



Mount Anville Montessori
Junior School

SCHOOL EXTERNAL REVIEW REPORT



DATE OF REPORT: 16th MARCH 2016

MOUNT ANVILLE MONTESSORI JUNIOR SCHOOL, MOUNT ANVILLE ROAD, GOATSTOWN, DUBLIN 14

1. Introduction

Mount Anville Montessori Junior School (MAMJS) is a Catholic, fee-charging school located on an extensive educational campus on Mount Anville Road in Goatstown, Dublin 14. Mount Anville Girls' Secondary School is also on this site. The school is under the patronage of the Mount Anville Sacred Heart Education Trust. Originally, Mount Anville Montessori Junior School comprised two separate schools – Mount Anville Montessori School and Mount Anville Junior School, then during the school year 2009-2010 the two schools amalgamated. Now MAMJS caters for boys and girls between the ages of three and four and for girls only from age five upwards.

The school's mission statement notes that it aims to "educate the whole person as a responsible member of society, confident of personal worth, actively living out Christ's call to know and share His Love." It also aims to "provide the environment for development in every sphere, spiritual, physical, emotional, social, intellectual, artistic and moral." In addition to using the Montessori approach and teaching all subjects of the Primary School Curriculum, MAMJS provides for its pupils a wide range of morning and afternoon sporting, cultural and social activities. Currently, there are 459 children enrolled in the school. Attendance is carefully monitored and attendance rates are very good. The school staff comprises an administrative principal, an administrative deputy principal, 20 classroom teachers, two part-time and two full-time support teachers, four specialist teachers - a Sports Co-ordinator/ Physical Education teacher, a second teacher for Physical Education, a teacher for Music and a teacher for Drama. In addition, the school employs five classroom assistants, a number of administrative personnel and aftercare assistants. The qualifications of staff are in line with relevant legislation and best practice.

2. Review Methodology

This report has been compiled on foot of a request by the Board of Management of MAMJS to review the management of the school and the education it provides. The reviewers engaged in a range of activities during February and early March 2016. An initial meeting with the principal and teachers on the Board of Management provided an opportunity to discuss the review process; further meetings were held with members of the Parents' Council, the principal and deputy principal, the school bursar, the teaching staff, the chairperson of the Board of Management, teachers with special duties posts, learning-support teachers and focus groups of pupils. The quality of teaching and learning in all curriculum areas - Irish, English, Mathematics, Social, Environmental and Scientific Education, Social, Personal and Health Education, Arts Education and PE - was reviewed. In addition, the quality of school management, school planning and support for pupils with additional educational needs was examined. Various additional activities, provided as an option for pupils, were also observed. Following the completion of the in-school phase of the review, separate meetings were held with the Board of Management and the teachers to present the outcomes of the review and to discuss the recommendations. A draft report was submitted to the school for factual verification before the final report was issued.

3. Summary of Findings and Recommendations for Further Development

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

- A positive, supportive learning environment, underpinned by a strong commitment to the Sacred Heart goals encompassed in Faith, Character, Intellect, Community and Social Awareness informs the work of the school.
- The school is managed effectively by the Board of Management and is supported by a dedicated and diligent Parents' Council.
- The principal and deputy principal provide very effective leadership to the school and set high standards in terms of educational expectations and school organisation.
- Teachers provide a stimulating learning environment in their classrooms and the overall quality of teaching and learning is very good. Pupils were seen to be enthusiastic, courteous and eager to learn.
- Literacy and numeracy skills are developed to a very high standard and the results of standardised tests indicate that achievement in English and Mathematics is very good.
- Very commendable work is being done by staff in developing a comprehensive whole-school plan for the delivery of the curriculum and the organisation of school activities.
- A very supportive school environment has been created to foster pupils' interest in learning and using Irish.
- A broad range of learning experiences is provided for pupils with commendable opportunities to engage in morning and afternoon musical, sporting and language activities.
- Very effective use is made of the school's rich natural environment to foster the pupils' sense of environmental awareness and care. The school is very well resourced; all classrooms are equipped with modern IT display facilities and the quality of education is enriched by the use of a very fine school library and extensive sports facilities.

