

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

St Oliver's National School,
Ballycasheen, Killarney,
County Kerry.
Uimhir rolla: 19512I

Date of inspection: 01 February 2013



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

1. Introduction

St Oliver's NS under the patronage of the Catholic Bishop of Kerry is situated in Killarney. It is a co-educational school and includes six classes for pupils with special educational needs. A significant number of pupils are learning English as an additional language. Enrolment stands at 753. During the whole-school evaluation, inspectors observed learning and teaching in sixteen mainstream settings and in fourteen special classes or support settings. 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:

- Outstanding leadership is provided by the principal and deputy principal.
- The quality of teaching is generally very good with some excellent practice observed.
- The school is very inclusive and there are effective arrangements to support all pupils.
- The board of management and parents/carers are very supportive of the school.
- A sense of pride of community is instilled in the pupils and an awareness of environmental issues pervades school life.

The following **main recommendations** are made:

- Members of the in-school management team should be given the opportunity to give an account of their work to the board of management.
- The whole-school approach to short-term planning and to progress records should be examined to ensure ease of tracking of curriculum delivery.
- Moltar tuilleadh féiniarrachta sa scríbhneoireacht chruthaitheach a lorg i saothar dhaltai sa Ghaeilge. *[It is recommended that further efforts in creative writing are sought in the pupils' work in Irish].*
- A more structured approach to teaching music literacy should be developed.
- The parents' association should affiliate with the National Parents Council.
- The staff should engage further with the individual education planning (IEP) process to ensure a consistent approach.

3. Quality of School Management

- The board of management adopts a proactive role in the school. Whole-school policies are reviewed regularly. Members of the board have spent considerable time in addressing the future accommodation needs of the school. The board is aware of standards being achieved by the pupils and members expressed a high level of satisfaction with the way the curriculum is delivered.

- The principal has established a high level of personal credibility in the community. His very effective leadership is characterised by high professional standards and he is committed to developing a supportive and inclusive learning community. The deputy principal provides highly competent and dedicated support. The principal and deputy principal are mindful of the instructional dimension of their roles.
- The in-school management structure also provides for five assistant principals and fourteen special duties posts of responsibility. The members of the in-school management team perform a range of purposeful duties. The team is made up of able, and enthusiastic teachers who are well positioned to lead the school self-evaluation process. They should be afforded opportunities to give an account of their work to the board of management.
- The school's accommodation provides an attractive and stimulating learning environment. All available accommodation is fully utilised and a building programme is in place to provide additional accommodation.
- The school has a good range of supportive links with parents. Parents fundraise extensively and support a variety of school initiatives. Formal parent-teacher meetings are convened as well as individual education plan (IEP) meetings. In responding to questionnaires, parents were overwhelmingly positive about the quality of education being provided. It is recommended that the parents' association affiliates with the National Parents Council.
- The school leaders see the school premises as a community resource and St Oliver's is used each evening by various cultural organisations. The staff and pupils are proud of the school's longstanding participation in the Green Schools Programme. The pupils are knowledgeable and proud of the cultural richness of their area. The teachers encourage a strong sense of responsibility among the pupils towards protecting the environment.
- During the evaluation period the pupils were mannerly and courteous. They were managed effectively in a caring environment. Results from pupil questionnaires indicate that pupils feel well supported by their teachers. There is an active students' council which is representative of the pupil population.
- A very good set of strategies has been put in place to promote school attendance. These include making the curriculum attractive to pupils, and the establishment of the 'Outdoor Classroom' involving planting and animal husbandry. A variety of after-school clubs and sporting activities and special-interest groups make the school a very inviting place. The school also participates in a Comenius programme which introduces pupils to school communities in other countries.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- An extensive range of administrative and pastoral policies provides guidance in the day-to-day organisation of the school. Curriculum policies provide a useful guide for teachers' classroom planning.
- All teachers carry out long-term and short-term planning and provide monthly progress records. A variety of planning templates is in use and more uniformity in practice would be beneficial in this very large school. It is recommended that the whole-school approach to short-term planning is examined to ensure ease of tracking of curriculum delivery.
- 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

