An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Father Everard Memorial Junior National School
Ratoath, Co. Meath
Uimhir rolla: 00885T

Date of inspection: 28 April, 2010
**WHOLE-SCHOOL EVALUATION**

A whole-school evaluation of Father Everard Memorial Junior National School, Ratoath, County Meath was undertaken in April, 2010. This report presents the findings of the evaluation and makes recommendations for improvement. The evaluation focused on the quality of teaching and learning in English, Irish, Mathematics and Social, Personal and Health Education. The board of management 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.

**INTRODUCTION – SCHOOL CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND**

Father Everard Memorial School was originally established as a two-teacher school in Ratoath in 1911. Pupil enrolments expanded rapidly over the past two decades and the school was divided into separate senior and junior schools in 2005.

Father Everard Memorial Junior National School is under the patronage of the Catholic bishop of Meath. It caters for pupils from junior infants to second class and shares a large campus with the senior school.

The following table provides an overview of the enrolment and staffing in the school at the time of the evaluation:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pupils enrolled in the school</td>
<td>468</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainstream classes in the school</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers on the school staff</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainstream class teachers</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers working in support roles</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special needs assistants</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Pupils’ attendance levels are very good.

1. **QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT**

1.1 *Board of management*

The school is managed by a dedicated and energetic board of management. Meetings are held very regularly, with focused minutes being written for each meeting. Duties and tasks have been allocated to board members. Through the use of the school’s newsletter and website, the board communicates regularly with the school community. It takes a proactive and vigilant approach to managing the school accounts. Financial statements are presented by the treasurer at each meeting. It is recommended that the board arranges to have the school’s accounts independently audited or certified on an annual basis.

The board is primarily concerned with the procurement of resources, the school’s provision for pupils with special educational needs, the development of both curricular and organisational policies and the management of the building programme. A plan for the provision of educational resources has been established. The board also actively encourages and supports teachers in
continuing professional development undertakings. The board seeks to maintain and support a positive and nurturing learning environment where very good standards of teaching pertain and where pupils enjoy school.

1.2 In-school management
Although only appointed to her position in December 2009, the school principal provides strong leadership for the school. She is actively involved in the curricular and organisational development of the school, empowering staff members to develop a learning environment which is effective and also enjoyable for the pupils. In so doing, the principal adopts a collaborative and consultative approach to her work.

The in-school management team comprises the principal, deputy principal and ten post holders. It provides strong and purposeful leadership for the school, setting about its work in a concerted and collaborative manner. Meetings are held on a regular basis, with minutes being recorded. The team liaises regularly with the school staff and involves them in the various initiatives being undertaken. The management team places strong emphasis on communication, with members being assigned specific class levels for reporting on the work of the team.

Duties allocated to post holders endeavour to meet the needs of the school and are distributed across pastoral, curricular and organisational areas. Curricular leaders are specifically commended for the proactive manner in which they lead their own curricular areas. Such leadership involves the management of resources and the development of specific teaching methods and approaches. Curricular leaders often model teaching approaches and methods for other staff members. Such practice is highly commended and encouraged. The duties attached to posts are normally reviewed on a yearly basis. It is recommended that, in the next review, more specific delineation of leadership in the area of special education be considered.

1.3 Management of resources
The school is currently located in both permanent and prefabricated classrooms. Construction of an extension to replace the prefabricated accommodation is now almost complete, with occupancy of the new building expected for September, 2010. Teaching and learning in this school is supported by a wide and suitable selection of resources. These resources are accessible and stimulating. The school is proactive in monitoring and continuously upgrading its resources, most notably in information and communication technology (ICT).

A school policy on staff rotation is in place and teachers are afforded a variety of teaching experiences across different class levels and teaching contexts. Staff members have engaged in a wide range of professional development courses, with suitable provision in place for the sharing and dissemination of such learning. The school benefits from the sterling services of a full-time secretary and caretaker. Special needs assistants support the school in a capable and committed manner.

