

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

**Whole School Evaluation
REPORT**

**Newtownmountkennedy Primary School
Newtownmountkennedy
Co. Wicklow
Uimhir rolla: 20278K**

Date of inspection: 19 November 2012



1. Introduction

Newtownmountkenedy Primary School is under the patronage of the Catholic Archbishop of Dublin and has 278 pupils on roll. It was established as a co-educational school following the amalgamation of a boys and girls school on the current campus. A unit for pupils with Autistic Spectrum Disorders (ASD) was opened in 1999 and operates very successfully as an integrated part of the primary school. The school also participates in Band 2 of the Department's DEIS programme. 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.

2. Summary of Findings and Recommendations for Further Development

The following are the **main strengths** of the work of the school:

- This is an inclusive, welcoming school that supports the learning needs and welfare of all pupils.
- The principal is an insightful, reflective and effective leader.
- Staff members are flexible and committed to ongoing school development and improvement.
- There is very good quality provision for pupils with ASD and their inclusion in the mainstream school is a very positive experience for its pupils.
- The board of management carries out its duties effectively.
- The parent body is very supportive of the school.
- Through focused programmes and interventions, the school has significantly raised reading standards in recent years.
- The school self-evaluation process that is currently underway provides a very good foundation on which to develop the school into the future.

The following **main recommendations** are made:

- The school is well placed to enrich pupils' education experiences by extending the range of teaching approaches to include more opportunities for active, collaborative and independent learning by pupils, school-wide.
- Further analysis of assessment information is recommended for setting targets and planning learning programmes in mainstream settings.
- To build on the self-evaluation processes currently underway in the school, it is recommended that a system be put in place to monitor the implementation of agreed school approaches and to record the extent to which the named targets have been achieved.

3. Quality of School Management

- The board of management carries out its duties effectively. The members are very supportive of staff and they are commended on their rigorous oversight of child protection and the implementation of other school policies. School management should initiate further liaison with the local authorities to address safety issues regarding road traffic management and car parking.
- The principal is an insightful, reflective and effective leader. She is inclusive and consultative in her approach and successfully promotes leadership development among the staff. She is open to change and is committed to continuous school improvement. The principal ensures that good communication practices exist within the school and she works collaboratively with all staff members. She addresses effectively and pragmatically issues as they arise.
- The in-school management team is committed to the welfare of all pupils and to supporting the principal in managing curricular, organisational and pastoral aspects of school life. In the current context of the school, it would be beneficial to review the duties of the posts to ensure that the achievement of new school targets can be supported.
- There is a wide range of resource material in the school and the purchase of extensive reading materials in recent years is particularly commended.
- School management has been pro-active in seeking the views of parents on the work of the school. Its parental questionnaires, along with the Inspectorate questionnaires, indicate that parents are very positively disposed towards the school. It would be important that the information derived from these questionnaires informs planning for furthering parental support for their children's learning.
- The school has made great strides in recent years regarding the implementation of effective discipline strategies. The whole-school involvement of the teachers, the board, the parents and the leadership of the principal has contributed to this. Pupils are very well behaved and according to the responses from the pupil questionnaires, they feel secure and safe in the school. The school is now well placed to develop its pupils' management approaches further, by maintaining a focus on high pupil expectations, developing active learning approaches and fostering pupil self-efficacy and self-confidence.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- Sound foundations for whole-staff engagement in School Self-Evaluation have been laid. The leadership of the principal has been significant in the instigation and facilitation of this approach. The processes of target-setting, using evidence to inform decisions regarding the selection and planning of learning programmes and the openness to ongoing review are all good features of the current planning process. The school's three-year action plan has been informed by a review process and reflects a good understanding of the cyclical nature of school planning. Literacy outcomes at the junior level in the school have improved as a direct result of effective planning.
- The preparation undertaken by a number of teachers is very good and directly reflects the decisions taken at a whole-school level. It is important that this approach is reflected in all individual planning.

- There is very good capacity among the staff to self-evaluate effectively. A straightforward system should be put in place to monitor the implementation of agreed school approaches and to record the extent to which named targets have been achieved.
- 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 overall teaching, learning and pupil achievement

Examples of very good teaching within each of the curriculum areas evaluated were evident during the inspection. These very good practices included the pre-teaching of relevant language, the careful planning of questioning and of gainful learning experiences, the sourcing and accessing of appropriate resources and the judicious use of textbooks. The majority of parents, in their responses to the Inspectorate questionnaires, indicated that they were happy with the teaching in the school and with their children's progress. While the majority of pupils indicated that they enjoyed their lessons and learning and felt that teachers explained things clearly, their responses also suggest a need for further enrichment of their school experiences. In this regard active, hands-on learning should be a feature of every teacher's practice, activities should be in pursuance of a particular or relevant curriculum objective as set out in the school improvement plan and focused efforts should be made to foster both collaborative and independent learning. The further development of the representative voice of the pupils will also contribute to meaningful learning experiences for all.

- The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in Gaeilge

Dar leis an bhfoireann, tá roinnt dushláin rómpu maidir le cumas sa Ghaeilge a fheabhsú. Chun forbairt san fhoghlaim a chur chun cinn, ba chóir (i) na hardscileanna atá ag cúpla oide a úsáid chun clár bunúsach, atá bunaithe ar scileanna cumarsáide, a leagan amach agus a chur i bhfeidhm (ii) modhanna múinte níos leithne a chur i gcrích, agus (iii) níos mó deiseanna i ngach rang a thabhairt do na daltaí chun an teanga a chleachtadh i gcomhthéasceanna éagsúla.

