

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

**Whole School Evaluation
REPORT**

**Saint Patrick's National School
Kiltormer, Ballinasloe, Co. Galway
Uimhir rolla: 01328P**

Date of inspection: 17 May 2010



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

WHOLE-SCHOOL EVALUATION

A whole-school evaluation of St. Patrick's National School was undertaken in May, 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 Geography. The board of management was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the report; a response was not received from the board.

INTRODUCTION – SCHOOL CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

St. Patrick's National School is a co-educational school situated in the village of Kiltomer, approximately 12kms from Ballinasloe in Co. Galway. The village is located in a designated CLÁR (Ceantair Laga Ard-Riachtanais) area and the school has accessed funding under the scheme to enhance its resources and facilities. In line with local demographics, the school has experienced a downward trend in enrolments in recent years and as a consequence, a mainstream teaching post was suppressed in June 2008. The following table provides an overview of the enrolment and staffing in the school at the time of the evaluation:

| | Number |
|-----------------------------------|--------|
| Pupils enrolled in the school | 68 |
| Mainstream classes in the school | 8 |
| Teachers on the school staff | 5 |
| Mainstream class teachers | 3 |
| Teachers working in support roles | 3 |
| Special needs assistants | 1 |

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT

1.1 Characteristic spirit, mission or vision

The school is under the patronage of the Catholic Bishop of Clonfert and espouses a Christian ethos. The board of management, staff and parent body strive conscientiously to create a caring, happy and secure atmosphere in which the uniqueness of each child may be recognised and all aspects of their development nurtured. Emphasis is placed on the development of self-esteem and pupils are encouraged to engage in a wide range of activities with particular focus on involvement in the Arts, in sporting activities and in community events.

1.2 Board of management

The board of management is properly constituted and meets at least once a term. Minutes of meetings are clearly recorded and a long-term action plan, spanning a period of five years, has been formulated. School accounts are managed appropriately and arrangements are in place to have the accounts certified this year. The board engages regularly in policy development, previewing draft policy statements prior to their presentation for discussion and ratification at board meetings.

The school was built in 1964 and was extended in 1975. It provides a secretary's office, a staffroom, toilet facilities, a resource room, two small classrooms and a large classroom which is used for assemblies and musical activities following the infant day. Prefabricated units are used for learning-support and to provide specific facilities for pupils with special educational needs. All areas of the school are very well maintained and praiseworthy attention is given to decorating classrooms, corridors and support rooms with charts, pictures and samples of the pupils' work.

There is a need, however, to provide classrooms of adequate size and storage space, to replace old furniture and to provide some additional teaching and learning resources.

The board is cognisant of its responsibilities in relation to safeguarding the health and safety of those using the school premises. A security system is in place in the building and the board has worked in conjunction with the parent body to implement an orderly system for the set-down and collection of pupils. The local sports club is adjacent to the school site and the school uses its facilities and grounds for physical education lessons and for additional playground space. As the school has a number of different play areas, the board is requested to be mindful of the necessity to ensure that there is appropriate supervision in all play areas during break periods. A review of the school's health and safety statement is identified in the school's action plan as an area of work to be addressed by the board.

The board values and supports staff engagement in continuous professional development. All staff members have pursued courses in recent years covering such areas as school leadership, arts education, language teaching, special education, assessment and the use of technology. Members of the board have also availed of training by attending the national induction programme for new board members.

1.3 In-school management

The in-school management team comprises the principal, the deputy principal and a privileged assistant. The principal has a clear vision for the school and shares it effectively with all the partners. The day-to-day business of the school is very competently managed and a positive school climate is carefully fostered. The deputy principal and the privileged assistant willingly undertake a broad range of duties in support of the principal. A team approach to curriculum planning and implementation is adopted in the school and all staff members maintain clear monthly records of work to support the monitoring of curriculum implementation. Staff meetings are held on a regular basis to facilitate discussion and to engage all members in the decision-making process. An appropriate record is kept of the decisions made and the actions to be taken, including the priorities in relation to curriculum implementation and review. In support of this work, the board should regularly engage in reviewing the duties attached to the posts of responsibility to ensure that they continue to address the changing prioritised needs of the school.

