An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Scoil Iosaif
Firmount, Donoughmore
Co. Cork
Uimhir rolla: 01692N

Date of inspection: 15 October 2010
1. Introduction

Firmount National School is a co-educational primary school under the patronage of the Catholic Bishop of Cloyne. There are five mainstream class teachers, one learning-support teacher and one resource teacher employed in the school. There are 149 pupils currently enrolled and they are taught in multi-grade settings. It is noted that their attendance levels are very good. The school’s motto *Ní neart go cur le chéile* (unity is strength) is actively promoted within the school community.

The board of management of the school 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.

2. Summary of Findings and Recommendations for Further Development

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<th>The following are the <strong>main strengths</strong> of the work of the school:</th>
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<td>• The board of management actively supports the work of the school; in particular, it ensures physical environment is maintained to a high standard.</td>
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<td>• A dedicated teaching staff, with the support of ancillary personnel, works conscientiously to provide a broad and balanced educational experience for pupils.</td>
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<td>• Pupils are commended for their excellent behaviour and their enthusiastic participation in learning.</td>
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<td>• Parents’ support for the work of the school is reflected in the provision of a wide range of resources to support teaching and learning.</td>
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<th>The following <strong>main recommendations</strong> are made:</th>
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<td>• It is recommended that teachers place greater emphasis on planning for and implementing differentiated teaching strategies to address pupils’ varying abilities in multi-grade settings.</td>
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<td>• Participative methodologies, including group, pair and individual work, should be adopted by all teachers, thus placing pupils as active agents in their own learning.</td>
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<td>• Teachers should further embrace assessment for learning, including deeper analysis of data contained in standardised test results and monthly progress records.</td>
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<td>• The duties of the in-school management team require formal review and greater emphasis should be placed on the further development of its curricular leadership role.</td>
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3. Quality of School Management

- The board of management works conscientiously to fulfil its functions. Oral accounts of expenditure are presented at board meetings and an external audit is undertaken annually. Consideration might now be given to providing written financial statements for board scrutiny. Positive relations are in evidence among all partners of the school community. As a means of further promoting good communication, the issuing of a newsletter with contributions from school, board and parents is suggested.

- The principal’s leadership style is characterised by a primary concern for the welfare of pupils and staff. She undertakes her duties with enthusiasm and diligence. The collaborative relationship that exists between principal and deputy principal contributes significantly to the efficient operation of the school. A strong team spirit among members of the in-school management structure is fostered by regular informal discussion. More formal meetings and a review of posts of responsibility, to include the promotion of curricular leadership, is advised.

- The school building and environs are maintained to a high standard. Valuable assistance is provided by the secretary, cleaner and caretaker.

- The provision of a wide range of resources, including information and communication technology (ICT) is very well advanced in the school.

- Parents are most supportive of the work of the school. Their representatives expressed satisfaction with the education provision and achievement of pupils and their views were echoed in responses to the parent questionnaires.

- The management of pupils is very good. Pupils are very well-behaved, display a positive attitude to learning and engage eagerly in school activities. Classroom atmospheres are positive and interactions between teachers and pupils are affirmative.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- The school plan is a comprehensive document. Some curriculum plans appropriately indicate the subject content for each class level. This good practice should be extended to all curricular plans. Commendably, a schedule for the review of key school policies has been formulated and it is recommended that parents become more involved in this process. A review of the enrolment policy is recommended, paying particular attention to section relating to the enrolment of pupils with special educational needs.

- Class teachers consistently prepare long-term and short-term schemes of work. They are advised to make greater use of the school plan to inform their long-term planning, thereby promoting spiral learning. Short-term planning is recorded on an agreed template. In some instances, greater focus on differentiated planning to address pupils’ varying abilities in multi-class settings is recommended. Teachers carefully maintain monthly progress reports.

- At present, the school’s process of self-evaluation emanates from issues identified at staff meetings whereby decisions for implementation are agreed and recorded. Staff and management demonstrate capacity and sufficient readiness to adopt a more formal and systematic approach to school self-evaluation and this is recommended.
Child protection policy and procedures

School authorities provided evidence that, in compliance with Primary Circular 0061/2006, the board of management has formally adopted the Department’s Child Protection Guidelines for Primary Schools. Evidence was provided to show that these child protection procedures have been brought to the attention of management and school staff; 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. It is now recommended that parents be made formally aware of the school’s child protection policy and procedures. A designated liaison person (DLP) and a deputy DLP have been appointed in line with the requirements of the guidelines.

5. Quality of Teaching, Learning and Pupil Achievement

- Overall, well-structured lessons were observed and a variety of effective methodologies appropriately used to promote teaching and learning. Manipulative materials are purposefully utilised. Differentiation is judiciously employed to cater for the needs of pupils of varying abilities, particularly during in-class support sessions. Consideration should be given to extending these good practices to all class settings. Teacher-directed whole-class teaching is adopted by some teachers. More active learning strategies, to include greater use of group and pair work, is encouraged.

