

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation

REPORT

**John Scottus NS
Northumberland Road
Ballsbridge, Dublin 4
Uimhir rolla: 20103V**

Date of inspection: 13 September 2010



**AN ROINN | DEPARTMENT OF
OIDEACHAIS | EDUCATION
AGUS SCILEANNA | AND SKILLS**

1. Introduction

John Scottus NS in Dublin 4 caters for pupils from junior infants to sixth class. It was founded in 1986 to serve the educational needs of families interested in philosophical principles derived from their studies in the School of Philosophy and Economic Science and also reflected in the teaching of John Scottus Eriugena, the 9th century Irish Neo-Platonist. The school is seeking permanent recognition from the Department of Education and Skills (DES).

The school is unique in that it is the only primary school in Ireland founded on such principles. The commitment of the school community to these principles is reflected in the extent to which they influence all aspects of school life. This includes the provision for extra staffing by the board of management, the range of subjects available to the pupils in addition to the full primary school curriculum and the organisation of the school day. There are sixteen mainstream class teachers employed in the school, ten of which are paid by the DES. The remaining class teachers are paid by the John Scottus Educational Trust. This staffing provision allows for a low pupil-teacher ratio. The school also employs a number of external instructors/teachers who provide teaching in specific areas such as Sanksrit, Philosophy, Classical Studies and French and also in mainstream curricular areas (Music, Physical Education and the Visual Arts). As part of the core philosophy of the school, boys and girls are taught separately. The school management places significant emphasis on the relationship between pupils and teachers so that one teacher takes a class through its eight years of schooling, in so far as this is possible. The school day for all pupils is significantly longer than that required by Circular 11/95. Pupils are given a cooked lunch each day and all text books and teaching materials are provided. The school seeks a very substantial voluntary contribution per child to offset all the above provisions. The board of management clearly stipulates the voluntary nature of this contribution.

The school currently has an enrolment of 259 pupils and attendance is very good. The majority of the pupils transfer to John Scottus post-primary school. The board of management was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the evaluation, and the response of the board will be found in the appendix to this report.

2. Summary of Findings and Recommendations for Further Development

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

- The school is managed very effectively by the board of management, the principal and the in-school management team.
- A very strong sense of community is evident in the school. This is reflected in the shared meals, the nurturing atmosphere and the positive and caring relationships displayed between members of staff and the pupils. It is also evident in the commitment of the teaching staff and the parents to the school and its particular philosophy.
- The principal is a highly effective and committed leader. Her vision to provide a high-quality teaching and learning experience for the pupils in the context of the philosophy of John Scottus is clear and permeates all aspects of school life.
- The overall quality of planning and teaching in the school is very good.
- In the intervening years between inspections the school took on board the advice given by the Inspectorate and the support services and acted on that advice in a purposeful and meaningful manner.
- There are particular strengths in the school's curriculum provision: the improvements in

the teaching of Irish, the very high standards being achieved in English; the wide variety of experiences provided for the pupils in the teaching of drama and the effective introduction of new technologies.

The following **main recommendations** are made:

- It is recommended that group-teaching approaches be introduced throughout the school. Learning activities, particularly in Mathematics, should be further differentiated to ensure that the pupils are challenged and supported appropriately. The information gleaned from the analysis of assessment data should be used to inform this differentiated approach.
- A review of the school policy on Special Education Needs should explore extending the current model of learning-support provision to include more in-class support and team teaching. It should also provide clarity on the whole-school approach to the teaching of English as an Additional Language.
- Acknowledging the good work that is taking place in the teaching of Irish, it is recommended that further attention be paid to the teaching of Irish reading. Lesson themes should be linked more systematically to maximise continuity and progression in the development of the pupils' language competence.
- As the in-school management team develops and consolidates, it is recommended that curriculum leadership be further developed among its members.
- Particular emphasis should be placed on developing the pupils' skills in the areas of problem-solving and Mental Mathematics.
- The board of management's attention is drawn to the ultimate responsibility of individual teachers for in-class teaching and learning in all areas of the primary school curriculum, input from non-staff instructors notwithstanding.

3. Quality of School Management

- The board of management carries out its duties in an effective manner. It is very committed to the school and to maintaining and supporting the John Scottus philosophy in the life of the school.
- The principal is a highly effective leader. She has identified the strategies required to achieve her vision for the school and has cultivated a very positive team spirit among all staff members. The in-school management team is very committed to providing support to the principal and to taking individual and collective responsibility for aspects of the curriculum and organisational issues. It is recommended that these responsibilities be broadened to ensure that leadership is fostered to the fullest extent possible in the in-school management team.
- The school is commended on the effective introduction of Information and Communication Technologies in the school.
- The school management places significant emphasis on the quality of relationship between pupils and teachers. Notwithstanding that the intended practice of one teacher taking a class through its eight years of schooling reflects a core principle in the school's philosophy, management should reflect on what is the most appropriate and effective teaching structure/approach to meet the pupils' needs.