1.4 Management of relationships and communication with the school community

The school has a parent association that is not affiliated to the National Parents Council. Meetings of the association and of other community groups are facilitated on the school premises and officers of the association maintain appropriate communication with the principal and board. The school welcomes and encourages the involvement of parents and of the wider community in the life of the school. Parents fundraise and actively support a wide range of school activities including the pupils' involvement in swimming, games, project work and paired-reading activities. School concerts and carol services provide further occasions for parents and other members of the community to come together in support of the school. It is praiseworthy that parents and other members of the community are invited to visit the school to share their knowledge of the local area as well as their craftwork skills and musical abilities.

A number of effective strategies are successfully used to maintain regular communication with the parent body. Parents of new pupils are provided with copies of pertinent school policies on enrolment day and parents are informed and consulted on policy development and review. Parent-teacher meetings are held annually and parents of pupils with special educational needs are invited to attend multi-disciplinary meetings. Parents may also arrange to meet teachers at other times and written reports on pupil progress are issued at the end of the school year. The

approachability of the staff, the open friendly atmosphere of the school, the celebration of pupil achievements and the manner in which the school is integrated into the life of the community were among the aspects of school life praised by the parent representatives during the evaluation.

1.5 Management of pupils

The management of pupils is very good. Pupils are appropriately grouped into two multi-grade classes at junior and middle standards and form a dual-class grouping at senior level. The school's code of behaviour is implemented with praiseworthy consistency and all school activities are organised in an orderly fashion. Pupils are very cognisant of school rules and are very respectful towards the staff, visitors and each other. School attendance is carefully monitored and an attendance policy has been formulated. It is recommended that the policy should be developed further to include details of the specific strategies employed to promote good attendance. The pupils are provided with opportunities to engage in a wide range of activities, both during and after school. A strong community spirit is nurtured in the school and the staff is commended for the efforts they make to provide a space where pupils of all ages can come together on a regular basis to make music, to dance and to share their talents and skills for the enjoyment of others.

2. QUALITY OF SCHOOL PLANNING

2.1 Whole-school and classroom planning

Working in consultation with the national planning and curriculum support services, the staff has completed a significant amount of work on the school plan. Clear, practical guidance is provided in relation to organisational practices. The plan contains policies on each curricular area. Many of the curricular policies coherently indicate the intended progression as regards the content and skills to be covered at each class level. Key approaches and methodologies, and parental and community involvement are also carefully outlined. Further development of the school plan should focus on ensuring that every curricular policy provides guidance in relation to how the curriculum is to be implemented in the multi-grade and dual class contexts which pertain in the school. The teachers also engage diligently in classroom planning. Some teachers design the layout of their own plans while others use commercially prepared templates. Methodologies, approaches and activities are specified and differentiation is carefully planned. There is a very good structure to the monthly progress records which build up to a concise account of the years' work at each class level.

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.

3. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

3.1 Language

Gaeilge

Léiríonn na hoidí dearcadh dearfach i dtaobh na Gaeilge agus múintear na ceithre scil teanga go héifeachtach. Baineann taitneamh agus cruthaitheacht le cur i láthair na gceachtanna agus cuirtear áiseanna tarraingteacha ar fáil chun suim a spreagadh. Tugtar deiseanna rialta do na daltaí

eiseamláirí d'fheidhmeanna teanga ar leith a úsáid i gcomhthéacsanna difriúla. Baintear úsáid innholta as an drámaíocht ag gach rangleibhéal agus cuirtear idir gheáitsíocht, cluichí, ceistiú, aithriseoireacht agus amhránaíocht ar siúl freisin. Is ceardúil mar a úsáidtear leabhair bheaga sna bunranganna mar threoir don drámaíocht agus mar réamhullmhúchán don léitheoireacht fhoirmiúil. Láimhsítear an scéalaíocht go cruthaitheach tríd an scoil chun a chur ar chumas na ndaltaí tuairisciú a dhéanamh agus caint leanúnach a chleachtadh. Cothaítear tuiscint ar cheistfhocail ag gach rangleibhéal agus bíonn deiseanna ag na daltaí ceisteanna a chur chomh maith le ceisteanna a fhreagairt. Caitear dua le hamhráin thraidisiúnta, amhráin nua-chumtha agus an fheadóg stáin a mhúineadh. Is ealaíonta mar a dhéantar amhránaíocht, damhsaíocht agus ceol ionstraime a fhí le chéile freisin chun tuiscint ar fheasacht cultúir a chur chun cinn.

