

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**

**Department of Education and Skills**

**Whole School Evaluation  
REPORT**

**Scoil Íosagáin  
Sexton Street, Limerick  
Uimhir rolla: 16910F**

**Date of inspection: 02 December 2010**



## 1. Introduction

Scoil Íosagáin is a twenty-one teacher national school, which enrolls boys from second to sixth class. It operates under the patronage of the Catholic bishop of Limerick and is under the trusteeship of the Edmund Rice Schools' Trust (ERST). While the school is located in the centre of Limerick city, an inclusive enrolment policy ensures that pupils are drawn from a wider catchment area and from a rich variety of cultural backgrounds. The current enrolment figure stands at 259. An analysis of the pupil-intake profile at the time of the evaluation, suggests a downward enrolment trend. 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.

The school participates in the Department's action plan for educational inclusion: *Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools* (DEIS). Consequently, it is included in a number of initiatives, including the *School Completion Programme* (SCP). An attendance strategy is in place, but this has not been successful in securing sustained improvements in the school's overall attendance levels. Target setting and more focused intervention measures need to be put in place to enhance the school's performance in this regard.

## 2. Summary of Findings and Recommendations for Further Development

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

- The principal provides strong leadership in all areas of school life
- Teachers are commended for the positive atmosphere which pervades the school and for their commitment to the welfare of pupils
- The behaviour of pupils and their engagement in learning are exemplary
- The three-year cycle of the school's engagement with DEIS has been very successful in raising pupils' literacy and numeracy levels. The strategy of differentiating English and Mathematics lessons across class levels has proved to be a very significant intervention in this regard
- The overall quality of teaching observed was good and in some instances, it was excellent

The following **main recommendations** are made:

- It is recommended that leadership functions at in-school management level be developed and that a more collaborative approach to planning be cultivated among all teaching staff.
- As a means of building on the progress already achieved, new targets need to be set to sustain and further improve attendance levels and literacy and numeracy standards over the next three-year cycle of DEIS planning.
- A review of curriculum implementation is recommended with a view towards developing the pupils' conversation skills in Irish and their handwriting skills in English and towards making greater use of the local environment in Mathematics and Geography.
- A review of the deployment of teachers in support settings is recommended, paying due regard to the terms of Special Education Circular 02/05. Consideration should also be given to facilitating opportunities for more co-operative learning through in-class support.

### 3. Quality of School Management

- The board of management meets regularly, it is properly constituted and it supports the work of the school in an efficient and professional manner: Accurate records of meetings are maintained, school finances are certified annually and good provision is made for the upkeep and future maintenance of the school building.
- The principal provides strong leadership in all areas of school life. He is a visible leader and enjoys the full confidence of the teaching staff, the parents' association and the board of management. He is a very effective administrator and he plays a co-ordinating role in all aspects of school organisation and management. He attends tirelessly to all pupils' care and welfare needs. He facilitates good working relationships with and between staff members. Consequently, staff morale is high. A particular strength is the degree to which he ensures a discerning and judicious emphasis on the school's core function of providing a positive and relevant learning experience for pupils.
- The in-school middle management team comprises the deputy principal, one assistant principal and six teachers with special-duties posts of responsibility. This team meets formally with the principal on a regular basis to discuss and agree on responsibilities for key organisational matters. The duties attached to posts were reviewed in 2008 to achieve a greater balance between curriculum, organisation and pastoral responsibilities. Documentation relating to these reviews indicates that leadership functions at in-school middle management level are underdeveloped. A move to a more distributed model of school leadership at this level will be necessary if the progress achieved during the three cycle (2006-09) of DEIS is to be sustained.
- The school accommodation consists of five separately built classroom blocks. This presents challenges for the management of pupils, resources and communication. These challenges are overcome through the dedication and commitment of staff. The behaviour of pupils inside the classrooms and at transitional times during the school day is exemplary. The quality of the relationships between teachers and pupils is sensitive and affirming and the positive school climate which pervades is deserving of particular praise. Learning resources are also well managed including access to *information and communication technology* (ICT). The development plan in place for the enhancement of the school's ICT infrastructure should also help to overcome the challenges associated with communication between the separate blocks.

### 4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- All teachers provide appropriate classroom planning. This individual preparation is supported by a comprehensive overall school plan, which clearly documents school policy in a range of curriculum and administrative areas. Teachers are aware of these plans and they can contribute to finalising the documents at staff meetings. There is scope to develop greater shared ownership of the school planning process by employing a more collaborative approach. A more collaborative culture could begin to bed in with curriculum review and development in a limited number of prioritised subject areas.
- The process of school self-evaluation and strategic planning for improvements over the three-year cycle of DEIS has been very well managed. Significant improvements have been achieved in pupils' literacy and numeracy levels at the least and most able ends of the ability continuum. In order to sustain these creditable improvements, responsibility for leading the process over the next three-year cycle should be devolved to members of the in-school middle management team.

