An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

St. Patrick's Junior Boys' National School,
Skibbereen, Co. Cork
Uimhir rolla: 16901E

Date of inspection: 11 June 2012

AN ROINN OIDEACHAIS AGUS SCILEANNA | DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND SKILLS

1. Introduction

St. Patrick's Junior Boys' NS on the outskirts of Skibbereen town, provides education for boys from junior infants to first class and also incorporates two co-educational classes for pupils with Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD). Currently, there are seventy five pupils enrolled in the school and enrolment trends are stable. The school was officially opened in 1981 and shares its building with St. Patrick's Senior Boys' NS. Both schools are under the patronage of the catholic Bishop of Cork and Ross and co-operate effectively in many aspects of curricular, administrative and pastoral provision. 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:

- Effective day to day management practices.
- Good relationships within the school and in the broader school community.
- Very good facilities and accommodation.
- Dedicated teachers with positive expectations of their pupils.
- Contented pupils with positive self-esteem.
- A focus on improving standards of pupil achievement

The following **main recommendations** are made:

- The school should engage more with strategic planning and self-evaluation with a view to publishing an annual school report.
- The formal role of the in-school management team needs to be linked more closely with agreed school priorities and staff development practices using formally agreed feedback mechanisms.
- The school should provide certified annual accounts in line with Departmental guidelines.
- Given the very effective co-operation that exists between the junior school and the senior school the advantages of formal amalgamation should be discussed.

3. Quality of School Management

- The organisational, administrative and financial affairs of the school are managed efficiently and responsibly and there is a high level of compliance with Departmental regulations and guidelines. A shared approach to resource provision has resulted in the school being very well resourced and value for money in expenditure terms has, historically, been a very positive feature of school management and expenditure practices. However, in order to fulfil their legal responsibilities under the Education Act (1998) it will be necessary for the board of St. Patrick's Junior School, in the future, to maintain separate accounts of income and to have these accounts certified annually in line with Departmental guidelines and best practice. An outstanding issue regarding the length of the school day for some pupils attending classes for pupils with Autistic Spectrum Disorder remains unresolved despite genuine efforts by the board to seek a resolution in conjunction with current transport service providers.

- It is apparent from collated questionnaire responses that parents are happy with the overall work of the school management and staff and believe the school is well run. Questionnaire responses also indicate high levels of partnership and trust within the school community. Parents feel welcome and are happy with the current arrangements with regard to parent/teacher meetings. They believe that their children are safe and treated fairly in school. In addition, they feel there is someone to talk to in the event of a problem arising and are confident that complaints are dealt with fairly.

- The learning environment of the school is very good. Accommodation is appropriate and well maintained. Resource provision is excellent and pupils have access to a wide range of materials and equipment which are well matched to their learning needs. The provision of ICT is at an advanced stage. The effective use of ICT as a key teaching methodology featured in the majority of lessons observed during the course of the evaluation.

- With regard to the day-to-day running of the school in-school management practices are very good. The formal in-school management team includes the principal, deputy principal and one additional teacher with a specific post of responsibility. All duties have been assigned in line with departmental guidelines and are subject to periodic review. Mutual support and collegiality are significant aspects of the in-school management practices in the school and a positive, productive team orientation exists. In addition to her full-time teaching duties, the principal has played a key role in the development of a positive working environment and she has facilitated the leadership or managerial ambitions of colleagues without difficulty. Consequently, many staff members contribute to the internal management practices and a high level of co-operation occurs with regard to areas of mutual interest between the Junior and Senior schools and with the special classes.
  Advice was given with regard to the strategic development of the school and to the value of adopting more formal procedures with regard to the annual review of duties of the in-school management team and of looking at opportunities to link these with a school continuous professional development plan in line with agreed priorities. Suggested areas for consideration include the long term strategic development of the school and school self-evaluation practices. The status of teacher designed tests with regard to assessment for learning practices should also be more formally enshrined within school policy documents.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- The whole-school planning process conforms to Departmental guidelines and best practice and a broad range of relevant documentation was presented for examination during the evaluation. Effective use has been made of national support personnel in the development of these plans which have been ratified by the board. Some consultation has occurred with parents in this process and in a formal interview with members of the parents' association and from questionnaire responses it is clear that the majority of parents are happy with their current level of involvement in the school planning process.

- Advice was given with regard to the value of involving parents more substantially in the school planning process, where possible, and also in relation to the need to ensure that all official school documents reflect, accurately, school practices, traditions and customs.
  In that respect, it is recommended that, during the term of the current board, all school plans are re-visited with a view to broadening the collaborative process and ensuring that, in addition to reflecting the broad principles of the curriculum, they also reflect, clearly, the unique context of learning in the school.

- Given the collegial nature of the teaching and learning environment, and, the positive nature of the professional dialogue that occurs, the school is in a good position to engage, more systematically, in school self-evaluation. In that respect, the in-school management team are well equipped to lead that process of gathering first hand evidence from all stakeholders, including pupils. It is recommended that an ongoing review of practices and provision is initiated and that emerging information is used, annually, to identify school priorities and to inform school development planning. Advice was given with regard to the accurate analysis and interpretation of performance data from standardised tests. The capacity of the school to grow and improve is good because of the collegial environment that exists and the reflective nature of the staff and management.

