has made considerable investment in information and communication technology (ICT). The school is commended for the development of its school garden. The responses of the parent questionnaires confirm that almost all parents are of the view that the facilities in the school are good.

- Very good relations exist between the school, the parents and the wider community. The school has a highly committed parents' association that makes a significant contribution to enhancing the learning experiences of the pupils. They are particularly committed to supporting extra-curricular activities in the school. In the parent questionnaires, almost all parents report that the school is welcoming of parents.

- The pupils' behaviour is very good and they present as conscientious and interested in their work. They demonstrate respect for each other, for their teachers and for their school. These findings are corroborated by the responses of the pupil questionnaires. Almost all pupils confirm that they are treated fairly at school and that they get on well with their peers.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- There is scope for development in the quality and effectiveness of school planning. Curriculum plans for all areas of the curriculum and a range of organisational policies have been devised collaboratively by the principal and the teaching staff, in consultation with the board of management. Each teacher provides long-term and short-term plans of work. The challenges for the school in regard to planning include: the establishment of key curriculum priorities; ensuring that curriculum plans provide guidance for individual teacher planning and outline clearly the spiral approach to the pupils' learning; and the establishment of consistent links between individual teacher planning, the school plan and the primary curriculum.

Child protection policy and procedures

School authorities provided evidence that, in compliance with Primary Circular 0061/2006, the board of management has formally adopted the Department's *Child Protection Guidelines for Primary Schools.* Evidence was provided to show 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.

5. Quality of Teaching, Learning and Pupil Achievement

- Classroom atmospheres are positive and interaction between teachers and pupils are encouraging and supportive. The teachers' communication and questioning skills are effective with higher-order questioning observed. The teachers are becoming familiar with the recently installed interactive whiteboards and these are being used effectively to enhance teaching and learning. Whole-class teaching and paired work are the main methodologies employed by the teachers. There is a need to extend opportunities for the pupils to work collaboratively in groups. Parental questionnaire responses indicate that almost all parents are happy with the quality of teaching in the school. Most pupil questionnaires indicate that the pupils enjoy their lessons and learning.

- Ar an iomlán, sroichtear caighdeán sásúil i múineadh na Gaeilge. Cruthaítear láithreacha suime don Ghaeilge sna ranganna uile agus úsáidtear réimse leathan d'acmhainní chun tacú le teagasc agus foghlaim na teanga. Cothaíonn na hoidí scileanna éisteachta na ndaltaí go rialta agus baineann siad feidhm fhiúntach as rainn agus as amhráin chun fuaim agus rithim na teanga a chur ar chluasa na ndaltaí. Tá sé le moladh go bhfuil stór cuí de dhánta ar eolas de ghlanmheabhair ag na daltaí i ngach rang. Úsáidtear cairteacha, fearas éagsúla agus teicneolaíocht go torthúil chun ionchur teanga a thabhairt do na daltaí ach ní mór straitéisí breise a úsáid chun cur le cumas cumarsáide na ndaltaí. Is gá deiseanna fíorchumarsáide a sholáthar dóibh chun a dteanga a chleachtadh agus a leathnú. Maidir le cúrsaí léitheoireachta, cuirtear an bhéim ar dhul chun cinn an dalta aonair agus léann na daltaí le cruinneas agus le líofacht. Déanann na daltaí cleachtaí éagsúla bunaithe ar na leabhair saothair nó faoi threoir an mhúinteora. Fanann sé mar dúshlán don scoil an scríbhneoireacht phearsanta a fhorbairt agus deiseanna a thabhairt do na daltaí tascanna éagsúla scríbhneoireachta a chleachtadh.

  In general, the teaching of Irish is of a satisfactory standard. Print-rich environments and a wide range of resources are used consistently to support teaching and learning of the language. The pupils' listening skills are fostered on a regular basis and there is very effective use of songs and rhymes to reinforce the sound and the rhythm of the language. It is praiseworthy that pupils in every classroom have an appropriate repertoire of poems which they recite by rote. Resources such as charts and technology are used productively to teach the language to the pupils. Further strategies should be used to ensure that the pupils are active in their learning and that communication is cultivated among them. The development of individual pupils' reading skills is given due regard and they read fluently and accurately. The pupils engage in various written exercises based on the workbooks or under direction from the teacher. It will now be a challenge to develop personal writing throughout the school and to provide extra opportunities for pupils to engage in various writing tasks.

- Teaching and learning in English reading and writing is good. However there is scope for development in the teaching of oral language, notwithstanding that, in all settings, the pupils' oral language competence is fostered through integration with reading and writing activities. It is recommended that a more structured and consistent approach to the development of the pupils' oral language competence through regular and discrete oral language lessons be implemented on a schoolwide basis. The pupils' interest in poetry and rhyme is capably fostered at each class level. The school employs a range of strategies to develop pupils' reading skills and they are making very good progress. The school's success in promoting the pupils' reading competence is confirmed by the pupil questionnaire responses in which most agreed that they were doing well at reading. Appropriate attention is paid to the development of pupils' functional writing skills. Some laudable examples and displays of the pupils' engagement with a range of writing genres are in evidence, including some use of ICT to assist in the publication of their work.

- Good teaching is in evidence in Mathematics and it results in commendable levels of pupil achievement. Mathematics-rich environments are in evidence in all classrooms. The pupils' existing knowledge of the mathematical concepts under investigation is explored through well-structured talk and discussion, and skilful teacher questioning and clarification. A variety of manipulatives is employed to aid the pupils' understanding and some opportunities for the pupils to work in pairs are provided. The pupils demonstrate praiseworthy understanding of a range of mathematical concepts and language.

- Teaching and learning in History is satisfactory. Storytelling and discussion, with some good use of the interactive whiteboard, are among the approaches employed to engage the pupils in historical enquiry. Many lessons are integrated suitably with other curricular areas. More opportunities should be provided for the pupils to work as historians and to use historical evidence.

- The pupils' work is monitored carefully by the teachers. They use teacher observation, teacher-designed tasks and tests and standardised tests to monitor pupil progress. The diagnostic testing of pupils is also undertaken when necessary.

6. Quality of Supports for Pupils

- Teaching provision for pupils with special educational needs is very good. Individualised education plans are prepared for each pupil. Lessons are provided on a withdrawal and in-class basis. Lessons are well structured and tailored to the pupils' needs. A good range of resources, including ICT, is employed purposefully. Interactions between teachers and pupils are positive and affirming.

Published April 2011

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 and staff would like to thank the inspector for her professional, courteous and positive approach to the whole school evaluation. The staff appreciated her encouragement and advice.

The Board of Management and staff welcome the affirming WSE report which recognises many positive attributes of the school. The main strengths of the school include:-

- The positive school climate across the whole school community.
- The dedicated Board of Management who actively support the work of the school.
- The enthusiastic and committed teaching and ancillary staff.
- The very active and supportive Parents Association that contributes significantly to school life.
- The exemplary behaviour of the girls and their enthusiastic and conscientious approach to their work, learning and school life in general.

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 staff has undertaken In-service Training on Oral Language and discrete Oral Language lessons are now in place.
- Greater emphasis is being placed on developing pupils' communication skills in Irish.
- A more systematic approach to planning is being developed by the teaching staff and will be incorporated in future plans.

The Board of Management is committed to providing a secure environment in which each child can develop to their full potential in all areas, academically, socially, emotionally, physically and spiritually.

Our Board of Management is also committed to maintaining and supporting the very high standard of the school, the school grounds, the facilities and the resources within the school.