1.4 Management of relationships and communication with the school community
The school adopts an open-door policy to communicating with the parents and the general school community. It communicates very regularly with the parent body, with the ‘text-a-parent’ service being of notable value. Through the use of newsletters, information booklets and the school website, parents are regularly apprised of school events and activities and are also informed of ways to support their child’s learning. An induction meeting is held at the beginning of each school year for all new pupils.
The school is supported by a dynamic and committed parents’ association which serves both the junior school and the senior school. However, given the large size of both schools, there are occasions where sub-committees are established to serve the particular interests of one or other of the schools. The association meets regularly. The school principal and representatives of the board of management attend all the association’s meetings. A financial report is presented at the association’s AGM each year. The association communicates very regularly with the parent body. It endeavours to support the school through the organisation of fundraising activities and the hosting of significant school events, such as celebrations after Confirmation and First Communion. It frequently involves itself in the work of the school through a range of activities which include reading and mathematics activities, readathons, school book fairs, school gardening activities, sporting activities, intercultural events and assistance with various school organisational matters.

The parents’ association provides information sessions for parents by inviting speakers on various educational and pastoral topics. The association is widely consulted on the formulation and development of school organisational and curricular plans. It feels very welcomed and empowered to raise matters with the school’s management team and to partake in various school activities. It stated that it is satisfied with the education provided and the achievement of the pupils. The priorities of the association include supporting the school in the acquisition of the resources needed to meet its recent rapid expansion.

1.5 Management of pupils
The management of pupils is of a very high quality. A warm, nurturing and affirming school climate exists which recognises and respects the individuality of each pupil. School staff interact positively with pupils, showing respect and regard for their welfare in both academic and pastoral domains. Effective and efficient school organisational practices have been established.

2. Quality of School Planning

2.1 School planning process and implementation
The school’s approach to school development planning is grounded in consultative and collaborative processes which involve all staff, the board of management and the parents’ association. On some occasions, specific sub-groups are established to guide and drive the formation of particular policies. Such work is also guided by a school action plan which identifies curricular and organisational areas in need of address. As part of this action plan, the school aims to review its policies on behaviour, equality, enrolment and intercultural education. A large number of the school’s plans and policies contain a date of review and ratification. It is recommended that all plans and policies contain dates of review and ratification.

The school plan is comprehensive with a wide range of organisational policies in place. These policies are very useful, providing clear and specific guidance and are firmly rooted in the context of the school. In addition, the school has written policies for all curricular areas. These policies are of a high quality. They are comprehensive, making very good provision for the sequential development of content from class level to class level. The delineation of content is appropriately accompanied by a range of teaching strategies many of which provide for creative approaches to integration and the use of cross-curriculum themes.

2.2 Child protection policy and procedures
Confirmation was provided that, in compliance with Department of Education and Skills Primary Circular 0061/2006, the board of management has formally adopted the Department’s Child...
Protection Guidelines for Primary Schools (Published September 2001). Confirmation was also provided 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.

2.3 Classroom planning
All teachers work collaboratively at each class level to write long-term and short-term plans to guide teaching and learning in their classrooms. Such plans have a good structure. In particular, long-term plans make very good provision for the delineation of content. In some instances, short-term plans should be more focused in their objectives and provide a fuller description of content to be covered and associated differentiation activities. All teachers complete monthly reports based on their short-term plans. While these reports set out the content covered, there is some variation in the degree of detail provided. It is recommended that the school re-examines its monthly progress report templates with a view to making greater provision for commentary on the content covered.

3. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

3.1 Language

Gaeilge
Sa phlean scoile, leagtar béim inmholta ar shuim agus ar mheas na ndaltaí i leith na Gaeilge a chothú agus a fhorbairt. Is léir go bhfuil ag éirí leis an scol a mhéid seo agus agus sonraítear go bhfuil na hoidí báuíl don Ghaeilge agus go bhfuil fonn ar na daltaí an teanga a fhoghlaim agus a úsáid go forleathan. Cuirtear béim ar an gcur chuige cumarsáideach agus tá modhanna agus straitéisí éagsúla rianaithe sa phlean chun an aidhm seo a bhaint amach. B’fhéidir anois an duine d’umháin, rann bheaga, rabhlóga agus seclaíte a bheidh oiriúnach do gach rang a chuirfí sé a phhean. Moltar freisin orthu leathnú a dhéanamh ar na cluichí teanga a bheidh in úsáid i ngach rang.

