

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Saint Colman's National School
Stradbally, Co. Laois
Uimhir rolla: 20353V

Date of inspection: 16 November 2015



AN ROINN | DEPARTMENT OF
OIDEACHAIS | EDUCATION
AGUS SCILEANNA | AND SKILLS

1. Introduction

Saint Colman's National School is a co-educational vertical school under the patronage of the Catholic Bishop of Kildare and Leighlin. An amalgamation of the boys' and girls' schools in 2010 has ensured that Saint Colman's continues to provide for the educational needs of the local community. Current enrolment stands at 257 pupils. Attendance generally is very good. During this whole-school evaluation provision for Irish, English, Mathematics and Drama was evaluated. 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.

2. Summary of Findings and Recommendations for Further Development

The following are the **key findings**:

- The board of management provides a high-quality learning environment for pupils and gives good ongoing support to the school.
- The principal demonstrates very good communication and management skills and is utilising these to enhance teaching and learning in the school.
- Overall teaching and learning is of a high quality and is underpinned by a very good rapport between teachers and pupils.
- Aspects of whole-school curriculum planning show scope for development.
- While pupils engage well with their lessons and learning, their oral language skills need further focussed development.
- There are aspects for development in relation to the provision of individual support plans for pupils with additional learning needs.

The following **main recommendations** are made:

- The school should devise and implement a structured oral language programme in Irish and English which is contextualised to the particular needs of the pupils in each class setting.
- The school should review its approach to the identification of priority learning needs and the setting of targets in individual support plans for pupils with additional learning needs.
- Whole-school curriculum plans need to be fully contextualised to the needs of the school in order to more effectively inform individual teachers' planning and practice.

3. Quality of School Management

- The quality of the work of the board of management is commendable. The board is properly constituted with roles and responsibilities assigned appropriately. Meetings are convened regularly and minutes are maintained. The provision of additional outdoor

recreational space for pupils is a priority of the board. A range of policies has come to the board for ratification. It is recommended that all policies be formally ratified and reviewed regularly.

- The newly appointed principal demonstrates very good communication skills along with very high levels of professional credibility. Open communication with all members of the school community is a hallmark of his management style. He seeks to enhance the holistic development of each pupil through utilisation of best quality, evidence-based teaching methodologies, and optimum use of resources. He has collaboratively implemented some initiatives in relation to teaching and learning. These have been embraced positively and reflectively by the staff. The deputy principal capably provides effective ongoing support to the principal. The in-school management team undertakes a range of assigned duties conscientiously. Each team member's responsibilities should be reviewed regularly in line with the school's evolving needs. Regular opportunities to communicate with management and staff regarding progress on implementation of agreed whole-school initiatives are advised.
- The school building is maintained to a high standard. Classrooms are well resourced and teachers ensure that pupils are provided with stimulating learning environments. Commendably, classroom displays include an appropriate balance of curriculum support material and samples of pupils' work. Teachers' skills are utilised effectively in their various settings. To ensure that teachers experience a range of teaching contexts over time, it is advised that a school policy on staff rotation be devised and implemented. Members of staff demonstrate a commendably high level of commitment to continuing professional development for the benefit of pupils. The ancillary staff significantly support the smooth running of the school. The special needs assistants are deployed flexibly in providing valuable support for the pupils in their care.
- The management of relations and communication with the school community is of a very high quality. In the questionnaires administered as part of the evaluation almost all parents agree that they feel welcome in the school. School newsletters inform parents regarding school matters. A school website with a good focus on pupils' learning is available.
- The management of pupils is highly commendable. Interactions observed between teachers and pupils were underpinned by high levels of mutual respect and a positive atmosphere prevails. In the questionnaires administered as part of the evaluation almost all pupils agree that this is a good school.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- Whole-school planning shows scope for further development. A range of organisational policies is in place to support the smooth running of the school. While plans are provided for each subject area of the curriculum, they should be further contextualised to the needs of the school so that they can more effectively inform individual teachers' classroom planning. It is advised that the school devises and implements an action plan identifying and addressing priorities for developments in teaching and learning.
- The school has engaged positively with school self-evaluation. School improvement reports and plans have been devised for literacy and numeracy. It is commendable that actions articulated in the plans are evident in classroom practice.

