

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

DEIS FOCUSED EVALUATION 2011

RECORD OF EVALUATION

**St Thomas Senior School
Jobstown, Tallaght, Dublin 24
Uimhir rolla: 197650**

Date of evaluation: 9 November 2011



**A N R O I N N | D E P A R T M E N T O F
O I D E A C H A I S | E D U C A T I O N
A G U S S C I L E A N N A | A N D S K I L L S**

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Record of Evaluation

1 Introduction

A focused evaluation of the DEIS planning process in St. Thomas' Senior National School was undertaken by the Inspectorate of the Department of Education and Skills in November 2011. During that evaluation, aspects of the school's work in relation to attendance, retention, progression, literacy, numeracy, and partnership with parents and others were reviewed. The evaluation involved interviews with school personnel, review of school documents and records, observation of pupils' learning and other activities during and after school, inspection of pupils' work, questionnaires for pupils and parents, and a focus group meeting with parents. Following the evaluation, a meeting to discuss the findings was held with the principal and a number of teachers. 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 School Context

St. Thomas' Senior National School participates in Band I of DEIS. There are twenty-one mainstream class teachers, one support teacher, three special class teachers and five learning support/resource teachers (LS/RT) in the school. There are three posts assigned to a reading unit, a full-time home-school-community liaison (HSCL) teacher and an administrative principal. This comprises a staffing schedule of thirty five in total. The school has had a very high turn over of staff since 1999; one ten-month period saw the resignation of fifteen teachers.

At the time of the evaluation, there were 452 pupils enrolled in the school. Enrolment has been steadily increasing in the past decade and is projected to increase further. Up to 25% of the enrolment includes pupils whose first language is not English and approximately 10% of pupils are members of the Traveller community. A little over 20% of pupils have been diagnosed as having a general learning disorder, specific learning disorder or low incidence learning needs. The school reports that there are high levels of anti-social behaviour in the community.

3 DEIS Themes

3.1 Attendance, Retention, Progression

- Specific, realistic and measurable targets have been set in the DEIS plan to improve the school's overall attendance figures. An attendance committee has been established comprising the HSCL teacher, School Completion Programme (SCP) co-ordinator and a teacher representative from each class level. They work collaboratively to set targets and devise strategies to improve attendance levels.
- Evidence was provided to show that interventions have had a positive impact on attendance. The numbers of pupils who missed twenty days or more decreased in 2010/2011. The school achieved its target for the period 2007/2010.

- Included among the very effective attendance strategies are a daily breakfast club and a wide range of in-school and after-school activities supported by the SCP. Full and improved attendance is celebrated at school assemblies and success in this area is communicated through newsletters, notice boards and posters. All staff, pupils and parents are aware of the interventions and strategies regarding attendance.
- The HSCL teacher and SCP co-ordinator meet weekly to monitor targeted pupils' attendance. The school reports that the recently reviewed code of behaviour and playground activities are having a positive impact on attendance. To build on this good practice a more in-depth analysis of attendance data to assist in the identification of trends and patterns should be undertaken.
- Retention of pupils is very good. Pupil suspensions and expulsions are very rare. The efforts of staff in this regard are highly commendable.
- A very successful transfer programme has been established in the school to ensure pupils progress from the junior school to senior school and from 6th class to post-primary level. Almost all pupils progressed from 6th class to first year in 2011. A very high percentage of pupils surveyed indicated that they will go to post-primary school.
- The high levels of communication between principals, HSCL teachers, SCP co-ordinator, SCP project workers, SEN teachers and relevant class teachers is a particularly strong feature of the transfer programme. Standardised tests results, assessment records, psychological reports and pupil profiles are shared with the relevant schools. In most cases, the relevant resources are in place for pupils before starting in the senior school or post-primary school.

3.2 Literacy and Numeracy

- The literacy team under the competent leadership of the literacy co-ordinators and in conjunction with the DEIS co-ordinator and staff have devised specific and measurable targets and actions for improvement in reading. Data from standardised tests was utilised to inform targets and actions.
- As part of the school's DEIS plan, many successful interventions to support reading are delivered throughout the school, including, guided reading, in-class support, shared-reading, DEAR time and graded reading schemes. Practical preparation for the teaching and implementation of these interventions is of a very high standard. Stimulating and print-rich classroom environments are evident.
- The impact of interventions is having a positive effect on pupil attainment in reading; the school has achieved its targets set out in the DEIS plan. The numbers of pupils performing below the 50th percentile has reduced by 5% in the past four years. A high percentage of pupils indicated in the questionnaires that they liked English. Parents in the focus group were very positive about the school's approach to reading and indicated that their children were reading books appropriate to their ability.
- The First Steps writing programme is systematically implemented. Well-resourced and purposeful writing lessons are delivered. Very good samples of the pupils' writing were observed in copybooks, portfolios and displays. As a means of improving pupils' attainment in literacy further, it is recommended that targets for oral language be devised and a structured oral language programme be put in place and implemented throughout the school.