Tá teagasc agus foghlaíomh na Gaeilge ar chaighdeán sásta sa scoil. I ngach rang, muintear an Ghaeilge go beoga, bríomhar agus déantar nascadh chuid iad idir na snáitheanna agus na snáthaonaidh. Baintear feidhm thorthúil as ábhair léirithe, acmhainn corpartha agus gníomhachtaí éagsúla chun foclóir agus cumas tuisceana na bpáistí a leatfhionú. Usáideann an Ghaeilge mar theanga theaigisc agus mar theanga bhainistíochta. Cothaítear cumas agus muidhín na ndaltaí in mbun labharthta. Spreagtar an ndaltaí go luath chun caint sholáire, leanúnach a chleachtadh agus a chuirfí sé a úsáid ag an imeachtaí a bheidh oiriúnach do gach rang a chuirfí sé a phhean. Moltar freisin orthu leathnú a dhéanamh ar an t-imeachtaí a chuirfí sé a phhean a bheidh oiriúnach do gach rang.

Tá raon leat féin in úsáid sna ranganna go léir chun foclóir nua a mhúinigh agus chun an fhoghlaim a thabhairt. Léiriúonn formhór na ndaltaí tuiscint mhaith ar réimse cí nach bhfuil tuiscint mar gheall ar an Ghaeilge agus an mhúinigh atá in ann go mbeadh spás san fhoghlaim a thabhairt. Tá dhá cheann de cheart do dhá chuid den fhoghlaim a bheith in ann a fhoghlaim a thabhairt.

Déantar an léitheadreacht agus an scríbhneoireacht a nascadh go tuisceanaíochtaí a chuirfí sé a bhfuil in ann a mhúinigh atá in ann a fhoghlaim a thabhairt.
Irish

In the school plan, praiseworthy emphasis is placed on nurturing and developing the pupils’ interest and respect for Irish. It is clear that the school is succeeding in this and it was noted that teachers are well-disposed to Irish and that pupils are motivated to learn the language and to make widespread use of it. Emphasis is placed on the communicative approach and various methods and strategies are outlined in the plan to realise this aim. It would be worthwhile, now, to include in the plan a collection of songs, short rhymes, tongue-twisters and stories that would be appropriate for each class. It is also recommended that language games which are used by each class be extended.

Teaching and learning of Irish is at a satisfactory level in this school. In every class, Irish is taught in a lively, energetic manner and proper linkage between strands and strand units is undertaken. Illustrative materials, physical resources and various activities are used fruitfully to extend the vocabulary and conceptual capacity of the pupils. Teachers use Irish as a teaching medium and as a medium for classroom management. Pupils’ abilities and confidence to speak are nourished. Pupils are encouraged to speak clearly and coherently from the start and to use simple expressions. Pupils are often heard greeting teachers in Irish in the yard or around the school.

A very good selection of resources is in use in all the classrooms to explain new vocabulary and to support learning. The majority of pupils reveal a good understanding of an appropriate range of language and they are encouraged to engage in conversation and to compose full sentences. It would now be helpful to spend additional time during the pre-communication phase of lessons, to emphasise the formulation of phrases and to make wider use of simple dramas.

Reading and writing are thoughtfully linked with oral work in second class. The majority of pupils read accurately and the use of small books in various classrooms to stimulate interest in reading is very good. It would be of benefit to the school to further extend the reading programme and to make regular use of other interesting resources such as picture-books, cartoons, big books and graded readers.

English

Teaching and learning in English is guided by a comprehensive and detailed school plan which makes very good provision for oral language development, poetry, reading, writing and improvisational drama. The plan is well structured and indicates how pupils’ awareness of language in all its forms and their ability to use it as speakers, readers and writers are to be developed. A broad variety of oral language activities is planned for each class level, including news, show and tell, language games, discussion of topical issues and festivals. A common oral language programme is used throughout the school. Oral language is linked well with activities to develop pupils’ reading and writing abilities.

Teachers make very good use of stories as stimuli for oral activity, for pupils’ writing and for follow-up reading. Pupils’ awareness of sound-letter relationships is developed systematically through the co-ordinated use of a structured phonics programme in which language games and action songs are featured. Basic sight vocabulary is developed through the use of large-format books, labelling, print in the environment and high frequency word lists. Classrooms are print-rich environments and teachers make commendable use of interactive whiteboards in the presentation of lessons.
The school involves parents actively in the development of reading through the Children and Parents Enjoying Reading (CAPER) programme. Very good resources are provided to support this programme and each classroom is stocked with an age-appropriate supply of books. Novels are used at each class level and a class novel is introduced in second class. Poetry is used well to stimulate discussion and to develop reading. Pupils write their own poetry in response to poems they encounter.

