

**ST. ATTRACTA'S SENIOR NATIONAL SCHOOL
MEADOWBROOK, DUBLIN 16**



**SCHOOL SELF-EVALUATION REPORT 2013
& SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PLAN (SIP)**

LITERACY

UIMHIR ROLLA: 19716B

EVALUATION PERIOD: SEPTEMBER 2012 – JUNE 2013

REPORT ISSUE DATE (BOM): NOVEMBER 2013



**SCOIL SHINSIREACH NAOMH ATRACHT
CLUAIN GHLAISE, ÁTH CLIATH 16
UIMHIR ROLLA: 19716B**

School Self-Evaluation Report 2013 – Literacy

St. Attracta's Senior National School, Meadowbrook, Dublin 16.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Focus of the Evaluation

A school self-evaluation of teaching and learning in St. Attracta's Senior National School was undertaken during the period *September 2012 to June 2013*. During the evaluation, teaching and learning in the area of LITERACY was evaluated. This is a report on the findings of the evaluation.

School Context

St. Attracta's Senior National School is a Catholic co-educational primary school which provides a happy caring and secure learning environment for boys and girls from 3rd to 6th class. Our current enrolment is 330 pupils: 170 boys (52%) and 160 girls (48%). We have a total of 21 teachers (including Principal) and eight of these teachers work as support teachers for literacy, numeracy and special needs. We also have four Special Needs Assistants and we value the support and involvement of parents.

Our pupils come from a variety of backgrounds and our primary catchment area is Meadowbrook and Ballinteer, but it also covers Dundrum, Rathfarnham, Marley and Churchtown. We have many disadvantaged and we have a high proportion of special needs pupils in our mainstream school.

Traditionally, we have placed great emphasis on the area of literacy and we organised the first ever Book Week in our school back in 1984. That tradition of valuing reading and books has always been a hallmark of our school.

As we embark on a new literacy project, we hope to benefit from the professional expertise of the PDST and the SESS in the new school year (2013-2014). One of our teachers - Mr. Bennet Kirwan - took on the role of Literacy Link Teacher and with a committee of teachers he worked on our specific literacy project.

2. THE FINDINGS

A review of the teaching of literacy began during the 2012/13 school year. During a staff meeting, a discussion was initiated on the teaching and learning of Literacy in our school, facilitated by the findings of teachers' questionnaires. We also distributed detailed questionnaires to parents and pupils.

Our evaluation of teaching and learning in literacy was based on both qualitative and quantitative inquiry:

- ✚ Teacher questionnaires (Appendix A)
- ✚ Pupil questionnaires (Appendix B)
- ✚ Parent questionnaires (Appendix C)
- ✚ Staff dialogue
- ✚ An analysis of standardised test results.

Teacher Questionnaires

The main areas of strength and challenge outlined by teachers were:

Strengths

- ✚ A positive attitude throughout the school to the promotion of all aspects of literacy
- ✚ Very good and consistent scoring on Standardised Tests in relation to national norms
- ✚ A huge emphasis on and encouragement of reading and book-related activities and events (DEAR, Book Week, Real Books, Paired reading, Buddy reading, Book Fairs, etc.)
- ✚ Success in particular with writing narrative fiction i.e. creative writing where the focus is on the process not just the finished product.
- ✚ A strong and committed learning support team and a strong tradition of providing learning support in English
- ✚ A well-resourced central school library as well as individual class libraries
- ✚ A very successful Literacy Hour introduced in 2011
- ✚ A strong investment in literacy resources
- ✚ Oral fluency has been accorded a higher status than previously.
- ✚ Emphasis on grammar and comprehension

Challenges:

- ✚ Comprehension skills/strategies don't seem to match reading vocabulary in the case of some pupils on standardised test results
- ✚ Continuity and progression in approaches from 3rd to 6th class.
- ✚ Writing fluency across all genres - essays, debates, recipes, rules, letters, story etc.
- ✚ Carelessness in applying conventions of writing to functional writing - sentence structure, punctuation, spelling, grammar
- ✚ Modelling of good writing across all genres
- ✚ Spelling strategies
- ✚ Poetry - time for appreciation and composition; use of resources
- ✚ Vocabulary development and oral language to develop imagination for stories

Summary of the findings from the Teachers' Review of Literacy

In the initial stages of our research, teachers sought to identify general areas of strength and challenge in the teaching and learning of literacy. A glance at the results showed that a majority of the strengths related to reading, while many of the challenges related to writing.

