

Harold's Cross N.S.
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School Self-Evaluation Report

Cycle 2 of School Improvement Planning in the Subject Area of Literacy

(June 2019)

School Self-Evaluation Report - Cycle 2 – Literacy (June 2019)

The focus of the evaluation:

A second school self-evaluation of teaching and learning in the subject area of literacy took place throughout the 2018-2019 school year. This was in preparation for the development of our second School Improvement Plan following on from the implementation of our original one of 2016-2019 using the new SSE approach. The following is the report on the findings of this second evaluation.

School Context:

Harold's Cross NS is a vertical mixed school. We currently have 397 pupils on roll, an increase of over one hundred and fifty pupils since undertaking our last evaluation. There are now twenty five teachers on staff comprising fifteen class teachers, seven fulltime and one shared SEN teacher, a full time HSCL coordinator and an administrative principal. The school also has five SNAs who between them support twelve to fifteen pupils throughout the school.

2. The Findings:

- As identified as an area of need in our last School Self-Evaluation Report, oral language development was and continues to be a key area of concern. Currently in each class, two timetabled, discrete oral language lessons are taught weekly. Children are provided with a wide variety of language experiences. With the continued implementation of the revised Primary Language Curriculum it is envisaged that the children will have ample opportunities to continue to improve both their expressive and receptive language skills.
- Since tracking the scale scores of our oral language tracker children using the Drumcondra English Profiles, substantial progress has been made.
- We have a highly structured, whole-school approach to the implementation of First Steps and Building Bridges of Understanding and it is clear that these strategies have impacted positively on comprehension and on writing skills. Scores are within and even slightly above national norms. However, having reviewed previous years standardised tests and having compared them to general day-to-day observations and class based exercises, it is evident that comprehension is still an area of difficulty for many children.

Teacher Feedback:

With the introduction and implementation of the revised Primary Language Curriculum, an even greater focus has been placed on the central role of oral language. Once again sections of the School Self-Evaluation document were used to ascertain if teachers felt pupils were progressing in line with expectations in their oral language development and to ascertain progress across the board in relation to Literacy. A SWOT analysis was carried out by staff and they were asked for feedback in relation to areas that they felt the pupils were struggling.

Findings:

- Children are generally highly engaged and enthusiastic learners.
- The teaching and learning in the area of Literacy is of a high standard.
- Class and SEN teachers work collaboratively in planning and delivering the curriculum.

- The DEIS Literacy Plan is a very practical and highly structured document which is used to outline planning across the classes.
- Standardised test results in English are very positive and show clear evidence of the impact of the various, highly structured initiatives that are in place throughout the school, eg. First Steps, Power Hour, Building Bridges of Understanding, Jolly Grammar etc.
- The varying needs and abilities of pupils at the lower and middle levels are catered for primarily through differentiation within the class but also by withdrawal methods.
- The teachers feel that the focus placed on oral language development has been very beneficial and worthwhile since our last School Self-Evaluation in Literacy in 2016. Noticeable improvements have been evident and the children have developed a much greater confidence in speaking out and listening to each other. There have been improvements in relation to how children understand, recognise and use speaker-listener social cues. This indeed has been an area of specific focus for many SEN teachers taking EBD and social skills groups.
- Teachers felt that having two timetabled, discreet oral language lessons per week is working well and allows for integration and linkage with other areas. Pupils are given frequent opportunities to engage in oral language activities which allows for cooperative and collaborative learning.
- There has been a consistent improvement in children's writing since the implementation of First Steps throughout the school. Good progress is being made in each of the writing genres and teachers generally feel the structure of following three genres per year is working well. In the junior end, some teachers have found some of the genres quite difficult but on the whole, feedback was very positive. The introduction of cursive writing from junior infants has been working well and the standard of written work is improving although we need to make sure it does not slip in the older classes.
- Team/collaborative teaching occurs in the junior classes through the implementation of Power Hour and Aistear. The SEN team and class teachers collaborate on the drawing up of IEPs. Pupils with specific speech and language difficulties are targeted at an early age where resources allow and language recommendations sourced from outside agencies such as the HSE are implemented when given.
- Assessment and Support profiles are drawn up on all pupils receiving SEN supports. Teacher observation and feedback is a strong aspect of assessment among the staff. Staff use assessment of and assessment for learning and learning intentions are shared with the pupils.