Pupils are encouraged to write in a variety of genres. Attention is paid to the writing process and pupils are taught to draft and rewrite their work. Their copybooks are corrected regularly and teachers give helpful feedback to pupils on their written work. The school is commended on the regular and proactive approach it takes to reviewing its progress in English. Such reviews involve examinations of the success of the school’s phonological awareness programme, spellings, writing standards, oral language standards and links with special education teachers.

3.2 Mathematics
Teaching and learning in Mathematics is guided by a comprehensive and detailed school plan. The school is commended on the clear and progressional delineation of content from class level to class level. The school has plans to examine the role of mathematics trails in the general environment. It is recommended that as these trails are completed, they be included in the plan as an appendix. Also, there is some potential in the plan for the wider delineation of approaches to problem solving.

Pupils benefit from early mathematical activities in well-structured play sessions. Teachers make judicious use of a number of teaching methodologies and approaches, with very effective use of collaborative learning being noted in a number of instances. Lessons make very good provision for the involvement of pupils and for their active participation through the creative use of concrete resources, games, hands-on activities, ICT and discussion. Some teachers make good provision for differentiated activities, although there is some potential for the further development of such practice at a school-wide level. In the main, lessons make very good provision for the connection of lesson content to the environment and life experience of the pupils.

Mental arithmetic and the language of Mathematics are catered for in a very deliberate manner, with pupils being provided with various opportunities to practise and develop such language. In some instances, teachers make clever and creative provision for the development of the pupils’ problem-solving skills through the use of strategic questioning, discussion and specific activities. It is recommended that the school investigates approaches to the sharing and development of such good practices at a school-wide level.

Teachers make very good use of a variety of assessment techniques and approaches in Mathematics. Classrooms are presented in a mathematics-rich manner, but there is some scope for the further development of the school’s grounds, corridors and general display areas as mathematics-rich environments.

3.3 Social, Personal and Health Education
The delivery of Social Personal and Health Education (SPHE) is guided by a comprehensive and detailed school plan. In delivering this aspect of the curriculum, the school makes suitable provision for the Walk Tall, Stay Safe and Bí Folláin programmes.

SPHE is delivered effectively in both discrete and integrated settings. Discrete lessons are characterised by the appropriate use of whole-class teaching and group work. In some instances,
there is scope for the wider use of pair work to allow pupils to discuss and interrogate key aspects of lesson content. Story and circle time are used creatively and effectively to prompt the pupils to analyse particular themes and topics and to stimulate discussion. Lesson content is successfully related to the environment and life experience of the pupils. Very good provision is in place for the delivery of a full and balanced SPHE curriculum, with notably commendable emphasis on healthy bodies, healthy eating, hygiene, bullying and friendships.

3.4 Assessment
The school adopts a very deliberate, focused and systematic approach to assessment. Teachers are commended on the range and variety of assessment techniques they employ. These include the use of running records, teacher observation, teacher-devised tasks and tests, profiles and checklists.

All pupils in first and second classes are tested using the *Non-Reading Intelligence Test (NRIT)* and using standardised tests in the areas of numeracy and English reading. Results from assessment tests are used in a very proactive manner. All pupils in junior infants are tested on their numerical and literary abilities in the third term using the school’s early indicators test. In senior infants, pupils are tested using the *Middle Infant Screening Test* and *Forward Together Programme*. In addition, other tests such as the *Belfield Infant Assessment Profile (BIAP)* and the *Dyslexia Early Screening Test (DEST)* are administered where deemed necessary.

4. **Quality of Support for Pupils**

4.1 Pupils with special educational needs
Special education is guided by a comprehensive and well-thought out school policy which places strong emphasis on the staged approach and early intervention. The school has seven special education teachers. A special education teacher is assigned to each class level with responsibility for special education at that particular class level.

In deciding on pupils who should receive additional support, the school carefully draws on the results of assessment data from a variety of sources including class teachers and parents. Specific diagnostic tests are referenced. As part of an early intervention approach, the special education team consults with parents of children in the junior infant classes who are deemed to be in need of support in order to advise them on strategies to support their children’s learning. Such consultation is praiseworthy. Additionally, the school uses the *Forward Together Programme* to provide training for parents to enable them to support children in the areas of oral language development, writing, phonological awareness and reading. In recent times, the school has examined the educational benefits and logistics of using team teaching approaches. Its proactive and reflective approach to such a development is commended and it is recommended that wider use of collaborative approaches and wider intervention in the classroom be undertaken.