Numeracy

- The DEIS plan outlines specific time-bound and measurable targets for numeracy. The numeracy co-ordinators conduct detailed analysis of data and pupil questionnaires in devising targets. Targets set have been achieved by the school and there has been definite measurable improvement in Mathematics since the DEIS plan

was implemented. Pupils are very positively disposed towards Mathematics and 80% of the pupils surveyed feel they are doing well in Mathematics.

- The DEIS plan for numeracy contains a wide range of effective strategies and interventions which are successfully implemented throughout the school. Features of very effective practice include a focus on mental Mathematics, use of concrete materials, problem-solving, differentiated group teaching, parental involvement, use of Maths Recovery and the consistent use of mathematics language. The mathematics rich environments are praiseworthy. Effective structures have been put in place to facilitate team teaching in Mathematics at every class level and very good communication is evident between class teachers and support teachers. To optimise the effectiveness of in-class support, it is recommended that teachers plan more specific roles and responsibilities for lesson introductions and conclusions.

3.3 *Partnership with Parents and Others*

- Targets are outlined for partnership with parents and others and a range of related actions has been identified to enable parental involvement in their children's education. These include the organisation of a variety of parent courses and the facilitation of parental participation in in-class literacy and numeracy strategies and a range of other in-school initiatives.
- The HSCL teacher is trusted by the parents and they spoke positively of the partnership that exists between home and the school. 100% of parents surveyed feel welcome in the school and a very high percentage indicated that their children like coming to school and are doing well in school. There is very good communication with parents regarding their child's progress academically, the difficulties and successes which they experience and specific interventions which they attend. In addition, results of standardised tests are shared with and explained to parents.
- As part of the review of the DEIS plan, the school should consider using data to formulate more specific and measurable targets for involvement with parents or groups of parents with a view to quantifiably evaluating the impact of programmes and interventions in this area.

4 DEIS Planning Process

- A very successful and collaborative approach to planning is adopted in the DEIS planning process. It involves meetings between staff, DEIS cuiditheoirí and external personnel. The pivotal role of the in-school management team is praised in this process. In-school committees research new approaches, up-skill staff members, review successes and target areas for development.
- The DEIS plan outlines clear and measurable targets for attendance, progression, reading and numeracy.
- All strategies and interventions are fit for purpose and relevant to the target area.
- There is a clear commitment by the whole staff to achieving agreed targets and implementing DEIS interventions.
- Measurable improvement has been made by the school with regard to attendance, progression, reading and numeracy. In that context, the school's achievements with regard to numeracy and writing are particularly noteworthy.

5 Conclusions

Among the positive features of the DEIS planning process in this school are the following:

- The strong curriculum leadership provided by the principal and members of the in-school management team and support teachers facilitates the successful implementation of interventions for literacy, numeracy, attendance and partnership with parents and others.
- The positive school climate, code of discipline and the highly organised and stimulating learning environment contribute significantly to the achievement of targets set out in the DEIS plan.
- The willingness of teachers to become involved in new initiatives and the implementation of these initiatives in a very structured and very successful manner is commendable.
- The school has made good progress in raising pupil attainment levels in literacy and numeracy.

Aspects of the DEIS planning process that require development in this school include:

- In order to develop the school's interventions and strategies in the DEIS numeracy plan, it is recommended that roles and responsibilities be established between support teachers and class teachers in the co-teaching model of in-class support.
- As a means of extending literacy further, it is recommended that targets for oral language are devised in the context of the school's DEIS plan, and a comprehensive and structured oral language programme is put in place and implemented throughout 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 of Management and staff would like to take this opportunity to thank the inspectors for the professional and courteous manner in which the DEIS evaluation was undertaken. The Board welcomes the extremely positive findings of the report which affirms the commitment, dedication, expertise and excellent work of the school staff. The Board is very pleased that while the main focus of the report is on DEIS and DEIS planning, it also acknowledges the positive school climate and code of behaviour as significant contributory factors in achieving targets set out in the DEIS plan. The Board would like to congratulate the whole school staff and express its appreciation to the parents for their contribution.

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

We welcome the recommendations for further development.

Changes have been made to optimise the benefit of the co-teaching model of in-class support and roles and responsibilities have been clarified.

We wanted to ensure that the First Steps Writing and Reading programmes were being fully implemented before introducing the First Steps Oral Language Programme. A structured oral language programme is currently being introduced.