- A wide range of successful teaching methodologies is used. Much of the teaching observed involved whole-class discussion and going forward there should now be a greater blend of whole class, group-work, and pair-work. Information Technology is often used to enhance teaching and learning.
- Tá caighdeán Gaeilge ard ag formhór na noidí agus déanann siad macnamh ar straitéisí spreagúla chun an Ghaeilge a chur chun cinn. Múintear ceachtanna dea-chéimnithe ag baint úsáid as cluichí teanga agus cómhraí beirte tríd an scoil.
- Athrisíonn daltaí stór leathan oiriúnach filíochta. Úsáidtear teicneolaíocht an eolais go torthúil chomh maith. Ba de thairbhe na foghlama cur chuige cumarsáide a fhorbairt a thuilleadh i ranganna áirithe.
- Tá caighdeán na scríbhneoireachta feidhmiúla le moladh agus tá samplaí creidiúnacha scríbhneoireachta le sonrú sna rangsheomraí. Moltar tuilleadh féiniarrachta sa scríbhneoireacht chruthaitheach agus phearsanta a mhealladh i saothar na ndaltaí. Chun cur leis an dea-chleachtas, b'fhiú leas a bhaint as measúnú foirmiúil.
- *The majority of teachers possess a high standard of Irish and they adopt motivating strategies to promote the language. Well-structured lessons using language games and conversation in pairs are features of provision throughout the school.*
- *Pupils recite a range of suitable poems. Information and communications technology is also used productively. It would benefit learning if a communicative approach was further developed in some cases.*
- *The standard of functional writing is praiseworthy and creditable example of writing are in evidence in classrooms. It is recommended that further efforts in creative writing are sought in the pupils' work in Irish. To enhance the good practice observed, it would be beneficial also if formal assessment approaches were used.*
- In English, the teaching of literacy is rooted in a broad language-experience approach. Most pupils are enthusiastic readers of fiction and non-fiction. They write in a range of genres and communicate orally and in writing with enthusiasm, fluency, and accuracy. Senior pupils use information and communication technology to a limited extent to research and word-process their work. Its use could be now be extended.
- In Mathematics, the quality of whole-school planning is very good. Resources are ample. At all levels there is an emphasis on teaching the language of Mathematics. Successful methods used include guided discussion, and scaffolding. Practical work with concrete materials is very much in evidence.
- There is an emphasis on some collaborative work and in general, the work is well presented. The teachers' records and talking with the children indicate that the pupils are making progress in all strands of the mathematics curriculum.
- Problem-solving strategies involving estimation and calculation in real situations are utilised. The after-school maths club provides pupils with opportunities to develop their interest in Mathematics.
- Pupils enjoy their music-making activities. They are given opportunities to listen to a wide variety of Music across a range of cultures and times. Pupils' responses to Music are displayed in different formats such as paintings, imaginative writing, and dance.

- They sing a wide variety of unison songs expressively. Sometimes the pupils are given opportunities to become actively involved in creating Music. Members of the staff contribute to whole-school music activities according to their strengths including those staff with particular instrumental skills.
- Pupils are developing a good technical vocabulary and they are encouraged to discuss their likes and dislikes. Although pupils are developing an ability to write music using appropriate notation in some classes, the teachers are conscious of the need to adopt a more structured approach to teaching music literacy and to develop a system for assessing pupils' progress in music.

6. Quality of Support for Pupils

- The management and staff of the school are committed to creating an inclusive school. Class teachers accept first-line responsibility for teaching all the children in their classes.
- The special-education support teachers approach their work in a professional manner. Instruction is well-organised and support is provided sensitively with good use of resources. Individual profile and learning programmes (IPLPs) are carefully constructed and a significant amount of teachers' time is devoted to providing in-class support with a strong emphasis on early intervention and prevention.
- Teachers also address the needs of pupils with low-incidence disabilities through Individual Education plans (IEPs) that often focus on improving communication, literacy, numeracy and social skills. In some cases, short-term objectives could be more specific. It is recommended therefore that the staff engages further with the IEP process to ensure a consistent approach across the school.
- Teachers have developed a very good working relationship with external professionals. Some teachers have availed of additional training relating to special educational needs.
- Although parents are encouraged to contribute to their pupils' programmes, the school should now consider introducing a formal parental involvement programme.
- There are six special classes for pupils with specific and mild general learning disabilities and for specific speech and language disorders. Teachers possess extensive knowledge of the special needs within these classes and they use effective strategies for dealing with the pupils. They focus on the child's strengths and they ensure that the tasks are within the child's capacity. Diagnostic assessment is a strong feature of the approach.
- Special Needs Assistants (SNA) play an important role in meeting the care-needs of pupils and in enabling pupils to access the curriculum. SNAs are aware of the importance of promoting pupils' independence.
- A significant number of pupils are learning English as an additional language. The quality of teaching is very good. Attention is paid to the importance of children valuing their first language and culture.
- Practical arrangements are in place to support pupils who come from less advantaged backgrounds to participate in a broad range of worthwhile activities.

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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 welcome the report of the Inspectorate and wish to acknowledge the courteous and professional manner in which they carried out the Whole School Evaluation. We are extremely pleased that the wonderful work and atmosphere in our school was both recognised and affirmed. We are proud of our children and staff.

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

We welcome the observations of the Inspection team and have already started to work on their recommendations. We remain committed to ensuring our school is a happy, safe and welcoming school for our pupils, their families, our staff and the wider community.