

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

St Raphaela's Primary School
Kilmacud, Co Dublin
Uimhir rolla: 174701

Date of inspection: 20 November 2013



1. Introduction

St. Raphaela's Primary school caters for girls from infants to sixth class and is situated in Kilmacud, Co Dublin. Its school population has grown significantly in recent years and there are currently 394 pupils on roll. The trustees of the school are the religious order of the Handmaids of the Sacred Heart and it operates under the patronage of the Catholic Archbishop of Dublin.

During the whole-school evaluation inspectors observed teaching and learning in nine mainstream class settings and three support teaching 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:

- This school strives for excellence in the pastoral, curricular and organisational areas of its work. It has achieved remarkable success in the development of its school self-evaluation processes which are impacting in a very positive way on the learning achievements of the pupils.
- Very good attainment levels are being achieved by the pupils in literacy and numeracy.
- The principal provides enlightened, progressive and proactive leadership to the whole school community.
- Teachers are collegial, reflective practitioners who are committed to the welfare, care and education of each individual child.
- A clear sense of purpose and vision for the school is shared by parents, board of management, principal and staff members.
- The overall quality of teaching is very good with some excellent practices evident in a number of learning settings.
- An exceptional level of analysis of pupil attainment, target setting and use of data has been carried out.
- Parents participate in a very active and purposeful way in every aspect of school life. Frequent and meaningful communication exists between home and school.
- The board of management carries out its functions in an exemplary manner.

The following **main recommendations** are made:

- The formalising of systems for the sharing of pedagogical practice is advised, to support the dissemination of best practice in teaching and appropriate expectations for learning.
- As the school grows and develops a key priority will be to recognise how to sustain success and excellence into the future.

3. Quality of School Management

- The board carries out its work in an exemplary manner. It displays a high level of engagement with the work of the school. It has played a particular role in supporting the learning of the pupils by analysing pupil achievement and sharing its findings. Central to all its deliberations is the practical focus on fostering and maintaining the ethos of the school.
- The principal provides excellent leadership to staff, pupils and the wider school community. She is purposeful, enlightened and progressive in her approach to education and to the holistic development of every pupil in the school. As leader of the school community she has developed a remarkably open, reflective and collaborative culture. High expectations for learning have been set that have impacted powerfully on education standards and professional practice. The in-school management team respond effectively to the emerging needs of the school and work cohesively and effectively to support and complement the overall leadership.
- The school has an excellent range of resources for teaching and learning that are used purposefully. The recent extension to the school building has further enhanced the environs in which the pupils learn and grow. With a view to the ongoing provision for learning in the school it is advised that an audit of the use of ICT as a learning and communication tool be undertaken.
- Co-operation, courtesy, respect and kindness are hallmarks of school interactions. Parents expressed very high levels of satisfaction with the school, the welcome afforded to them, the open-door policy and the school atmosphere. Parents engage enthusiastically with the school and their opinions and views have been sought and valued. Communication between all members of the school community is regular, meaningful and transparent.
- In line with the stated ethos of the school, pupil's well-being is nurtured through policies, and practices that specifically promote inclusion, respect, care and equality for all. Almost all pupils (according to the questionnaires) feel safe in the classroom and in the playground. Structures are in place to ensure security, and a sense of belonging for all. To further develop the pupils' voice in the school, opportunities should be provided for them to be more involved in the decision-making that affects them, in line with their age and maturity.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- The school makes excellent use of school self-evaluation in raising educational standards and developing teachers' practice. Aspects of learning in both Mathematics and Literacy have been targeted and the process is well established and is impacting positively on learning and teaching. While developing and continuing to set smart targets for particular aspects of the curriculum, it is advised that strategies for maintaining the improvements achieved, be identified. The ongoing success of SSE in the school will depend on all teachers committing fully to the whole-school decisions made around learning expectations and teaching approaches.
- The effective functioning of the school is supported by clear, agreed and helpful policies that inform the organisation and administration of the school.
- Teachers generally prepare effectively for their work. To ensure that planning concisely and adequately reflects overall intended learning outcomes and planned learning activities, it is advised that teachers consider sharing and reviewing current approaches to planning with a view to adopting, on a whole-school basis, the most effective elements of existing approaches.
- 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 overall learning experience provided for pupils in this school is of a an extremely high quality. In general the standard of teaching is very good with some excellent practices evident in a number of learning settings. An exceptional level of tracking and analysis of pupil attainment is taking place which is used to set learning targets and to inform teaching in literacy and numeracy. Overall engagement levels of the pupils are very high and a good balance between collaborative and independent learning is achieved. The school has engaged earnestly in an SSE process that has impacted positively on learning and teaching in the school. The formalising of systems for the sharing of pedagogy through observation, collaborative reflection and discussion is advised in order to support the dissemination of best practice in teaching and appropriate expectations for learning. The inclusion of more play-based methodologies in the junior classes will further enhance the learning in the early years.
- Is léir go bhfuil éifeachtacht ag baint leis an athmhachnamh atá déanta ag an bhfoireann mar tá cur chun cinn sa Ghaeilge mar thosaíocht don scoil. Aithnítear an tosaíocht chéanna le linn na meansúnaithe. Is é an dushlán atá roimh na múinteoirí áfach, ná clár bunúsach, atá bunaithe ar scileanna cumarsáide, a fhorbairt agus a chur i bhfeidhm go cuimsitheach i ngach rang. Mar thacaíocht don chlár seo, moltar dul chun cinn a dhéanamh ar na gcuntais mhíosúla chun rianú níos dlúithe a dhéanamh ar an gcur i bhfeidhm na Gaeilge tríd an scoil.