The following **main recommendations** are made:

- To facilitate the implementation of the whole-school plan, each teacher should now prepare a long-term plan for each curriculum area to ensure that the strands and strand units of the curriculum are delivered in a balanced and timely manner throughout the school year.
- The work undertaken by specialist teachers in Music and Drama should be supplemented by class teachers to ensure that the appropriate time allocation, as set out in the Primary School Curriculum 1999, is afforded to each of these areas.

4. Quality of School Management

The Board of Management comprises eight people appointed by the trustees as follows: four directly nominated by the trustees; one parent elected by the parents of children in the Montessori Department (from pre-school to second class); one parent elected by parents of children the Junior Department (from third to sixth class); and two teachers - one nominee from the Montessori Department and one from the Junior Department. The principal and deputy principal also attend board meetings as non-voting members. The members of the board are appointed for a period of three years.

All board members are committed to providing a high quality education for the pupils of the school. The board meets regularly, keeps careful records of meetings and attends appropriately to all management matters as they arise. The board oversees the school planning process, contributes to policy development and ratifies policies when they have been agreed and sanctioned. The bursar, who is the financial officer for MAMJS and Mount Anville Secondary School, has responsibility for all the financial decisions and transactions of the school. Appropriate arrangements are in place to ensure professional external oversight of all school accounts. Very good provision has been made in terms of educational facilities and resources; the school building is well maintained and educational resources are renewed as required. In addition, the board takes a particular interest in staff development and provides for the continuing professional development of its teachers. Furthermore, the board ensures that the school's trustees are fully apprised of all school activities.

The school is supported by a dynamic and effective Parents' Council representing parents from all class grades. The council is centrally involved in school life and actively supports the school's educational provision and ethos through participation in the school's sports committee, green committee and ethos committee. The council also supports the raising of funds for a number of charities each year.

Communications between home and school are very good. Each September, parents are invited to their child's classroom to meet the class teacher and to be informed about expectations, protocols and curriculum content for the forthcoming year. Formal parent-teacher meetings are held in November and February. A full school report is sent to parents at the end of the school year and an interim progress report is furnished at Christmas. In addition, the school operates an open-door policy where parents are welcome to discuss their child's progress with the class teacher by appointment at any time. A Newsletter is issued each term and homework journals also help to foster good communication between home and school.

The principal and deputy principal, both of whom have been assigned full-time administrative responsibilities by the board, operate very well together as a leadership team. They have overseen considerable change and development in the recent past and they manage the day-to-day operation of the school in a sensitive and professional manner ensuring that the educational wellbeing of pupils is foremost in all their plans and decisions. Effective school planning and self-evaluation processes have been put in place and considerable progress has been made in completing a

comprehensive school plan for most curriculum areas. In addition, all organisational arrangements are carefully structured and one senses an orderly and purposeful atmosphere throughout the school where timetables for the provision of in-school and out-of-school activities run smoothly. During the review, pupils were seen to be very mannerly, motivated and eager to do their best in all facets of their learning. In addition to good provision for the academic development of pupils, their social and emotional wellbeing is of primary concern to the school. A caring, nurturing culture pervades the school's activities where effort and participation are celebrated as much as achievement and success.

In the recent past, a middle-management structure has been put in place with three teachers assigned leadership responsibilities on a whole-school basis for some curriculum areas and aspects of school organisation. The principal and deputy principal meet regularly with the middle-management team and a coherent whole-school approach is taken to curriculum innovation and the development of new organisational structures.

5. Quality of School Planning and Self-evaluation

Very commendable work has been done in the area of whole-school planning. The planning process is well established and all teachers engage enthusiastically in reviewing, designing and agreeing plans for the delivery of the curriculum and the organisation of effective practices throughout the school. Considerable progress has been made to date and a whole-school plan for most areas of the curriculum has been devised. In addition, a realistic but ambitious development plan has been put in place and a timetable for further development set out. The whole-school plan also sets out procedures and practice in areas that are statutorily required including a safety statement, child protection policy, enrolment policy, data protection policy and code of behaviour. In order to build on this solid foundation, it is recommended that whole-school plans for all outstanding aspects of the curriculum be devised with suggested curriculum content for each class level included.