Following staff discussion, it was agreed that the focus of our evaluation would be on writing. However, it was only when we issued questionnaires to parents and pupils that we identified strengths and areas for development within the broad area of writing.

Parent Questionnaires

Having identified that writing would be the focus of our self-evaluation in literacy, we sent all parents a questionnaire, to which we had a 68% response rate. The following findings emerged:

- Parents were generally very happy with how the school was developing their children's writing.
- The vast majority reported that presentation of work was important and that their children took pride in a job well done.
- The areas of writing which required attention varied from child to child, but parents were very aware of where improvement was needed in their own child's work.
- They gave very positive comments to the work of teachers and indicated that they are fully supportive of the work we are doing.
- Many parents found it difficult to identify areas of improvement. However the richness of responses generally has given us guidelines for the future.
- They revealed that the areas of writing their children most enjoyed were stories, poems and projects more than the other genres of writing.
- Yet when children write outside of school, it is often the genres other than narrative writing which they choose, e.g. cards, letters, poems, quizzes, recipes, notes, invitations, personal diaries, songs, scripts, mini plays, profiling, posters, lists and projects, pictures, doodles, music, cartoons/comic strips and mini graphic novels.

Pupil Questionnaires

A pupil questionnaire was administered to all classes. Child friendly language and a 'tick the box' approach was used from 3rd - 6th. Pupils were also asked open-ended questions about literacy. The questionnaires focused on attitudes to writing and spelling, implementation of the mechanics of writing, confidence in the writing genres and presentation of work.

- The vast majority of pupils like writing stories, they plan the stories before writing them, they re-read and edit them and once they start writing, their ideas begin to flow.
- However, they find starting stories difficult, they don't always use paragraphs and they could use richer vocabulary when writing.
- The findings in relation to grammar, punctuation, spellings and use of dictionary/thesaurus were interesting if not conclusive, but they will be used to inform our practice in the future. What did emerge was the fact that as children progressed from 3rd to 6th their confidence and competence grew in these areas.
- On the other hand, confidence in the various writing genres was lower than expected and children liked writing stories less as they progressed through the school

STANDARDISED TEST RESULTS IN LITERACY

An analysis of the **Drumcondra Primary Reading** standardised test results show that:

- Children in our school score within or exceed expectations with regard to national norms in English. In comparison with national norms there are 33% of our whole school population in the cohort of high attainment (PR 85 and above)
- Only 8% of our whole school population are currently in the low range of attainment (PR 16 and below) in comparison to 16% nationally.

3. PROGRESS MADE ON PREVIOUSLY IDENTIFIED IMPROVEMENT TARGETS

- The introduction of a literacy hour in 2011 has helped give more individual attention to pupils and has provided more opportunities for focussed work on vocabulary development, comprehension and listening to children reading every day. This work is ongoing.
- The success of this project has prompted teachers to adapt their teaching approaches in the area of literacy. Therefore, comprehension and vocabulary development will be targeted over the next two years.

4. SUMMARY OF SCHOOL SELF-EVALUATION FINDINGS

4.1 Our school has strengths in the following areas:

- ✚ The responses from the parents' questionnaires indicate that parents in general are very happy with their children's learning in the area of literacy.
- ✚ Our children have a very positive attitude to literacy and are interested in improving their own work.
- ✚ Reading and reading-related activities are a particular strength in our school and have contributed to a high standard in this area.
- ✚ From the teacher's responses it is very clear that we have an innovative, forward-thinking and self-critical staff who reflect on their own practice with a view to improving teaching and learning outcomes.
- ✚ The model of learning support provided is positively received by class teachers, parents and pupils.
- ✚ The results of the DPRT tests confirm that our teaching of literacy has been successful to date. 65% of pupils score above the national norm.

