

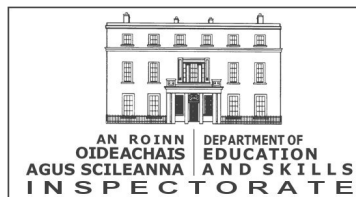
**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**  
**Department of Education and Skills**

**Whole School Evaluation**  
**Management, Leadership and Learning**

**REPORT**

**Saint George's National School**  
**Balbriggan, County Dublin**  
**Roll number: 15315J**

**Date of inspection: 2 March 2016**



## Whole-School Evaluation – Management, Leadership and Learning Report

### Introduction

A Whole-School Evaluation – Management, Leadership and Learning (WSE - MLL) was undertaken in Saint George's National School, Balbriggan in February 2016. This report is based on a selection of lessons observed in a range of learning settings in the school, interaction with pupils and review of their work, meetings with the principal and with board and parent representatives, completed parent and pupil questionnaires and a selection of school documents. 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.

Saint George's National School operates under the patronage of the United Diocese of Dublin and Glendalough. The school has grown significantly in size and diversity in recent years, with a current enrolment of 409 pupils. Attendance rates are good. The current teaching staff comprises sixteen class teachers, eleven support teachers and the principal.

The evaluation has found:

- Overall, the learning achievements of pupils are commendable.
- There is an appropriate balance of in-class and withdrawal models of provision for pupils with special educational needs (SEN), in both literacy and numeracy.
- While teaching is of a high standard, more specific teaching and assessment strategies should be employed consistently to support pupils' language acquisition.
- While teachers' planning is good overall, there is need to be more explicit in the identification of target language, as well as specific assessment and differentiation strategies, to support learning.
- There is very good provision for pastoral care within the school.
- The school's engagement with the school self-evaluation (SSE) process is now established; implementing and monitoring the actions emerging from this process should be prioritised and accelerated.

The following **main recommendations** are made:

- Teaching and assessment strategies should be implemented that target the language acquisition required by pupils to make progress in all aspects of their learning.
- Identified targets, arising from the SSE process, should be systematically implemented, monitored and reviewed to help ensure that the expected outcomes are achieved.
- School leadership should develop more effective methods to communicate the SSE process to the school community.

### Findings

- Overall, the learning achievements of pupils are good. They were observed to be enthusiastic participants in Physical Education, Music and Art lessons. They demonstrated age-appropriate skills in History and Geography. However, their capacity to engage in scientifically based discovery learning should be developed further. Children in infant classes have a greater suite of opportunities to be independent, creative and collaborative than older pupils, especially in literacy and numeracy activities.

- Pupils' outcomes in numeracy are good. They carry out number operations accurately. Resources in the infant settings are used to very good effect. Problem-solving skills in all strands should be further developed, as identified through the SSE process. The explicit use of mathematical language to develop high-order problem-solving skills requires greater attention.
- There is scope to improve the quality of learning outcomes in literacy. Pupils read well functionally and have access to a well-stocked library. However, assessment data indicate that attainment levels in literacy have decreased over the past two years for older pupils. A whole-school approach to the development of a broader range of strategies to improve their reading is advised. Pupils' oral language skills need significant development to ensure that they can participate in appropriately challenging language activities in all curricular experiences. Pupils are enabled to write competently in a variety of genres.
- Tá dearcadh dearfach ag na daltaí i leith fhoghlaím na Gaeilge. Léann siad téacsleabhair sna ranganna sinsearacha. Labhraíonn siad le chéile in abairtí gearra agus tá foclóir cuí á fhorbairt acu go leanúnach. Tá an scríbhneoireacht fheidhmiúil ag feabhsú. Is gá plean don Ghaeilge neamhfhoirmiúil a fhorbairt, atá ag teacht leis an straitéis scoile-uile don teanga, chun scileanna labhartha na ndaltaí a fheabhsú a thuilleadh. *(Pupils have a positive attitude towards learning Irish. They read textbooks in the senior classes. They speak effectively in short sentences with their peers and vocabulary is developed continuously. Functional writing is improving. A plan for incidental Irish, in line with the whole-school language strategy, should be developed to further improve pupils' oral skills).*

## 2. Quality of teaching

- Overall, teaching is of a high standard. Teachers use a range of methodologies and resources effectively. They liaise regularly with support teachers in team-teaching settings. The regular use of technology to motivate and engage learners is effective. Purposeful learning environments are provided and attractive displays of pupils' work are evident throughout the school. Almost all parents, in inspectorate questionnaires, agreed that teaching is good in the school.
- The overall quality of teaching provided for pupils with special educational needs is good. There is an appropriate balance of in-class and withdrawal models of provision. Team teaching is largely focused on the delivery of specific programmes for literacy and numeracy. The skills developed, through these initiatives, can be extended by classroom teachers to a broader range of curriculum experiences for pupils. Effective learning programmes are developed for most pupils in receipt of support. The development of agreed whole-school approaches to planning for these pupils is advised. Almost all environments in the support settings are developed appropriately to enrich pupils' learning experiences.
- Given the high proportion of pupils with English as an additional language, the teaching of a broad range of English-language skills was not sufficiently at the core of the instructional focus. This should now be one of the key elements of the school's improvement agenda over time. There is good use of the *Primary School Assessment Kit*. A wider range of specific teaching strategies, using the information gained through assessments to support pupils' language acquisition, should be employed more consistently in all settings.
- Overall, teachers' planning is good. They plan collaboratively across all settings and for the specific programmes offered. To enhance the effectiveness of short-term planning, there is need to identify target language as well as specific assessment and differentiation strategies to support curriculum implementation. All plans should be informed by whole-school curricular plans and SSE priorities. In bringing about these improvements, the school should consider the development of agreed uniform

approaches to long-term and short-term planning and the recording of monthly progress.