- All teachers provide appropriate classroom planning. Short-term planning needs to document more clearly, differentiated learning outcomes and tasks for individuals and groups of pupils.
- 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

- Overall, teaching, learning and pupil achievement are of a high quality. In questionnaires administered during the evaluation, most pupils agree they are doing well at Mathematics and reading. Lessons are delivered using a range of methodologies including team-teaching. The *Aistear* programme is used effectively to support learning in infant classes. Overall, literacy and numeracy standards are praiseworthy. Emphasis should now be placed on the incremental development of pupils' oral language skills. A structured language programme in English and Irish should be devised and implemented to focus on cultivating pupils' competence and confidence in oral language. A variation in pupils' handwriting skills is evident in copies. Consistent implementation of the whole-school handwriting policy is advised.
- Tá cáilíocht an teagaisc, na foghlama agus gnóthachtáil na ndaltaí sa Ghaeilge inmholta. Tá réimse maith de dhánta agus amhráin foghlamtha acu. Ins na suímh ina bhfuil cleachtas an-mhaith le feiscint, tá teanga ar leith pleanáilte agus múinte, le sách deiseanna tugtha do na daltaí teanga nua a chleachtadh trí obair ghrúpa agus péire. Ins na suímh sin cuirtear béim láidir ar ionchur teanga cruinn agus tugtar deiseanna do na daltaí bheith ag labhairt in abairtí iomlána. Moltar an dea-chleachtas sin a scaipeadh go chuide rang. Ba chóir go dtarraingeodh na múinteoirí ón bplean scoile uile agus ó na téacsanna ranga chun tacaíocht a thabhairt dá bpleananna gearrthéarmacha féin. Moltar freisin go gcothófaí nasc níos daingne idir labhairt, léitheoireacht agus scríbhneoireacht na ndaltaí sna ceachtanna teanga. Léann na daltaí le sách tuisceana agus tugtar aird faoi leith do na scileanna scríbhneoireachta fheidhmiúla. Tá gá ann go ndéanfaí cinnte go mbeidh deiseanna rialta ag na daltaí a gcumas scríbhneoireachta chruthaitheacha a fhorbairt bunaithe ar theanga ó bhéal.
- *The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in Irish is commendable. Pupils have learned a good range of poems and songs. In the settings where practice is very good, specific language is planned and taught with pupils getting opportunities to practise new language through group and pair work. In these settings very good emphasis is placed on accuracy of language input, and pupils have opportunities to speak in full sentences. This practice should be extended to all classes. Teachers should draw from the whole-school plan and class texts to support their own short-term planning. They should also work to incorporate speaking, reading and writing into a more integrated language experience for the pupils. Pupils read with a fair degree of understanding and their functional writing skills are well catered for. There is a need to ensure that pupils have regular opportunities to develop creative writing skills based on oral preparation.*
- Overall, teaching, learning and pupil achievement in English are of a high quality. Good use is made of team-teaching to develop pupils' reading skills. It is advised that in reviewing this aspect of provision, the activities provided are appropriately varied and challenging to the range of learners. Pupils' read with a good degree of fluency and expression. Very effective structures are in place to incrementally develop writing skills across a range of genres. Teachers model very good oral language. However, there is a

need to focus on developing the quality of pupils' oral language output. It is recommended that a structured oral language programme, contextualised to the particular needs in each class setting, be devised and implemented.

- Teaching, learning and pupil achievement in Mathematics are of a good quality. Lessons are well structured and include effective whole-class teaching of key concepts. All teachers should ensure that in line with the school self-evaluation plan for numeracy, consistent use of agreed problem-solving strategies is an integral part of the learning experience.
- The quality of teaching and learning in Drama is good overall. Through the use of drama contracts, teachers create a safe environment for pupils, leading to positive and productive engagement during lessons. Where practice is particularly highly developed, pupils have opportunities to engage imaginatively in the elements of drama. This very good practice should be extended to all classes.
- Overall, assessment practices in the school are satisfactory. Standardised and diagnostic tests are administered appropriately. Pupils' progress is assessed using a variety of strategies. The quality and scope of these varies. To ensure greater cohesion in the area of assessment, agreed best practice should be articulated in an overall assessment policy.

6. Quality of Support for Pupils

- High quality provision is in place for pupils with special educational needs. Support is provided flexibly in response to individual requirements. Teaching is of a very high quality and is informed by deep knowledge of individual needs. Effective assessment underpins the fashioning of appropriate individual support plans. However, closer links should be established between recommendations contained in professional reports and priority learning needs stated in support plans. Teachers should ensure that all targets deriving from stated priorities are specific, measurable and time-bound so that progress can be clearly assessed and recorded at the review stage of implementation.
- The school supports pupils' holistic development through the provision of a number of co-curricular and extra-curricular activities.

Published February 2016