Teachers collaborate with similar grade colleagues to devise short-term, fortnightly plans for the delivery of the curriculum in their own classrooms. Teachers' long-term plans are generally replicated from the whole-school plan. To further develop this aspect of the school's work, it is recommended that each teacher should prepare long-term plans, using the whole-school plan and the Primary School Curriculum as starting points, to ensure that the strands and strand units of each curriculum area are delivered in a balanced and timely manner throughout the school year.

6. Quality of Teaching, Learning and Pupil Achievement

In MAMJS, teachers follow the Montessori Philosophy and the Primary School Curriculum (1999). Overall, the quality of teaching and learning is very good. Pupils engage in a wide variety of educational experiences and suitable resources are available to support the work. Pupils' achievements across the curriculum are celebrated and many fine examples of their work are displayed in classrooms and in

the public areas of the school. In addition, many sporting and cultural activities are provided which enrich the educational experience of pupils. Teachers have high expectations for the quality of their pupils' work and a culture that values effort, achievement and success is apparent. The quality of pupils' written work in copybooks and projects is generally very good. In all classrooms, pupils were observed, in accordance with best practice, engaged in active and collaborative learning, working in pairs or small groups facilitated by teaching methods and lesson content that matched pupils' abilities.

In order to enhance the work further, it is recommended that the process of transition from the Montessori 3 – 6 group, where pupils engage in a good deal of hands-on work on an individual basis, to first class, where more group-based learning activities are organised, be reviewed. It is important to balance the focus on individual learning with the benefits gained through engaging in whole-class and group activities.

Language

In addition to the curriculum subjects of Gaeilge and English, opportunities are provided for pupils to learn other languages including Spanish and French during early morning classes for third to sixth classes and during the school day from "Afternooners" level to second class. The focus of learning in these classes is on the spoken language. The attendance at these classes, which are optional from third to sixth, reflects the interest that pupils and their parents have in acquiring additional language skills and the school is to be commended for widening pupils' learning experiences in this way.

Gaeilge

Cruthaítear timpeallacht an-tacúil do fhoghlaim na Gaeilge tríd an scoil. Cloiseann na daltaí an teanga in úsáid go nádúrtha ag oidí agus feiceann siad líon mór fógraí i nGaeilge thart timpeall na scoile. Sna ranganna do pháistí óga bíonn an teanga fite fuaite sa chumarsáid le linn na ngníomhaíochtaí foghlama. Sna ceachtanna foirmeálta Gaeilge baintear úsáid as an nGaeilge go leanúnach mar theanga an teagaisc. Leagtar béim inmholta ar bhunstruchtúir na teanga a mhúineadh agus díritear aird ar leith ar theagasc na mbriathar.

Léiríonn na daltaí tuiscint mhaith ar an nGaeilge ó bhéal. Aithrisíonn siad cnuasach breá dánta agus amhrán go han-taitneamhach agus le dea-fhoghraíocht. Cleachtar modhanna oiriúnacha teagaisc chun scileanna cumarsáide na ndaltaí a chothú. Baintear úsáid go rialta as ceistiúchán le linn obair i bpéirí. Freagraíonn daltaí tríd an scoil ceisteanna a bhaineann leo féin agus lena saolta go líofa, nádúrtha. Nuair a thugtar deis do dhaltaí scéalta beaga a chumadh, is léir go bhfuil foclóir leathan ag cuid acu. Is léir ó shamplaí den obair scríofa a breathnaíodh go dtugtar deis do na daltaí scríbhneoireacht fheidhmiúil a chleachtadh go rialta.

Chun tógáil anois ar an dea-obair atá ar siúl, moltar feidhm a bhaint as an scéalaíocht agus as léitheoireacht lasmuigh de na téacsleabhair chun saibhreas teanga a chothú. Níor mhiste freisin deiseanna a thabhairt do na daltaí scríbhneoireacht phearsanta a chleachtadh go rialta.