Bíonn bunús breá teanga i seilbh na ndaltaí sula dtosaítear ar an léitheoireacht agus an scríbhneoireacht. Leagtar béim ar dhea-fhoghraíocht agus cuirtear le tuiscint ar rithim, struchtúr agus feidhm na teanga trí leabhair a dhéanamh bunaithe ar sheanfhocail, ar rábhlóga agus ar thopaicí eile. Léiríonn na daltaí cumas, muinín agus tuiscint agus iad i mbun léitheoireachta. Tugann siad faoi chineálacha difriúla scríbhneoireachta agus is léir go dtuigeann siad conas briathra agus gnéithe eile de chomhréir na teanga a láimhseáil. Ba thairbheach anois cur leis an stoc leabhar Gaeilge sa scoil agus idir leabhair bheaga, leabhair mhóra, irisleabhair, nuachtlitreacha agus fíorleabhair a chur ar fáil. B'fhiú freisin forbairt a dhéanamh ar an bplean scoile sa Ghaeilge. Moltar fothéamaí a cheapadh faoi na mórthéamaí teanga chun réimse na teanga do gach rangleibhéal a léiriú go soiléir ann agus an clár feasachta cultúir atá idir lámhe ag an scoil a chlárú freisin.

Irish

The teachers display a positive attitude towards Irish and the four language skills are taught effectively. Enjoyment and creativity are features of lesson presentation and attractive resources are provided to arouse interest. The pupils are given regular opportunities to use exemplars of particular language functions in different contexts. Commendable use is made of drama at each class level and movement, games, questioning, recitation and song-singing also take place. Small books are skilfully used in the lower classes as a guide to drama and as preparation for formal reading. Storytelling is creatively handled throughout the school to enable the pupils to give a report and to practise continuous speech. Understanding of questioning words is fostered at each class level and the pupils have opportunities to pose questions as well as answer questions. Effort is put into teaching traditional songs, newly composed songs and the tin whistle. Song-singing, dancing and instrumental music are also skilfully intertwined to promote cultural appreciation.

The pupils possess a good language base before reading and writing is commenced. Emphasis is placed on good pronunciation and an understanding of the rhythm, structure and function of the language is developed through making books based on proverbs, tongue twisters and other topics. The pupils display competency, confidence and understanding as they read. They write in different genres and it is clear that they understand how verbs and other aspect of the syntax of the language are handled. It would be beneficial now to extend the stock of Irish books and to provide little books, big books, magazines, newsletters and real books. It would also be of value to develop the school plan in Irish. It is recommended that minor themes should be created under the main language themes to clarify the range of language for each class level and that the school's current cultural appreciation programme should also be recorded.

English

Throughout the school, activities in oral English, reading and writing are skilfully linked and very effectively integrated with other curricular areas. Strong emphasis is placed on the teaching of oral language and pupils are provided with regular opportunities to engage in talk and discussion

and to explore vocabulary. Pupils are exposed to a rich repertoire of poetry and they display pleasure and enjoyment while reading and reciting the work of Irish poets and poets of other nationalities. The function and richness of the language in poetry is explored in a very effective manner at some class levels.

Print-rich classroom environments provide valuable stimulation for the development of reading and writing skills. Onset, rime, and word families are explored very effectively in the context of reading. Pupils develop a firm understanding of sound-letter relationships in the junior classes and of word families and spelling patterns in the middle and senior classes. Pupils display enthusiasm for reading and pride in their written work. The majority of pupils read with fluency and confidently engage in discussing the work of different authors. Pupils write in various genres and their work is included in classroom libraries, class books and wall displays. A range of strategies is used to teach handwriting and the majority of pupils develop good handwriting skills. A review of the school policy on handwriting would be of benefit to ensure consistency from class to class in teaching letter formation and cursive handwriting.

3.2 Mathematics

The quality of teaching and learning in Mathematics is of a high standard. Activities are very well structured and paced throughout the school. Differentiated tasks are carefully planned and group work is effectively organised. While, in general, very effective use is made of manipulatives, there is scope to extend the range of available equipment and of the visual aids on display at some class levels. Throughout the school oral mathematics is afforded praiseworthy attention. There is a clear focus on teaching the language of mathematics and pupils are provided with opportunities to verbalise and share their approaches to number operations and problem-solving. Pupils are taught a range of strategies to assist in memorising and recalling number facts. The pupils have a positive attitude towards Mathematics. They engage readily and confidently in activity and display very good understanding of the concepts covered. Their understanding of the relationships between fractions is noteworthy. Appreciation of the importance and place of mathematics in everyday life is enhanced through solving problems based on real life situations and through the organisation of very interesting and enjoyable trails encompassing work in other curricular areas. It is praiseworthy that parental support for this curricular area is elicited by providing parents with details of the language of procedures and the manner in which computations are recorded.