The effectiveness of the school's own reflection on its work is evident in its identification for Irish as an area for development. This concurs with the findings of the evaluation. The challenge for the teachers is indeed to develop, agree and oversee the implementation of a core Irish language skills programme consistently in every class. To support the implementation of this core curriculum, it is recommended the progress reports in Irish be developed further, in order to track the curriculum implementation of Irish more closely through the school.

- The overall standard of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in English is very high. Some excellent examples of teaching in English were observed. Particular strengths in the teaching of reading are the early phonics programme, the use of individualised reading texts, the opportunities afforded for reciprocal reading and the focus on listening and higher-order comprehension skills. The parent-managed school library supports pupils' motivation for reading and exposure to a wide range of books. Pupils experience a rich holistic writing programme based on progressive skill development and creativity. Teachers give helpful, written, focused formative feedback to pupils on their written work.
- Some excellent examples of teaching and pupil learning in Mathematics were observed. The use of differentiated activities, focused extension work, reflective mathematical journals, in-depth teaching and team-teaching and were some of the very good practices in place. In its School Improvement Plan for Mathematics, the primary focus was on the senior classes where significant improvements have taken place. Teachers are now cognisant of the need to make learning targets and related actions for improvement in Mathematics more explicit for the junior levels. The schools' current use of setting in the delivery of Mathematics needs to be monitored closely so that an informed decision on its further use can be made. A balance between the solid teaching of concepts in a spiral and planned way and the provision of appropriate challenges for pupils that unlocks the imaginative potential of Mathematics, should be sought
- Many aspects of pupil learning in music are of a good standard. The overall quality of music teaching is good with some pupils being provided with an excellent musical experience across all three strands. All pupils enjoy music and are given opportunities to perform and song-singing in general is very good. The school is well placed to develop its music programme further using the existing expertise among the staff to develop a comprehensive spiral programme for all classes.

6. Quality of Support for Pupils

- The quality of the policies, practices and systems in place to support pupils with additional learning needs is excellent and reflects the ethos of the school. The focus is on determining clearly the learning needs of individual pupils, developing and implementing appropriate programmes of work using the staged approach and ensuring clarity and cohesion between roles and responsibilities of both class and support teachers. The ongoing dialogue with parents, class teachers and within the LS/RT team regarding pupil needs is working very effectively. As part of the ongoing review of provision in this area consideration might be given to increasing early intervention approaches.
- All pupils, regardless of background, religious belief or circumstances are welcomed and supported in the school. The pervading inclusive, caring and respectful ethos is expressed in the very positive, secure and safe school environment. Home-school partnership is very strong and the school is very mindful of the needs of pupils, parents and families in the range of supports it offers.

Conclusion

Given the school's culture, the focus on teaching and learning and the stage of development of its school self-evaluation processes, this schools capacity to develop further is excellent.

Appendix

SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

Submitted by the Board of Management

Area 1 Observations on the content of the inspection report

On behalf of the school community of Saint Raphaela's Primary School the Board of Management acknowledges the professional and courteous manner in which the whole school evaluation was undertaken.

We welcome the report, highlighting as it does the high standards of teaching, learning, management, self-evaluation and planning at Saint Raphaela's School.

We especially appreciate the Inspectors' observation that "co-operation, courtesy, respect and kindness" are hallmarks of relationships in our school.

The Board of Management wishes to thank all of the partners who together contribute to ensuring that "the learning of pupils is of an extremely high quality" in our school.

The commitment and dedication of our teachers to the holistic development of each child is recognised and appreciated by the Board.

We are grateful to parents for the manner in which they engage in and support every aspect of school life.

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 Board recognises the value of creating opportunities for sharing pedagogical practise and has taken initial steps towards sharing good practise.

The Board remains committed to ensuring that success and excellence are sustained into the future.