The school draws up an individual School Support Plan for all pupils receiving support. These plans are very well constructed. They build on the pupils’ strengths and in so doing, set out clear and specific targets to be attained through well-delineated strategies and activities. The school is commended for the due attention it pays to involving parents in the realisation of these targets and for apprising them regularly on pupil successes in achieving them. To guide the strategic delivery of these support plans, all teachers prepare long-term and short-term plans. All special education teachers record daily observations to assist with their ongoing analysis of pupil progress.
In the delivery of literacy support, lessons are focused and structured, providing pupils with very active and engaging learning experiences. Teachers are commended for the affirming and nurturing manner in which they interact with the pupils. Lessons make effective use of well chosen resources, which include ICT. They make very suitable provision for the active involvement of pupils.

Pupils in receipt of resource hours benefit from a social skills programme. This programme ably focuses on skills such as turn-taking, sharing and solving problems. For some pupils, specific activities which build on some of the principles of occupational therapy are incorporated into their programme. These activities are appropriately designed, focusing on the development of gross and fine motor co-ordination.

In recent times the school has set about addressing pupils’ learning needs in the area of numeracy. One member of the special education team has been specifically deployed to this end. Numeracy lessons are delivered in a lively and focused manner, being guided by clear targets. Pupils’ work is monitored very carefully. Creative and very effective provision is in place for the active involvement of pupils, for the specific development of concepts and for pupils to engage and interrogate their own understanding of these concepts. The future development of this successful initiative should consider the wider use of in-class support techniques and team teaching. Possibilities for the delivery of support classes and interventions which straddle both numeracy and literacy should also be considered.

4.2 Other supports for pupils: disadvantaged, minority and other groups
One full-time teacher provides support for pupils for whom English is an additional language. At present English as an Additional Language (EAL) support is provided exclusively on a withdrawal basis. It is recommended that this teacher works to a greater degree alongside the learning support and class teachers to provide more classroom-based support. Teacher planning is focused and regular assessment data is maintained. Resources are used to good effect, with commendable provision for the study and celebration of the various cultures in the school. Pupils enjoy EAL lessons and participate enthusiastically in them.

5. **SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT**

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- The school benefits from the strong and strategic leadership provided by the school principal and other members of the in-school management team.
- The school has established a whole-school plan which is both useful and insightful in guiding and directing teaching and learning in the school.
- A warm, nurturing school climate exists which recognises and celebrates the uniqueness of each child.
- The school has established very positive and strong links with parents and the wider community.
- Lessons serve to motivate pupils and in so doing make very good provision for their active involvement.
- Pupils reveal interest and pride in their learning.
- Pupil progress is closely and regularly monitored.
- The school is successfully implementing a number of initiatives targeted at improving literacy and numeracy standards in the school.
- Special education provision is delivered in a very warm and affirming manner.
As a means of building on these strengths and to address areas for development, the following key recommendations are made:

- It is recommended that the school re-examines the manner in which short-term planning templates are used so that such planning is tailored more effectively towards the needs of individual classes. Such a review also needs to examine the manner in which monthly progress is recorded.
- It is recommended that greater use of team teaching and in-class support be undertaken to ensure the provision of a coherent learning experience for all pupils.
- In building on the success of the school’s recent initiative to target numeracy in first and second classes, it is recommended that this be extended to infant classes.

Post-evaluation meetings were held with the staff and board of management where the draft findings and recommendations of the evaluation were presented and discussed.

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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

Overall, the positive feedback contained in the report has affirmed the work of the school community. The recommendations in the report have given great impetus to the Principal and the staff in further developing the teaching and learning in the school.

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

New templates for short-term and long-term planning have been introduced at all class levels. There are sections on these templates which allow each teacher to plan for and also reflect on his/her teaching and pupil learning. This new format also applies to monthly progress reports.

As a consequence of the draft report we have targeted the Plean Scoile Gaeilge for review to address the observations and recommendations expressed in the Gaeilge section of the report.

We are committed to exploiting the possibilities for more effective learning offered by team teaching and in-class support. The Principal and full SEN team are involved in a process of introducing this in the school at present. We have visited other schools to view their team-teaching and to discuss their organisation and planning for this. We have intervened at Senior Infant, First Class and Second Class levels already this year and plan to work with Junior Infants in the New Year.

Support in Maths continues to be offered in First and Second classes. In addition to this, one block of team teaching has targeted Maths in the Senior Infant classes. We plan to carry out a similar programme of support in the Junior Infant classes throughout next January and February. We are working towards prioritising Maths support in the Junior and Senior Infant Classes in the future.