Staff members have identified challenges in relation to developing pupils' competence in Irish. To advance pupils learning in this curriculum area, the following is advised: (i) to avail of current expertise among staff members to develop, agree and oversee the implementation of a core Irish language skills programme, (ii) to broaden the methodologies currently used and (iii) to enable pupils to apply the language in a range of contexts consistently in every class.

- The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in English

Through targeted interventions, focused teaching and close monitoring of progress, the school has succeed in achieving the school three-year DEIS goals regarding the raising of overall reading standards in the school. Pupils enjoy reading and have access to a rich variety of interesting reading material. A number of high quality reading lessons, incorporating elements of DEIS programmes, were observed during the evaluation. The adoption of this approach in all classrooms is advised, to sustain improvements in reading through the school. The teachers recognise that oral language is a priority area

for action and are embarking on the implementation of a programme to develop pupil competence and confidence in this area.

The First Steps writing programme has been recently introduced to address personal writing at all class levels. To ensure the effectiveness of the school's teaching of writing, it is important that pupils at all levels write frequently, write across a range of genres, receive formative feedback and see their work displayed and celebrated.

- The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in Mathematics.

There were some very good practices evident in the teaching of Mathematics in the school. Of particular note was the teaching of early mathematical activities and, in a number of classrooms, the use of manipulatives, the application of Mathematics to real life, the emphasis on mental Mathematics and the attention to problem-solving skills. While the school's three-year action planning cycle for Mathematics has not concluded, the available evidence at this time suggests that some improvements in pupil attainment in Mathematics are being made. In this regard, the school's implementation of DEIS mathematics initiatives has been significant. To accelerate the evident improvement the following are recommended: the active engagement of the pupils in the lessons; an increased use of resources and manipulative by pupils; and a deeper analysis of the assessment information.

Consideration should also be given to further sharing the professional training in Mathematics in the school, through in-class support for mathematics in mainstream classrooms.

- The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in Science

Some very good examples of teaching and learning in Science were evident during the course of the evaluation. Features of these lessons included the explicit teaching of the language of Science, the active engagement of pupils in experiments, individual and pair work, effective use of resources and equipment, project work and higher-order discussion on scientific topics. The school is commended on receiving its third green flag and the development of a school garden is a very positive initiative for the pupils.

- Assessment

The school uses a good range of assessment approaches to determine pupil progress. Written work is regularly corrected. Information gathered from the standardised test results has informed practice in the teaching of English and Mathematics. Challenges remain in assessing oral language competence and pupil progress in writing. As the school develops its specific learning targets, a deeper analysis of the assessment information including diagnostic information will be necessary so that the learning programmes and methods of teaching directly address pupil need.

6. Quality of Support for Pupils

This is an inclusive welcoming school that supports the learning needs and welfare of all pupils. The school addresses diversity very effectively. Pupils with ASD are very successfully integrated in the mainstream school.

Individual Education plans for pupils with ASD are devised in consultation with parents and take due consideration of professional reports. The content taught in the ASD

settings is embedded in the primary school curriculum. A wide range of teaching approaches is used in these classes, including TEACH, PECS and ABA. The Special Needs Assistants work effectively under the direction of the class teachers. The school is highly commended on the well planned programme for the integration of pupils with ASD into the mainstream classes which is working very well.

The current Special Education Needs SEN team has been recently formed and includes members with a range of specialist training and expertise. A comprehensive policy on special education needs is in place and is being implemented effectively. All roles are clearly identified and practice is in line with the recommended staged approach. Significant work has been put into a model of in-class support that is impacting positively on pupils' learning outcomes. Some of the teaching in the various SEN settings is excellent. In such settings, programmes are linked to specific curriculum objectives and are informed by diagnostic test information.

A range of practical ways of increasing parental involvement is set out in the school's action plan and the home-school service is central to the organisation and facilitation of these activities. The co-ordinator is also a key member of the school's care team and is engaged in teaching SPHE in two mainstream classes. A student council is also very active in the school and provides pupils with a very good opportunity to develop their sense of citizenship and their decision-making skills.

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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 Newtownmountkennedy Primary School wishes to acknowledge the professional, positive approach of the Department Inspectors in conducting our Whole School Evaluation in November 2013. The Board would like to thank the reporting Inspector and her colleagues for their courtesy, consideration and professionalism throughout the process.

The Board appreciates the affirmation received in the report with regard to:

The school's ethos and culture: The report bears testament to our Mission Statement that: **In line with our Catholic Ethos, we aspire to nurture independence, tolerance and respect in all pupils encouraging them to reach their full potential in a safe and caring environment.**

The effectiveness of the Board of Management.

The professionalism and commitment of staff.

The meaningful involvement of parents.

The inclusive nature of provision for children with Autism.

The strategic and focussed programmes which have significantly raised reading standards.

The school's well established self evaluation process.

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

Newtownmountkennedy Primary School is committed to consolidating and building upon the positive findings outlined in the WSE report.

Progress on the refinement of our Assessment policy is well advanced. A new Monthly Report Template has been designed and implemented to provide analysis of targets and to plan structured learning programmes in order to inform out teaching and assessment of learning thereafter.

The school looks forward to implementing further change as part of the school improvement plan which is currently under development.

The Board is delighted that the school is well placed to enrich pupil's educational experiences. The range of teaching approaches will be extended to include more opportunities for active, collaborative and independent learning.