3.3 Geography

A broad range of methodologies and approaches is very competently employed in the teaching of Geography. Richly decorated classrooms with displays incorporating maps, globes, photographs, models and project work provide appropriate settings for classroom-based activities. The pupils are also provided with opportunities to explore the local area. Praiseworthy attention is focused initially on the human environments of the school and village. Pupils are enabled to use location terminology, to practise simple mapping skills, to record weather patterns and to acquire knowledge and understanding of the earth and space. The spiral and integrated approach to the curriculum is very evident in the activities subsequently organised at higher class levels. Teachers provide interesting materials and employ a range of strategies including group work and the use of information and communication technology to engage the pupils in geographical studies. Age-appropriate mapping activities are organised at each class level and the pupils exhibit extensive knowledge of the landscape and of life in Ireland and in other places. Participation in the Green Schools project enables all class levels to engage in caring for the environment. It would be of benefit to develop the school plan in Geography further as a means of ensuring that active-learning strategies continue to be employed and that there is clarity in relation to the specific topics that will be used at each class level to develop geographical concepts and skills.

3.4 Assessment

The school has developed a comprehensive policy on assessment that provides valuable guidance on both assessment of learning and assessment for learning. It is evident that assessment is an integral part of the teaching at each class level with teachers regularly questioning, observing and monitoring the pupils as they engage in activities and complete set tasks and assignments. Checklists, reading logs, digital folders, paper samples of work and results of topic tests and tests in spelling and tables are maintained to inform planning and reporting. Standardised tests in English and Mathematics and a range of early literacy tests are appropriately used to monitor progress and to select pupils for supplementary teaching. A range of diagnostic tests is also available to assist teachers in identifying specific areas of difficulty. Parents are informed of their children's progress at parent-teacher meetings and in written reports issued at the end of the school year. The staff has identified assessment in areas other than English and Mathematics for specific attention over the forthcoming years. It is suggested that the school should also review its reporting templates in light of the most recent work completed by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment.

4. QUALITY OF SUPPORT FOR PUPILS

4.1 Pupils with special educational needs

The special education support team comprises a shared learning-support teacher, a full-time resource teacher, a visiting resource teacher and a special needs assistant. The team collaborates closely with the mainstream teachers to organise early literacy programmes and supplementary teaching on a withdrawal basis for individual pupils and groups. There is appropriate consultation with class teachers, parents and other relevant personnel in relation to drawing up programmes of learning for the pupils. The programmes are clear and concise, and include prioritised learning targets and a range of activities to address those targets. It is recommended that the time periods covered by the programmes should be shortened, in some instances, in order to accommodate programme reviews during the course of the school year. Appropriate guidelines are also prepared to assist the special needs assistant in providing a very high level of care for specific pupils. The teachers very successfully employ a range of methodologies and approaches, and engage pupils in interesting activities to progress their learning effectively. These activities are very carefully structured and appropriately incorporate cross-curricular work and the use of technology.

The school plan contains policies on learning-support and on resource teaching. These should now be developed further to guide the practice in relation to working as a team in implementing the staged approach to provision as outlined in the most recent departmental circulars. While cognisant of the limited space in some of the classrooms, consideration should also be given to the organisation of in-class support and the use of team-teaching methodologies as a means of developing the service in the future.

5. CONCLUSION

The school has strengths in the following areas:

- The board of management and parent body actively engage with the staff to enhance and support the provision in the school.

- There is a strong spirit of teamwork in the school and all staff members work collaboratively to provide a broad and balanced curriculum in a friendly, respectful and very effective manner.
- The quality of teaching and learning across the curricular areas evaluated is of a very good standard.
- The staff is exploring the use of a broad range of assessment techniques to assist in monitoring and reporting pupil progress, and in achieving overall school improvement.
- The pupils in the school are very responsive, display pride in their work and engage in a wide range of activities.

The following key recommendations are made in order to further improve the quality of education provided by the school:

- The board should review the duties attached to posts of responsibility on a regular basis.
- It is advised that the board reassess the accommodation needs of the school.
- Future development of the school plan should seek to clarify curricular content and how it is to be approached in the context of dual and multi-class groupings.
- The school is advised to review the organisation of the support services and to explore the use of team-teaching and the provision of in-class support.

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