A very supportive environment for learning Irish has been created throughout the school. Pupils hear teachers using the language in a natural manner and they see a wide range of notices in Irish all around the school. In classes for the younger pupils the language is interwoven in communication during learning activities. During formal Irish lessons the language is used continually as a medium of instruction. Commendable emphasis is placed on teaching the basic language structures and particular attention is paid to teaching verbs and tenses.

Pupils demonstrate a good understanding of spoken Irish. They recite a fine collection of poems and songs very pleasantly and with good pronunciation. Suitable methodologies are used to develop pupils' communicative skills. Questioning is used frequently during pair-work. Pupils throughout the school respond fluently and naturally to questions about themselves and their lives. Given the opportunity to create simple stories in Irish it is evident that some pupils have a wide vocabulary. It is clear from reviewing samples of pupils' written work that they have regular opportunities to engage in functional writing tasks.

To build on the good work that is taking place it is recommended that further use be made of story and reading materials outside of textbooks to foster language enrichment. Pupils should also be given opportunities to engage regularly in personal writing activities.

English

Extensive work has been undertaken in reviewing practices and methodologies for the teaching of English throughout the school. A comprehensive literacy plan has been developed to guide the delivery of the English curriculum. It is evident that through a staff collaborative process, teachers engaged with the various strands and strand units of the curriculum and set out clearly the skills to be acquired by pupils at each class level.

The quality of teaching and learning in English throughout the school is very good. Circle time with the younger pupils provides opportunities to develop language skills. These activities were well managed and pupils contributed confidently to discussions and listened attentively to their peers and their teachers. Further development of oral language skills was evident as pupils progressed through the school and had the experience of engaging in talk and discussion in all areas of the curriculum. Opportunities were provided for pupils to gain confidence through presenting their work to their peers. Pupils expressed themselves clearly and articulately in a respectful manner and displayed a good command of oral language.

The print-rich environment created throughout the school supports the development of reading skills. Phonological awareness is fostered during group activities with the younger pupils. There is a strong reading culture in the school and the attractive and well-stocked school library and class libraries encourage pupils to read for pleasure. Formal reading activities, observed during the review, were very well structured. Well-selected novels fostered pupils' interest in the reading material. Many of the comprehension strategies outlined in the Literacy Plan were used to good effect to deepen pupils' understanding of the text. Text was used effectively as a stimulus for

vocabulary enrichment and for developing dictionary skills. There was also a very good focus on developing pupils' critical thinking skills during language lessons in English.

An agreed whole-school approach to the development of handwriting skills results in the fine penmanship evidenced in pupils' written work. The structured approach to teaching the conventions of punctuation and grammar, as outlined in the school plan, is to be commended. Pupils engage in both functional and personal writing activities across a range of curriculum areas. A review of copybooks and displays of pupils' writing, provides evidence of writing in a variety of genres. Among some younger pupils it is suggested that regular opportunities to engage in personal writing activity will enhance their creative writing skills. Word banks of frequently used words displayed in the classroom could support pupils in this endeavour.

Mathematics

The overall rationale, vision and aims for Mathematics have been set out in the school plan. Up to second class, the Maria Montessori philosophy with regard to the teaching of mathematics is foremost in the teaching approaches used. Children use the bespoke Montessori equipment to good effect to discover concepts of number, length, width and height and they are taught the associated mathematical language. Further up the school, the school plan sets out an agreed whole-school approach to the teaching of mathematical procedures such as subtraction, long multiplication and time calculations. There is also a unified approach to assessment with standardised tests (SIGMA-T tests in April/May) administered from first class up each year.

Effective teaching during Mathematics lessons was observed with teachers explaining the core concepts clearly using hands-on, practical resources. The interactive white board was also used to good effect in classrooms to illustrate mathematical concepts or to demonstrate mathematical procedures. Due emphasis is given to oral work in Mathematics while pupils' work in copybooks is well presented and carefully monitored. In many classrooms, pupils were observed engaging in real-life problem solving, using appropriate materials and working in a co-operative manner.