- All teachers prepare long-term and short-term plans and record learning achievements in a monthly progress record. These policies provide adequate direction for teachers. In order to improve aspects of planning further, clearer guidance regarding methodologies appropriate to the exceptional needs of some of the pupils, such as those with ASD, should be discussed on a whole school basis.

- 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 quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement is very good in the school. It is evident that a broad and balanced curriculum is provided for in line with Departmental guidelines and that effective teaching methods are regularly employed. Pupils are actively and positively engaged in the learning process and the overall quality of care and support for them is very good. Lessons observed were well planned and well delivered and it is clear that, in the majority of instances, there is continuity and progression in pupil achievement. Parental questionnaires indicated that all parents believe that teaching is good in the school and that progress, in their opinion, in key areas of learning (reading and mathematics) is satisfactory.

- Cuirtear na ceachtanna sa Ghaeilge i láthair go bríomhar, suimiúil agus mealltar na daltaí chun suime go héifeachtach. Baintear úsáid éifeachtach as cluichí foghlama, dramaí agus rólimirt, obair i mbeirteanna agus i ngrúpaí, leabhair mhóra, amhráin agus dánta. Cuirtear béim ar fhorbairt fhoclóra agus is léir go bhfuil foclóir maith ag roinnt mhaith daltaí. Chun a thuilleadh feabhais a chur leis an obair moltar plean forbartha nua don Ghaeilge a bhunú ina leagfaí amach spriocanna foghlama cinnte ó thaobh úsáid teanga de, go leathúil.

- *Irish lessons are presented in a lively and interesting manner and pupils are effectively encouraged to participate. Effective use is made of games, drama and role-play, group and pair work, big books, songs and poems. Emphasis is placed on vocabulary development and many pupils have a good vocabulary. To further improve the standard it would be worthwhile to draw up a strategic plan for Irish containing specific objectives with respect to the daily communicative use of the language.*

- The quality of teaching and learning in English is very good and there is a commendable emphasis on oral language and on the development of reading skills. Early intervention practices are used and they are an effective vehicle for integration with some pupils attending the ASD units. All classrooms are print and language rich environments in which teachers model good reading strategies. They read to pupils daily, encourage pupils to respond critically to texts, to make predictions and to select books and read independently, where appropriate. Pupil achievement in reading is good. Standardised tests (Micra-T) indicate that a reasonable proportion of pupils are above average though this could be improved further by focused interventions based on in-depth analysis of standardised test results. This may be a suitable focus for the school in the context of developing literacy targets in line with the National Strategy to improve Literacy and Numeracy. Advice was also given on the value of strategic investment in graded reading material to promote reading as a leisure activity as well as a key cornerstone of learning.

- The quality of teaching and learning in Mathematics observed during the evaluation was very good. Mathematics lessons were fun and pupils were actively engaged in them. Materials and equipment were available to facilitate prediction, estimation and experimentation. ICT was used effectively as a key teaching aid in all observed classes. The majority of parents believed that the school was helping their children to progress in Mathematics. Standardised test results for first class indicate levels of achievement in line with and above, in some aspects, normal expectations.

- All teachers engage positively with the Drama curriculum and are, effectively, facilitating dramatic activity at each class level. A wide range of strategies are used and there is an extensive range of resources and other suitable props available for use. The positive results of the programme are evident throughout the school and there is also purposeful use of Drama as a methodology across the curriculum. The school has significant strengths in this important area of teaching and learning and this is particularly successful in supporting the inclusion of pupils with special educational needs in Drama lessons.

6. Quality of Support for Pupils

- Because of the structure of the school a significant portion of the overall staff provides support for pupils with special educational needs. Altogether there are five LS/RT teachers, two teachers in the designated classes for pupils with ASD and seven Special Needs Assistants (SNAs). On an individual basis their contributions are significant and every effort is made to provide appropriate learning opportunities for all pupils in receipt of additional or specialised assistance in line with their diagnosed needs. A wide range of specific resources and equipment is available to support pupils with special educational needs and good use is made of ICT in that specialised teaching and learning context. From this solid basis further improvements may be possible through the more systematic evaluation of current practices in the context of whole school planning. There should be more ongoing reflection on the rationale for intervention with regard to pupils with special educational needs and on the leadership role of the support team in the management of overall school affairs.

- The teachers with responsibility for the designated ASD classes are dedicated and their work is very effective. The school is an ASD friendly environment where structure and predictability are prioritised and the needs of children come first. Both teachers and SNAs contribute substantially to the education and care of the pupils. School policy allows for the regular rotation of staff between mainstream and ASD settings and this is of immense value in broadening the whole school understanding of the challenges of ASD pupils.

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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. Patrick's Junior N.S. Skibbereen, along with the staff, wish to thank the D.E.S. Inspectors for their courtesy and professionalism during the recent W.S.E. The Board is pleased that the report affirms the good practices in place in the school.

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

Recommendations made by the Inspectorate will be implemented on an ongoing basis during the coming school year and there after.