Concerns: While the mechanics of reading is generally at an acceptable level overall, fluency, rate and comprehension are areas that need attention. The pupils' ability to comprehend the meanings of words often results in lower levels of comprehension than would be expected. The interest levels in relation to reading for pleasure is also an area of concern which is evident in the declining results in standardised tests as the children move from first to sixth class. This is particularly evident among the boys.

Pupil Feedback:

A focus group of pupils from fourth, fifth and sixth class took place in April 2019 to ascertain attitudes in relation to oral language and also to gather some feedback on their oral language skills

given the focus that had been placed on oral language over the past number of years. In selecting the children for the focus group we decided to select three of our oral language tracker children, one high, middle and low from each class from fourth to sixth.

All children felt that the development of oral language is an important skill as being able to communicate with others is something that is necessary in everyday life. They noted the importance of being a good listener as well as a proficient speaker. The children named a number of language learning experiences that they are exposed to regularly and they discussed their understanding of the purposes and functions of communication. All children felt that they are good speakers but were divided on how good they were at listening to others.

All children felt they are able to discuss and identify the different methods of demonstrating appropriate body language, eye contact, hand gestures etc. They also all felt that they could argue well for or against a topic.

When questioned in relation to reading, those at the higher level said that they loved reading and that they engaged in it on a regular basis at home nightly and over the weekend. Those in the middle and lower bands reported that they did not read much at home, if at all. If they read it was usually the material assigned by teachers. Many of the boys said they never read at home but usually engaged in gaming or online activities. This was quite a disturbing finding. Staff were aware that pupils spent considerable time engaging with social media and online activities but did not quite realise the negative impact it was having on reading.

Progress made on previously-identified improvement targets.

***Standardised Testing:** Standardised test results over the past number of years have been very positive despite a fall this year. Back in 2012 results of the MICRA-T showed that only 48% of pupils scored above the 50th Percentile Rank. Now, in May of 2019, 60% of pupils scored above the 50th Percentile Rank

We are currently at the end of our current three year DEIS SIP plan in Literacy. On a closer analysis of our current plan, we can see that definite improvements have been made. Our baseline figure from the start of our three year plan in May 2016 identified that 59% of pupils scored above the 50th Percentile Rank. In May 2017 this figure rose to 62%. In May 2018 this further increased to 66%. Unfortunately this figure dropped to 60% in May 2019. We are unsure what the cause of this significant drop is. Despite this drop we still managed to gain an overall 2% increase over the three year cycle.

Oral Language Scale Scores: Since engaging in the first cycle of School Self-Evaluation in Literacy and having identified Oral Language as an area in which to focus, we have been using the Oral Language Indicators and Scale Scores of the Drumcondra English Profiles to track progress in oral language.

Our baseline scores of May 2016 showed that 6% of pupils had a scale score from 1-3, 37% of pupils had a scale score from 4-7 and 57% of pupils had a scale score from 8-10.

Our current figures from May 2019 show that 0% of pupils had a scale score from 1-3, 29% of pupils had a scale score from 4-7 and 71% of pupils had a scale score from 8-10.

This shows a full 6% decrease to 0% in the lower band, a 14% improvement in the top band. There was an 8% decrease in the middle band which was as a direct result of the increase in the upper end. (Appendix 2)

Summary of school Self- Evaluation findings:

- The DEIS SIP Literacy Plan is a very practical and highly structured document which is used to provide a structured approach to planning across the classes. The school's SIPs over the years have resulted in more focused approaches to the teaching and learning of literacy within the school.
- Staff engage in a very positive manner with the school self-evaluation process and in implementing SIPs as they are developed.
- Staff need to continue to place emphasis on the development of Oral Language skills throughout the school.
- Staff are concerned about the decline in attainment levels in the reading ages of pupils especially in the fifth and sixth classes. The amount of time spent by the older pupils and increasingly younger ones on social media/gaming etc. is having a hugely negative impact on reading standards

Areas for Prioritization:

1. Reading
2. Continued focus on Oral Language
3. Continued focus on Comprehension

The following legislative and regulatory requirements need to be addressed

Ongoing review of the school's Child Safeguarding and Risk Assessment Policies.