- Assessment of learning practices, seen mostly in team-teaching settings during this evaluation, are well developed. There are examples of effective assessment for learning in some classes where the data gathered is used to inform teaching and learning strategies. This good practice should be extended to all settings.

### **3. Support for pupils' well-being**

- There is very effective provision for pastoral care within the school. In most settings, there was very good rapport observed between pupils and teachers, and pupils co-operated very well in their learning. However, in a small number of instances, there was need for more consistent implementation of the classroom routines and protocols which have been agreed at whole-school level. The school has positively engaged with European, environmental and multi-cultural projects. While pupils were facilitated effectively to contribute to classroom discussions in most classes during the evaluation, their questionnaire responses warrant further consideration at school level; a significant minority of pupils indicated that they did not have sufficient say in how things are done in the school. The pupils' voice would be further strengthened by the introduction of a pupil council.
- Parents assist the school in preparation for special events in the annual calendar and support various activities as they are requested. There is scope to establish a more purposeful, inclusive and involved school community. The parents' association should consider affiliating to the National Parents' Council (NPC) and benefit from its support. Parental contributions to policy development should be progressed. In responses to questionnaires, almost all parents agreed that they feel welcome in the school.
- 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*.

### **4. Leadership and Management**

- There is scope to improve certain aspects of the overall leadership and management of the school. The board of management manages operational matters effectively. There has been rapid growth in the diversity and size of the pupil population in recent years. The board, keenly aware of this significant challenge, should now focus upon supporting staff in the realisation of the school's vision for its pupils.
- Policies are in place and are up to date. Facilities are maintained to a high standard and suitable resources are provided for teaching and learning. The progress made in implementing SSE priorities should be reported regularly to the board. The board should promote more purposeful communication with the school community.
- The principal fulfills her role diligently and is committed to the school's ongoing development. Driving the improvement agenda in the coming years will require purposeful leadership. In working to realise the systematic development of the school, there will be need to identify, plan for and continuously review measurable and achievable outcomes.
- The in-school management (ISM) team meets regularly and has clearly defined responsibilities. Postholders ensure that sufficient resources are in place and that initiatives relevant to their role are promoted throughout the school. There is need for direct correlation between the SSE-identified priorities and the ISM team's responsibilities and the communication of these priorities across the school.

## **5. School Self-evaluation**

- The school has actively engaged with the SSE process, culminating in the development of a school improvement report. However, targets need to be measurable and relevant to the day-to-day practice of teachers and pupils. There is need to focus on the consistent implementation and regular monitoring of actions to achieve improvement, especially regarding pupils' language acquisition. A summary improvement report should be communicated to parents annually.

## **Conclusion**

The capacity of the school to improve is good. The development of a more involved and inclusive school community, by harnessing the commitment and skills of staff, parents, pupils and board members, would help to enhance pupils' overall learning outcomes.

## **Appendix**

**School response to the report**

**Submitted by the Board of Management**

## **Part A: Observations on the content of the inspection report**

The BOM welcomes the WSE report. We are pleased that the Inspectorate has commended the learning achievements of the pupils, the high standard of teaching and good pastoral care within the school.

We wish to highlight that following DES guidelines our classes are tested in line with circular 0138/2006. Our school has 95% EAL pupils. DES recommends testing after two years learning English. Cummins (1979) highlights that it takes non-native speakers 5-7 years to acquire CALPS (cognitive academic language proficiency), the language required for academic settings (in contrast with 1 – 2 years for BICs). Micra T requires CALPs. We attribute the apparent decrease in literacy over the past two years to a shortfall in CALPs as opposed to a “real” decrease in literacy. In addition, there is a consistent turnover of pupils throughout the school, particularly in senior class, and the curve is not representative of the same pupils as a constant.

## **Part B: Follow-up actions planned or undertaken since the completion of the inspection activity to implement the findings and recommendations of the inspection**

1. Teaching and Assessing Strategies targeting language acquisition will be reviewed mid-term and re-examined early term 3, 2016-17. (e.g. Mathematic language).
2. More precisely identified targets will be pursued following the removal of suspension of the SSE engagement (INTO).
3. School Leadership - B.O.M./Staff will develop more effective methods to communicate the SSE process to the school community (e.g. parents can access report via school website). In addition, a copy of this report when finalised, will be made available to the school community with annual reports on improvements also being made available.

## **Findings**

Scientific based discovery learning is being developed further within senior classes. A plan will be formulated to place English Language skills at the core to focus on English Language Skills throughout the curriculum.

The school will introduce a Pupil Council by December 2016.

The school will strive to reinvigorate the Parents' Council during the 2016-17 school year with the expectation that it will affiliate to the National Parents Council.

In 2016/2017, the B.O.M. will concentrate on how the school's vision for its children can be further supported.

The B.O.M. will review all communications with the school community with the goal of better provision of information.