- School authorities provided evidence that, in compliance with Primary Circular 0061/2006, the board of management has formally adopted the Department's Child Protection Guidelines for Primary Schools. Evidence was provided to show that these child protection procedures have been brought to the attention of management, school staff and parents; that a copy of the procedures has been provided to all staff (including all new staff); and that management has ensured that all staff are familiar with the procedures to be followed. A designated liaison person (DLP) and a deputy DLP have been appointed in line with the requirements of the guidelines.

## 5. Quality of Teaching, Learning and Pupil Achievement

- Breathnaíodh cleachtas dea-struchtúrtha i dteagasc na Gaeilge tríd an scoil. Úsáidtear raon maith áiseanna, an clár bán idirghníomhach ina measc, chun ionchur teanga á mhúineadh go taitneamhach, spreagúil. Tugtar deiseanna cumarsáide do dhaltai trí agallaimh bheirte, agus anois is arís, trí dhrámaíocht a eagrú. Tá caighdeán na léitheoireachta agus na scríbhneoireachta sásúil sa foriomlán. Moltar tuilleadh béime a leagan ar fhoghlaím na filíochta agus ar leanúnachas sa dul chun cinn i scileanna cumarsáide na ndaltai.

*Well-structured practice in the teaching of Irish was observed throughout the school. A good range of resources, including the interactive whiteboard, is used to teach language input in an enjoyable and encouraging manner. Pupils are given opportunities to communicate through paired dialogue and, occasionally, through drama. Standards in reading and writing are generally satisfactory. It is recommended that increased emphasis be placed on the learning of poetry and on the continuity of progression in the conversational skills of the pupils.*

- The quality of teaching in English is good at all class levels. Teachers are commended for their maintenance of classroom environments which support literacy development effectively. Pupils' vocabulary and communication skills are extended both in discrete oral language lessons and across the curriculum. Teachers use appropriate assessment strategies to monitor pupils' attitudes and progress in reading and writing. Reading skills are systematically developed and many pupils demonstrate a keen interest in books. Writing is particularly well taught. High-quality teacher modelling features strongly in lessons. Pupils' desire to write is adeptly stimulated in a variety of genres and the product of this work is very attractively displayed in many settings. It is recommended that the school place additional emphasis on enabling and encouraging pupils to develop a legible, fluent, personal style of handwriting.
- The school is commended for its success in consistently improving standards in pupils' achievement in Mathematics since 2006. The decision to provide differentiation across class levels has proved very effective and should now be extended to sixth class. Teaching is good and in some cases, it is very good. There is a strong emphasis on mathematical language and active learning approaches to concept development. Good use was made of the outside environment to enrich learning in some instances and this approach should be further developed. As a means of building on achievements to date, it is recommended that greater analysis of testing outcomes be undertaken with a view to implementing focused interventions in particular strand areas.
- Overall, the quality of teaching and learning in Geography ranges from satisfactory to good. Many pupils demonstrate good knowledge of previous topics taught and pupils' mapping skills are well developed. Teachers source and make good use of a range of interesting resources to generate pupils' interest in topics. Provision and use of a broader

range of maps, atlases and reference books would enhance lessons. Limited opportunities are provided for pupils to engage in fieldwork in the locality. The whole-school plan in Geography should be reviewed to include a plan for exploring the local environment to a greater extent.

## **6. Quality of Support for Pupils**

- The differentiated approach to teaching literacy and numeracy in the mainstream classes ensures that all pupils, including those with supplementary learning needs, access these areas of the curriculum at levels appropriate to their needs. This approach is complemented by good communication between teachers and the consistent implementation of a very systematic whole-school approach to assessment and record keeping. A review of the deployment of teachers in support settings is required to ensure that all pupils with supplementary learning needs receive levels of support proportionate to their entitlement. Special Education Circular 02/05 should be consulted in this regard.
- The quality of individual programme planning and teaching for pupils with supplementary learning needs, including pupils for whom English is an additional language (EAL) and pupils from the Traveller community, is generally good. In the case of pupils with special educational needs, individual education plans (IEPs) should be set out over shorter periods with more specific and measurable targets. This will facilitate more frequent reviews and greater use of learning outcomes to inform planning. Supplementary teaching is provided, for the most part, on a withdrawal basis. Opportunities for providing more in-class support should be considered as a means of facilitating more cooperative learning.
- The school is included in the home-school-community liaison (HSCL) scheme and good partnerships and communication structures between home and school have been developed. An active parents' association supports this work and parents and pupils indicate very high levels of satisfaction with the overall performance of the school.

# **Appendix**

**SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT**

**Submitted by the Board of Management**

**Area 1 Observations on the content of the inspection report**

The board were satisfied that the inspection report was a true and accurate assessment of the school. We were delighted with the courtesy and professionalism of the inspectors towards all members of the school community during their visit.

**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, following the report back meeting, had initiated a new Attendance Committee using the expertise of the EWO and school staff linked to attendance. This committee was already advanced in preparing for board approval a range of additional initiatives to be implemented going forward.

The school's planning day 2011 was dedicated to the recommendations on how to progress the success already of the school in relation to literacy and numeracy and the viewpoints of the report were used as the guiding position.