- Cothaítear dearcadh dearfach i leith na Gaeilge go dícheallach i measc na ndaltaí. Leagtar béim fhónta ar thimpeallacht Ghaelach a chruthú. Cothaítear scil na héisteachta go córasach agus muintear réime leathan rann agus dánta go tairbeach. Chun cur leis an dea-shaothar seo b’fhéadfadh sé aonadh aon fhadh le feidhm na scéalaiochta i bhfoghlaim agus i saibhriú na teanga. Chuige sin moltar réime nios leiththe le deabhairc shcéalaiochta agus a bhíbere breise leiththeireachta a oiriúnach a sholáthar. Léirionn cuid mhaithe daltaí cumas maith tuisceana. Muintear foclóir agus aonchur teanga cuí agus baintear feidhm éifeachtach as straitéisití éagsúla chuimhneacht a dhéanamh ar chumas labhartha na ndaltaí. B’fhéadfadh sé aon teanga a chlachtadh i gcomhthíosanna cumarsáide agus churasrudh d'fhéadfadh sé aon teanga a chlachtadh i gcomhthíosanna cumarsáideachta. Is fearr an fearr gan Béarla a úsáidiú le linn na gceachtanna. Moltar athbhreithníu a dhéanamh ar mhuintireachta agus na scríbhneoireachta a bhí i gceachtanna. Is fearr leis an cumas maith eolaíochta a sholáthar do na ndaltaí.

A positive attitude to Irish is fostered among pupils. A stimulating environment that supports the implementation of the Irish curriculum is created. Listening skills are purposefully developed and a wide range of rhythm and poetry is beneficially taught. The importance of story in the acquisition and enrichment of language should be considered at a whole-school level. To this end, a wider range of story books in Irish and other suitable reading material should be provided. Pupils display good understanding of language. Appropriate vocabulary and language input is taught using a range of effective strategies. It is advised that every opportunity be presented to pupils to practice the language taught in a communicative context. The use of English during Irish lessons should be avoided. The teaching of reading and writing should be reviewed in order to provide pupils with a broader experience of learning.

- Pupils’ oral language skills in English are conscientiously developed. Pupils’ response to and appreciation of poetry is actively nurtured in some classes. A compilation of suitable poems for all class levels would further promote poetry recitation. Appropriate emphasis is placed on the development of pupils’ phonological and phonemic awareness. Pupils demonstrate a keen interest in reading and a range of useful strategies is productively employed. Of particular note is the introduction of the Literacy Lift Off programme. At the emergent reading stage, it is suggested that more informal reading activity precede the
introduction of a formal reading programme. Pupils are provided with worthwhile opportunities to write and in some instances are systematically taught specific strategies to facilitate creative writing development. Greater emphasis should be placed on the writing process approach culminating in the celebration of pupils’ writing through display. There is also potential to further integrate ICT in the writing process.

- The quality of teaching and learning in Mathematics is good. Effective child-centred activities are a feature in most cases. In junior and middle classes, pupils display good competency when recalling number facts, while oral-maths and problem-solving skills among the more senior pupils are appropriately developed. To further extend this good practice, it is recommended that greater opportunity be afforded to the discussion of mathematical concepts and to their application to everyday situations relevant to pupils’ own experiences.

- The quality of teaching and learning in Physical Education (PE) is good. Lessons observed were appropriately structured and well organised. Group activities and judicious differentiation constructively promotes full participation by pupils of varying abilities. Positive levels of achievement are demonstrated and, commendably, some lessons provide opportunities for pupils to discuss the skills and activities in which they engage. Facilities and equipment are utilised effectively. Pupils’ participation in a variety of extr-curricular activities complements the school’s PE programme.

- Pupils’ attainment is regularly assessed through a combination of formal and informal assessment strategies. Standardised tests indicate that pupils are making good progress in accordance with their ability. Results are purposefully used to inform the selection of pupils for supplementary support. Pupils’ achievement is communicated to parents at parent-teacher meetings and through progress reports issued annually. Staff members should conduct deeper analysis of test results as part of the school’s self-evaluation programme.

6. Quality of Supports for Pupils

- The learning-support and resource teachers commendably share a mixed caseload of both high and low incidence special needs pupils. In general plans are carefully devised, learning targets identified and reviewed periodically. The involvement of parents in the design of individual education plans is praiseworthy. However, tracking and recording of pupil progress could be further advanced.

- The learning-support room is well resourced with varying practices in evidence with regard to the use of materials. A wide range of effective strategies is employed in some support settings. The extended use of more active, hands-on approaches for all pupils receiving support is recommended.

- New programmes, introduced and coordinated by one member of the support team, are positively impacting on pupils’ literacy skill development. To ensure that maximum benefit is derived from all in-class support sessions, agreed objectives coupled with the employment of a range of strategies that caters for skill development are advised.

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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

The Board of Management welcomes the WSE Report. Its content is noted and is given careful consideration.

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

Initial steps have been taken in implementing some of the report’s recommendations.