4.2 The following areas are prioritised for improvement:

TARGET	ACTION
Teachers identified the need for a structured graduated approach to writing across all the writing genres.	Hard and soft copy writing genres folders were prepared and distributed so that similar approaches would be used by all teachers in all classes from 3 rd to 6 th .
It was agreed that modelling of the genres by teachers and samples of good writing from peers in the various genres would give the children more drive and determination to feel motivated about their writing.	Each child has a Writing Genre copy in which they can see their first attempts at each genre of writing as well as the progression they have made after each six-week block. A motivational wall of fame was introduced to both encourage good practices and to highlight excellent examples of children's work.
We ascertained that a framework for what we would like pupils to achieve from year to year was needed to ensure that all genres are covered and that continuity and progression is evident from 3 rd to 6 th class.	A six week framework covering all the various genres was agreed. See attached table dealing with narrative, procedural, persuasive, recount, socialise, report and explanatory writing. Appendix D

The DPRT standardised tests we use in English measure reading (Vocabulary and Comprehension) but they doesn't measure ability in writing in the same way. However in order to be able to monitor the quality of learner outcomes, we wanted to pre- and post-test the children's work. It was decided to select tracker children from each class and the principal would monitor their progress over a six-week period, by keeping a sample of their work before and after the teaching intervention. An improvement in the quality of work was clearly evident, so we decided to continue with this project for the medium-term.

4.3 Progress on legislative and regulatory requirements was as follows:

Very good progress has been made on the legislative and regulatory requirements outlined at Appendix E.

CONCLUSIONS

Having gathered all the evidence and having reflected on the strengths and challenges facing us, it was agreed that the focus for our School Improvement Plan in Literacy would be on the specific area of the Writing Genres.

A lesson learned: In hindsight, the scope of our analysis was too broad for the purposes of our specific School Improvement Plan on Literacy. However, the information collected from teachers, from parents and from pupils has been invaluable.

Ratification by BOM: _____ (date)

Signed: _____ (Príomh Oide)

Signed: _____ (Chairperson of BOM)

LITERACY QUESTIONNAIRE FOR TEACHERS – MARCH 2013

FOCUS ON WRITING

Your current class/other: Rang 3 Rang 4 Rang 5 Rang 6 LS Junior LS Senior

WRITING SKILLS: How effectively do we teach the following writing skills?

Very effectively Reasonably effectively Needs more attention

Fluency and legibility in handwriting including following the agreed Fallons' Handwriting Scheme

Functional and structural aspects of writing, e.g. sentence, punctuation, grammar, spelling etc.

Development of sentence structure (from basic sentences to super sentences to richness of language)

Writing for various audiences: teachers, classmates, community, website, competition, display, etc.

Writing across the various genres:

Narrative writing (to tell an imaginative story which may be based on fact, e.g. fairy tales, novels, fables)

Recount writing (to retell past experiences, e.g. My School Tour, St. Patrick's Day)

Procedural writing (to list step to follow in making or doing something, e.g. cooking, directions)

Report writing (to present factual information, e.g. facts on frogs)

Persuasive writing (to persuade others in debate or argument, e.g. Mobile phones should be banned.)

Explanatory writing (to explain how things work or came to be, e.g. how erosion occurs)

Writing to socialise (to communicate, e.g. invitations, greetings, notes, messages)

STRENGTHS & WEAKNESSES:

Generally speaking, what are our **strengths in the teaching** of writing?

What do you see as areas of concern in the **standard of writing achieved** by our pupils?

RESOURCES:

List the **main resources** you have **used** in your teaching of **writing this year**?

