

INDEPENDENT EXTERNAL SCHOOL EVALUATION

REPORT

School name	St Mary's College Junior School
School address	73-79 Rathmines Road Dublin 6

Date of evaluation: 21 March 2019

Date of issue of report: 06 May 2019

INDEPENDENT EXTERNAL SCHOOL EVALUATION reports on the quality of teaching and learning and on the quality of management and leadership in the school. It affirms good practice and makes recommendations to aid the further development of educational provision in the school.

HOW TO READ THIS REPORT

During this inspection, the inspector(s) evaluated and reported under the following headings or areas of enquiry:

1. The quality of pupils' learning
2. The quality of teaching
3. The quality of support for pupils' well-being
4. The quality of leadership and management
5. The quality of school self-evaluation

CHILD PROTECTION

During the inspection visit, the following checks in relation to the school's child protection procedures were conducted:

1. The name of the DLP and the Child Safeguarding Statement are prominently displayed near the main entrance to the school.
2. The Child Safeguarding Statement has been ratified by the board and includes an annual review and a risk assessment.
3. All teachers visited reported that they have read the Child Safeguarding Statement and that they are aware of their responsibilities as mandated persons.
4. The Child Safeguarding Statement meets the requirements of the Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools 2017.
5. The records of the last three board of management meetings record a child protection oversight report that meet the requirements of the Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary schools 2017.
6. The board of management has ensured that arrangements are in place to provide information to all school personnel on the Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools, 2017
7. School planning documentation indicates that the school is making full provision for the relevant aspects of the curriculum (SPHE, Stay Safe, RSE, Wellbeing).
8. Child protection records are maintained in a secure location.

The school met the requirements in relation to each of the checks above.

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Date of inspection	21 March 2019
Inspection activities undertaken <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Meetings with principal and in-school leadership team• Meeting with chairperson of the board of management• Meeting with teachers	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Observation of teaching and learning• Examination of pupils' work• Interaction with pupils• Feedback to principal, deputy principal and teachers, and to chairperson of the board of management• Review of relevant documents

SCHOOL CONTEXT

St Mary's College Junior School, located adjacent to St Mary's College Senior School on Lower Rathmines Road, Dublin 6, is a private, fee-paying Catholic school for boys from Form 2 to Form 6. It is under the trusteeship of the Spiritan Congregation and the patronage overall of the Spiritan Education Trust (SET). The teaching staff includes an administrative principal, ten mainstream class teachers, two full-time and one part-time special education teachers, a specialist music teacher and specialist art teacher. There are 254 boys currently enrolled and their attendance levels are very good overall.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

FINDINGS

- The learning achievements and experiences of pupils, including pupils with special education needs (SEN), in almost all aspects of the curriculum, are very high. Pupils enjoy their learning and are self-motivated to learn. Learning outcomes in numeracy and English literacy are very good and exceed expected outcomes. However, there is scope for development in Irish literacy.
- The quality of teaching overall is effective and some significant strengths were noted.
- The overall quality of support for pupils' well-being is exceptionally high; a warm, welcoming, inclusive, pupil-centred learning environment permeates the school.
- Effective provision is made for supplementary support teaching in English literacy and numeracy; interventions for pupils with SEN, including pupils of high ability, require expansion beyond the withdrawal model currently in use.
- The quality of assessment is good overall; assessment for learning (AfL) approaches are under-utilised, and pupils' self-assessment and peer-assessment practices are not sufficiently promoted.
- The overall quality of leadership and management is very effective; the principal and deputy principal cultivate a collegial, collaborative work environment and a useful engagement with the process of school self-evaluation has begun.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- A whole-school review of approaches to the teaching of Irish literacy should be initiated with a view to extending and consolidating the range of activities provided to enable pupils to apply and develop their language skills.
- Curriculum objectives and assessment data should be utilised more effectively to inform teaching, learning, differentiated individual teacher planning, team-teaching approaches and classroom support planning, so as to ensure that all pupils are appropriately challenged and supported in their learning.

- A review of the current organisation of learning support should be initiated to optimise maximum impact on pupil learning outcomes, and facilitate the introduction of in-class support and collaborative station teaching; the NEPS continuum-of-support model could usefully guide the adoption of planned interventions.
- Curricular leadership should be prioritised and responsibilities to support curriculum implementation, monitoring and review should be specifically delineated.

DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. THE QUALITY OF PUPILS' LEARNING

- The overall learning achievements of pupils, including pupils with SEN, are very good. Pupils enjoy their learning. They are self-motivated and enthusiastic and can apply their knowledge and skills very well across almost all curricular areas. Pupils engage with and participate very actively in their learning especially where well-planned, well-resourced, differentiated, challenging and meaningful tasks are provided.
- Learning outcomes in numeracy are very good. Pupils demonstrate a clear understanding of mathematical concepts and procedures. Pupil achievement in summative assessments, including standardised tests, is in line with, and frequently above, realistic expectations.
- Pupil performance levels in English literacy are consistently high. In the lessons observed, pupils achieved, and at times surpassed, the intended learning outcomes. Pupils demonstrate exemplary oral and written language skills and show competence and confidence in their use of English language. There is a very commendable whole-school emphasis on the development of reading skills. Pupils generally read with admirable fluency and can apply comprehension strategies effectively. There is scope for the development of a whole-school approach to handwriting.
- The quality of learner outcomes and learner experiences in Irish is satisfactory overall. Many pupils demonstrate high levels of interest and participation in learning in Irish lessons. However, action is required to improve the extent to which they are enabled to communicate orally and in writing. The use of extended reading materials in Irish would improve pupil reading and comprehension skills in Irish.
- Learning outcomes in other aspects of the curriculum are very good as evidenced, for example, in the very effective manner in which pupils are enabled to communicate their learning in Social, Environmental and Scientific Education (SESE), and in the very good skill development they display in Music, Visual Arts and PE.

2. THE QUALITY OF TEACHING

- The quality of teaching overall is good. Significant strengths and highly effective teaching approaches were observed in some settings. The school needs to build on these strengths. The quality of whole-school and individual teacher curriculum planning is good. All teachers prepare comprehensively for their lessons and many employ very good questioning techniques. In the best lessons, active and meaningful pupil participation was fostered through small group work and pair work, and through the skilful use of a variety of teaching methodologies and appropriate resources. Teachers are advised, however, to place less reliance on commercial texts and workbooks to determine the content and approach to lessons. Teaching and learning should be guided more effectively by curriculum objectives and assessment-for-learning data. The

development of skills should be outlined in a progressive manner for each class level in order to ensure appropriate continuity and progression.

- Most learning environments are well presented with an appropriate combination of pupils' work and relevant subject specific material on display. Communal areas celebrate the creativity of students together with displays of awards and photographs of a range of activities. In almost all lessons, supportive learning atmospheres were evident.
- The overall quality of teaching in numeracy and English literacy is very high and some very effective practice was noted in many of the lessons observed in both mainstream and special education settings. Supplementary teaching is provided for pupils selected on the basis of need as decided by class teachers in collaboration with the special education team. However, the current support model which is based on the withdrawal of individual pupils and small groups does not maximise learning opportunities for pupils and does not make best use of the special education team. In line with best practice, the school should seek to maximise opportunities for in-class support and differentiated, collaborative station teaching.
- *Tá cáilíocht an teagaisc sa Ghaeilge sásúil ar an iomlán cé go bhfuil bun struchtúir chainte á sealbhú go héifeachtach i ranganna áirithe. Tá scóip chun múineadh na Gaeilge a fhorbairt ar bhonn uile scoile chun leibhéil inniúlachta na ndaltaí sa Ghaeilge a ardú. I measc na ngnéithe den deachleachtais a breathnaíodh, bhí úsáid na Gaeilge mar theanga theagaisc, ionchur cuí foclóra agus cluichí teanga. Amach anseo, moltar a chinntiú go gcuirtear na trí thréimhse cumarsáide i bhfeidhm i ngach ceacht Gaeilge. Moltar béim níos láidre a chur ar léitheoireacht sa Ghaeilge agus ní mór ábhar léitheoireachta breise a chur ar fáil do na daltaí. Tá cáilíocht na scríbhneoireachta sásúil i gcoitinne ach is gá deiseanna a thabhairt dóibh scríobh i seánraí éagsúla.*
- The quality of teaching in Irish is satisfactory overall although effective language structures are provided in a small number of settings. There is scope to develop the teaching of Irish at whole-school level to raise pupils' level of competence in Irish. Among the aspects of good practice observed were the use of Irish as the language of instruction, the input of appropriate vocabulary, and language games. However, the implementation of the three communicative phases should be ensured in all Irish lessons. A stronger emphasis should be placed on Irish reading and there is a need to widen the range of reading materials available. Pupils' writing skills in Irish are satisfactory in general but they would benefit from opportunities to write in a range of genres.
- The learning outcomes, progression continua, support material and examples provided by NCCA for the Primary Language Curriculum should be used as a basis for planning and implementing curriculum reform in language teaching and to support continuity and coherence in children's learning in Irish and English.
- Assessment practices overall are good. Pupils' written work is corrected regularly and constructive feedback is provided. Standardised tests and teacher-designed tests are administered regularly and results are communicated to parents. However, limited use is made of assessment for learning (AfL) strategies or pupil self-assessment and peer-assessment practices. Effective whole-school approaches to track pupils' progress should be implemented and the outcomes of assessments should be analysed more rigorously to inform teachers' individual and collective practices. Where specific learning targets are set as, for example, for pupils with special educational needs, such targets should be measurable, attainable, realistic and timed, and progress towards their achievement should be monitored and recorded systematically.