- There are systems in place that support effective communication between the school and home.
- The school building consists of two large houses which are listed and cannot be altered. This means restrictions in terms of storage and classroom size. The location of the fifth and sixth classes off-site in the separate post-primary school is noted.
- All staff members in the school are warm, caring and considerate in all their dealings with the pupils. Pupil responses in the questionnaires reflected this positive relationship. The whole-school approach to managing transitions, where pupils are encouraged to be still, reflective and prepared is commendable. The overall management of the pupils is very positive and contributes significantly to the effective implementation of lessons.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- Whole-school plans and policies provide clear guidance for all staff members, reflect significant thought and deliberation and are directly informed by the ethos of the school. The principal has taken the lead role in the planning process to date and the board of management has ratified all documentation. Action plans have been developed for the current school year that outline broad targets to be achieved based on priorities identified.
- The school is commended on the initial steps taken to monitor progress. It is recommended that a formal self-evaluation process be established and put into action by members of the in-school management team.
- While overall individual teacher planning is of a very high standard the need for mainstream class teachers to take full responsibility for teaching and learning in all curricular areas should be addressed.

Child Protection Policy and Procedures

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

- Léiríonn na daltaí dearcadh an-dearfach i leith na Gaeilge. Tá cur chuige aontuithe sa scoil maidir le múineadh na Gaeilge ina bhfuil béim ar úsáid a gcuid Gaeilge féin i measc na ndaltaí agus ar rannphairtíocht agus spraoi sna ceachtanna. Moltar an scoil as ucht an dul chun cinn go dtí seo i múineadh na Gaeilge. Moltar anois béim sa bhreis a dhíriú ar mhúineadh léitheoireacht Ghaeilge agus ar an leanúnachas idir téamaí ceachtanna.

Pupils display a very positive attitude towards the Irish language. A whole-school approach to the teaching of Irish has been agreed with emphasis placed on the pupils using the language learned and on participating in, and enjoying the lessons. The school is commended on developments to date in the teaching of Irish. It is recommended that

further attention be paid to the teaching of Irish reading and the linkage between lesson themes.

- The pupils' competence and confidence in oral language is one of the school's key strengths. The achievement levels in English reading are very high and very good support is provided for those with lower ability levels. The school should now consider widening the range of reading materials available to the pupils, developing different approaches to teaching the novel and enabling the pupils to engage more effectively with the process of writing.
- Pupils' overall achievement in Mathematics is very good. Mathematics has been prioritised by the school as a curriculum area for improvement. Assessment information in Mathematics should be used to identify groups for differentiated teaching to cater for the range of ability levels and to ensure that the higher achieving pupils are adequately challenged. This lack of group teaching was also noted by the pupils in their responses on the pupil questionnaire. Particular emphasis should be placed on developing the pupils' skills in the areas of problem-solving and Mental Mathematics.
- The school achieves a very good balance between process drama experiences and performance drama. Pupils are afforded excellent opportunities, in safe environments, to enter into the drama world using a range of drama strategies. Excellent examples of meaningful integration between drama and other curriculum areas were witnessed during the evaluation. The school is commended on the excellent oral and social skills displayed by the pupils as they engage openly, honestly and playfully with their classmates in a range of drama activities.
- The school has developed a consistent, coherent and co-ordinated teaching approach. Many very good practices are promoted and fostered such as sharing the learning objective with the pupils at the beginning of lessons, using a variety of effective teaching approaches and teaching concepts and content in a structured manner. It is recommended that these practices be reflected in all classrooms throughout the school.
- A clear emphasis is placed on language across the curriculum and pupils are competent and confident in their self-expression.

6. Quality of Supports for Pupils

- The Special Education Needs (SEN) team draws up comprehensive Individual Education Plans for the pupils identified for support in consultation with the class teachers and the parents of the individual children. The plans clearly outline the long and short-term targets to be achieved.
- The support teachers working in the SEN settings relate extremely well to the pupils and every encouragement is given to the pupils to succeed and to reach their individual potential. Very good teaching approaches are in use and very good processes for monitoring and recording progress are in place. Programmes are developed in accordance with pupil needs and a wide range of resources is available to support the teaching. The Special needs Assistants work in a committed and caring manner with individual pupils and are clear about their roles and responsibilities.
- A review of the school policy on SEN should explore extending the current model of learning-support provision to include more in-class support and team teaching. This would ensure that all pupils with low incidence needs are receiving their assigned hours

and that the expertise within the special education team is exploited as effectively as possible.

- The provision for pupils who are learning English as an Additional Language (EAL) is very good. Initial assessments are used to identify language needs. The programmes of work place appropriate emphasis on the pupils acquiring language to access the curriculum. It is recommended that a whole-school approach to the delivery of EAL support be outlined and clarified and individual roles and responsibilities be highlighted.

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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

On behalf of all the staff in John Scottus School, the Board of Management would like to express its appreciation and gratitude to the Inspectorate of the D.E.S. The W.S.E. was a valuable and insightful exercise and the staff are committed to implementing the recommendations in the report.