What other resources **do you need** in your teaching of **writing**?

What other resources does **the school more generally need** for the teaching of **writing**?

WHAT ONE ASPECT OF WRITING NEEDS IMPROVING IN HOW WE CURRENTLY TEACH WRITING?

DO YOU USE THE WRITING PROCESS AS A METHODOLOGY IN YOUR TEACHING OF WRITING?

YES NO IF YES

Appendix B Pupil Questionnaire - Junior

Class: 3rd Class

Please put an X in the box that best describes your answer

	Yes	No	Sometimes
I like writing stories			
I plan my stories before writing them			
I find it easy to come up with ideas for my stories			
It takes me a while to start writing my story as I don't know how to begin			
Once I start writing my story my ideas start to flow			
I have a beginning/middle/end to my stories			
I use paragraphs when writing			
I re-read my story after writing it to look for mistakes			
I find mistakes in my work that I need to correct			
I add more interesting words to my story after re-reading it			
I draft, edit and publish my work			

I feel confident writing:

	Yes	No	Sometimes
a postcard			
a letter			
a Diary entry			
a book review			
directions			
recipes			
instructions			
a summary of what I have read			
a character profile			
a newspaper report			
a poem			

Punctuation

I know when to use:	Yes	No	Sometimes	I remember to use:	Yes	No	Some times
Capital letters				Capital letters			
Full stops				Full stops			
Commas				Commas			
Apostrophes				Apostrophes			
Speech marks				Speech marks			
Question marks				Question marks			
Exclamation marks				Exclamation marks			

Grammar

I understand what the following words mean:	Yes	No	I use the following in my writing:	Yes	No	Sometimes
Noun			Nouns			
Verb			Verbs			
Adjective			Adjectives			
Pronoun			Pronouns			
Adverb			Adverbs			
Preposition			Prepositions			

I know how to use:	Yes	No	I use the following in my work:	Yes	No	Some times
A dictionary			A dictionary			
A thesaurus			A thesaurus			

Spellings

	Yes	No	Some times
I use the 'Look, Say, Cover, Write, Check' method when learning my spellings			
When learning my spellings I ask someone at home to call out the word and then I spell the word			
I say the letters out loud before writing them down			
As I write down my spellings I 'see' the letters in my mind			
I get worried before my spelling test on a Friday morning			
I find spelling tests easy but I make spelling mistakes when writing my stories			
	Yes	No	Maybe
I would prefer not to have a Friday spelling test			

Presentation

I remember to:	Yes	No	Some times
title my work			
date my work			
use neat writing			
begin my sentence beside the margin			
write on the line			
write clearly (close my letters)			
use pencil or blue or black pen when writing			
rule my page			
leave a clear space between each word when I am writing			
space out my writing (start on a new page when beginning a new piece of writing, skip lines after writing answers to questions etc.)			
draw a line under my work when I am finished writing			

Any other comments: (What do you like dislike about writing?)

Appendix C

PARENTS' QUESTIONNAIRE on WRITING

Dear Parent/Guardian,

We are reviewing the teaching and learning of **English Writing** in our school.

We would be most grateful for your input in this process. Please fill out this short questionnaire, the results of which will remain both anonymous and confidential. Please return on **Friday 15th March** or at the latest by **Tuesday 19th March** to your child's teacher.

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire. This information will prove invaluable in the positive development of both teaching and learning in our school.



Le gach dea ghúí,

Muireann Máirtín, Príomh Oide

1. What areas of writing does your child enjoy?

(sentences, paragraphs, essays, stories, poems, projects, recipes, letters, diaries, etc. etc. etc.)

2. Does your child enjoy handwriting and presenting their work well?

Yes No

3. What area(s) of writing, if any, does your child need help with?

4. How do you think the school can further develop your child's writing?

5. Does your child write at home (apart from schoolwork)?

Yes No

If yes, what kind of writing do they do outside school?

6. Any other comments or suggestions on the area of writing?