To further develop this work, it is recommended that the school should review the approach whereby very young pupils proceed to completing calculations involving multiplication and division before such operations are recommended in the Primary School Curriculum. While it is acknowledged that the children are able to correctly complete these operations using the appropriate equipment, it is not certain that they fully understand the concepts or are able to apply them to problem-solving situations in a real-life context. It is recommended that the school should proceed at a slower pace in line with the curriculum thus ensuring that mathematical concepts are deeply rooted and that a firm understanding of place value is well embedded before the range of concepts is extended.

Social, Environmental and Scientific Education (SESE)

Recently developed whole-school plans for History, Geography and Science form the basis for individual teachers' planning for the delivery of the SESE curriculum. Yearly plans developed for various class levels reflect the breadth and balance in the content of the programmes taught. An excellent environmental trail in the grounds of Mount

Anville proves a very rich resource for developing pupils' understanding of, and the need to care for, the natural environment. It also provides an ideal resource for integrating pupils' learning in History, Geography and Science. A variety of booklets has been prepared to focus learning when using this resource, and guided trails have been timetabled for each class. An active Green Committee, representative of pupils, parents and teachers has successfully achieved three Green Flags. Work currently underway in seeking to gain a Biodiversity Flag is of a very high quality. Individual class projects to increase pupils' knowledge of biodiversity reflect very well on the breadth and depth of learning involved.

The extensive project work undertaken in History, Geography and Science reflects the wide range of topics that are explored at the different class levels. Pupils' individual and group projects are of a very high quality and are shared and celebrated through displays in classrooms and corridors. Topics for projects reflect pupils' own interest, topics covered in the class and current historical commemorations. Collaboration between parents and their children in developing some of these projects enhances the links parents have with their child's learning. Lessons observed in History, Geography and Science were of a high quality. Pupils' previously acquired knowledge was the starting point for further learning in the topics to be explored. Very good use was made of visual stimuli to enrich learning. Talk and discussion featured largely during lessons and appropriate emphasis was placed on using terminology specific to the topics.

Arts Education

Significant emphasis is placed on developing pupils' skills in music through the provision of a varied programme of music activities. A specialist music teacher delivers the music curriculum to pupils from first to sixth class for thirty minutes per week in a dedicated, well-equipped music room. Long-term planning for music indicates that all strands of the curriculum are taught during these lessons. The school has recently purchased glockenspiels and good work was in evidence with pupils performing an extract of music following a listening and responding activity.

Further opportunities to develop music skills are provided through a range of additional activities before class time and during lunch breaks. It is noted that a very significant number of pupils take part enthusiastically in these activities. High standards of performance were noted in orchestral work, choral singing and instrumental playing. School choirs celebrate music through performance at school and public events.

It is recommended that the school should consider introducing a musical instrument to be taught to all classes from second or third class up. This work would be led by the specialist music teacher but responsibility for practice for short periods during school times a number of days a week should be undertaken by the class teachers. This will support the introduction of staff notation to all pupils and will build on the existing high standards being achieved in music in the school.

Many fine examples of pupils' art work in a variety of art media are attractively displayed throughout the school. There is evidence of significant integration between

Visual Arts activities and other areas of the curriculum. The teachers are currently trialling a focused exploration of art appreciation through structured questions on form, tone, colour etc. In the absence of a whole-school plan and teachers' long-term plans for the delivery of the Visual Arts curriculum, it is difficult to assess to what degree all strands of the curriculum are being implemented.

A specialist Drama teacher withdraws pupils from third to sixth class for a thirty minute Drama class each week. Activities take place in a fine bright studio. Planning indicates that activities in mime, improvisation, acting, poetry and debating are the focus of these lessons. During the mime activities observed, pupils participated enthusiastically and confidently in performing their roles. Very good collaboration and cooperation among the pairs performing was evident and guidance was given in how best to portray the scenarios. Pupils are given opportunities to present plays to family members at various times throughout the year. Aspects of the Drama curriculum are also developed through integration with other curriculum areas in classroom settings.

It is recommended that the provision for Arts Education throughout the school be reviewed and that the recommended three hours per week for these areas of the curriculum be built into class timetables. Where integration with other curriculum areas is planned, the link with the Drama curriculum should be clarified.

Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE)

The characteristic spirit of the school reflects the philosophy of the founder of the Sacred Heart Order and provides an ideal setting in which to develop the pupils' framework of attitudes, values and sense of belonging. A caring and inclusive atmosphere permeates all school activities. The quality of interpersonal relationships among all the parties in the school is reflected in the warm, supportive atmosphere evident throughout the school. During discussions with two focus groups of pupils it was clear that pupils felt included, respected and valued in a school environment in which they felt safe and secure.

The realisation of many SPHE-related learning goals is achieved through integration with other areas of the curriculum and through participation in school-related activities. Pupils are given opportunities to develop leadership skills through participation in a variety of committees. Senior pupils act as sports leaders and assist with the younger pupils at playtimes. The recent Entrepreneurial Project facilitated the further development of leadership and communication skills. Pupils visits to a local care home for the elderly, the Global Family Week and Grandparents' Day all contribute to developing a sense of care and respect for other people.

During discrete SPHE lessons, pupils were observed engaging confidently and comfortably in discussions about personal safety, food hygiene and advertisements on TV. Lessons were very well presented and were matched to pupils' levels of maturity and development. Pupils listened respectfully to the opinions of their peers. Discussions were well managed and through probing questioning by class teachers pupils were encouraged to reflect on what had been learned. Good use was made of suitably selected resource materials as a stimulus for discussion.

Physical Education (PE)

A sports co-ordinator/specialist PE teacher and a second specialist PE teacher deliver the Physical Education programme throughout the school. A very extensive range of opportunities is provided for pupils to engage in sporting activities during school time, before and after school and during break times. The excellent facilities on campus and the extensive range of sports equipment facilitate the delivery of the programme. Pupils are given opportunities to represent their school in a number of sporting competitions with other schools. The school received an Active School Flag in 2012. Once awarded, the flag remains valid for a period of three years after which time the school must re-apply in order to maintain its ASF status. MAMJS is currently working on its application for renewal of the flag for a second period. The fifth class Sports Leaders are formed every year to promote healthy and sporting lifestyles. A survey on participation in PE and physical activities has been carried out by pupils in sixth class. Parents are actively involved in supporting with organising and providing transport to matches. Sports leaders from fifth class organise sports activities at lunch times. The Healthy Eating Policy in the school is embraced by the sports co-ordinator and certificates are awarded at the weekly school assembly for the class that makes most effort in this regard.

A comprehensive school plan for PE has been developed. The yearly plan sets out the focus of PE lessons and reflects a broad and balanced approach to the delivery of the PE curriculum. The aquatics strand is delivered to all pupils from second to fifth class during a seven-week period in the nearby UCD swimming pool. Timetables show that each class receives approximately one hour of PE tuition each week and, from second to sixth class, one-and-a-half hours per week.

A number of PE lessons was observed during the review. Lessons were well structured and pupils participated actively in the various activities. Suitable warm-up and cool-down activities featured during the sessions. Pupils co-operated well during group activities and there was an appropriate emphasis on the development of the skills needed for games.

7. Quality of Support for Pupils

Pupils with additional learning needs, including those who are considered high achievers, are given extra support by one part-time and two full-time learning support teachers. The provision of this level of support is indicative of the school's commitment to providing for the individual needs of every pupil. Pupils requiring extra help are either withdrawn from class individually or in small groups or provided with in-class support by the learning-support team. Additional tuition in English and Mathematics is provided. An appropriate system of initial screening is in place. The learning-support facility in the school is very well resourced and additional tuition is delivered in a warm pleasant environment. The lessons observed were well structured and focused on developing a range of literacy and numeracy skills. Suitable records of individual pupils' progress were maintained.

The recently revised Learning Support Policy sets out the roles and responsibilities of all parties involved in supporting pupils with additional learning needs. Guidance is also given in relation to planning for the provision of additional support and for approaches to co-teaching. The implementation of this policy will underpin the fine quality of provision already in place and will enhance the quality of in-class provision to enable further differentiation of pupils' learning tasks.