3. THE QUALITY OF SUPPORT FOR PUPILS' WELL-BEING

- The overall quality of support for pupils' well-being is excellent. Pupil behaviour is exemplary. A

commitment to the holistic development of each pupil is fostered. Interactions between teachers and pupils and among pupils are very respectful. Pupils were observed to work very cooperatively and supportively with their peers. Very commendable emphasis is placed on ensuring that pupils feel safe and well looked after in school. The pupils benefit from the extensive range of valuable extra-curricular activities, including sport, science, music and drama, that is provided.

4. THE QUALITY OF LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

- The principal and deputy principal collaborate in a highly effective manner and provide dedicated and committed service to the school. A highly commendable approach is taken to the day-to-day management of the school organisation. There is a strong culture of trust and mutual respect. A positive school climate is fostered across all levels, including communication with teachers, the board of management, pupils, parents and the wider community. To build upon the effective practice noted, and enhance leadership of teaching and learning, daily timetables should be restructured to ensure premium teaching time is used to greater effect. Whole-school curriculum planning and reform should be prioritised in a systematic manner to advance whole-school improvement initiatives. Consideration should be given to how distributed leadership roles could be more clearly aligned to changing school priorities.
- The board of management provides for the appropriate governance of the school. It meets regularly and supports the work of the school very effectively. Minutes of meetings are recorded and school accounts are certified. The board might now consider how it could strengthen the school's information and communications technology (ICT) infrastructure to further support teaching and learning. As the board employs specialist teachers in various curricular areas, it is advised that the role of mainstream class teachers be clarified while pupils are taught by specialist teachers.
- Parents are very supportive of the work of the school and contribute greatly to many aspects of school life. Communication between school and home is very good and parental views are sought to inform the school's decision-making process and policy development.

5. THE QUALITY OF SCHOOL SELF-EVALUATION

- The school has begun a process of SSE and some curricular and administrative policies have been reviewed recently. However, a cyclical and structured approach to a continuous process of self-evaluation and professional collaborative review has yet to become embedded. The implementation of a school improvement plan, spearheaded by the board, overseen by the principal and deputy principal, and implemented with the collaboration of the teachers, is now recommended to progress the school's engagement with the SSE process and to ensure that priority school improvement areas are addressed. The willingness of teachers to undertake distributed leadership roles and to share expertise with other teachers, as evidenced during the evaluation, is a potential strength in the school's future engagement with SSE.

School Response to the Independent External School Evaluation

21/03/2019

Submitted by the Board of Management

The Board appreciates the professional approach to the recent inspection which was a positive experience for all.

We take on board your comments on Learning support, AFL, Irish, ICT and Station Teaching.

From September 2019 we will implement your recommendations on a trial basis with some classes before rolling them out to the whole school.

The current method used in Learning Support has proved very effective, especially with those children whose ability falls under the 12th percentile. Teachers and Parents feel one to one teaching with these children is imperative and progress is evident.

We use Station teaching in our project work and Development Education programme so take on board your recommendations for implementing it in the areas of numeracy and literacy.

Your comments on AFL are very valid and we do not underestimate its importance.

However, teachers are anxious to point out they are already using various strategies but not all showed this in the inspection.

We recognise the need to expand on the Irish Literacy programme and to that effect we have already put in action a reading programme for each year group.

Regarding distributed leadership, teachers feel they work well, individually and as a team in curricular organisation. Teachers are empowered and supported to take responsibility for various areas of the curriculum, working on planning, resources and various initiatives as their classes attend specialist teachers.

A cyclical approach has been taken, since 2012 on the review of policies, both administrative and curricular and we will continue to review policies on a three-year basis.

The following is the response to the comments on ICT:

The school has 31 ipads; each class is timetabled for one hour a week. This time can be used for ICT lessons using word processing, spreadsheets in higher classes, to teach typing, and Maths and English based activities in lower classes. Learning support avail of the iPads for those children with disgraphia to learn touch typing.

There are 15 hours outside of the timetable when teachers may take a number of iPads to use in their classroom for support teaching, group work and paired work.

Once again thank you from all here.