Whole School Evaluation
Management, Leadership and Learning

REPORT

Convoy Joint National School
Main Street, Convoy, County Donegal
Uimhir rolla: 05230S

Date of inspection: 29 January 2014
Whole-School Evaluation – Management, Leadership and Learning Report

Introduction

A Whole-School Evaluation – Management, Leadership and Learning (WSE - MLL) was undertaken in Convoy Joint National School in January 2014. This report is based on a selection of lessons observed in a range of learning settings in the school, interaction with pupils and review of their work, meetings with the principal and with board and parent representatives, completed parent and pupil questionnaires, and a selection of school documents.

Convoy Joint National School, under the joint patronage of the Church of Ireland and the Presbyterian Church, has seventy-three pupils enrolled. School attendance is good. There are three mainstream class teachers, one shared support teacher and one part-time special-needs assistant on the staff. A visiting resource teacher also attends. At the time of this evaluation, one teacher was on approved leave and a substitute teacher was employed by the board of management in her stead. The school participates in the School Completion Programme (SCP). 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.

The school has strengths in the following areas:

- The board of management functions very effectively and is committed to school development.
- The principal succeeds in creating a very stimulating and productive learning environment for pupils.
- The teachers work very diligently and display a great willingness to embrace new methodologies and approaches in support of the pupils' learning.
- The quality of learning support in literacy and numeracy is very good.
- The use of the outdoor environment as a context for learning is excellent.
- The exploration of local history, through a cross-community school partnership project, is highly praiseworthy.

The following main recommendations are made:

- Moltar a thuilleadh béime a chur ar chothú scilean na cumarsáide agus scileanna léitheoireachta na ndaltaí sa Ghaeilge. Further emphasis should be placed on developing the pupils’ communication and reading skills in Irish.
- Assessment for learning practices, including self and peer-assessment, should be developed further.

Findings

1. The learning achievements of pupils

   - The pupils’ overall learning achievements are commendable. The general purpose room presents colourful examples of the very broad range of stimulating learning experiences undertaken. Pupils work collaboratively and have opportunities to engage in active learning experiences. Information and communications technologies (ICT) are used effectively by pupils.

   - Paired reading, discrete oral language lessons and a whole-school comprehension programme are having a very positive impact on the pupils’ literacy skills. Pupils read and memorise a wide range of poetry. Their writing demonstrates appropriate fluency, punctuation and spelling.
Learning outcomes in Mathematics are good. Pair work is supportive of problem-solving activities. In the middle classes, the use of concrete materials to support the pupils’ conceptual development is highly commended.

Léiríonn na daltaí dearcadh dearfach i leith na Ga eilge. Tá dánta agus amhráin ar eolas acu agus tá caighdeán sásúil tusceana bainte amach ag fómhór na ndaltaí. Baineann síd sult as cluichí agus as obair ghrúpa san fhoghlaim. Ar an iomlán, áfach, tá forbart ag teacht ar chaighdeán na Gaeilge labhartha agus ar chaighdeán na scileanna léitheoireachta sa teanga. (The pupils display a positive attitude towards the Irish language. They have memorised poems and songs and the majority of the pupils have a good standard of understanding. They enjoy learning through games and pair activity. On the whole, however, there is a need to develop the standard of spoken Irish and reading skills in the language.)

In the lessons observed in Science, Geography and Physical Education, the pupils were provided with suitable challenge. Pupils’ environmental work, in particular the work of the Eco Club, is highly praiseworthy. Commendably, the school has received seven green flags in the Green-Schools programme. The exploration of local history, through a cross-community school partnership project, is highly praiseworthy.

Classroom displays indicate very satisfactory learning in the Visual Arts. The school choir performs to a high standard.

The overall learning and progress of pupils, including those with additional and special educational needs, are commendable.

2. Quality of teaching

- The quality of teaching is very good overall with some excellent individual practices observed. Where excellent practice was observed, there were well-planned thematic approaches facilitating integration across the curriculum and highly effective questioning of pupils. Almost all parents, in questionnaire responses, indicate that teaching is good in the school.

- Teachers provide a broad reading programme that is differentiated appropriately to the pupils’ literacy needs. In mathematics lessons, a strong emphasis is placed on target vocabulary and discussion. Teachers promote the use of mathematics effectively in other areas of learning.

- Tá scóip chun forbartha i gcailíocht na teagaisc sa Ghaeilge. Chun scileanna cumarsáide na ndaltaí a bhforbairt a thulcheadh, moltar an teicneolaíocht eolais agus cumarsáide a úsáid go rialta le linn na gceachtanna. Moltar, freisin, ábhar léitheoireachta sa bhreis a aimsiú chun suim na ndaltaí a thorbart. B’fhiú an trial Ghaeilge Dhroim Conrach a úsáid chun caighdeán na foghlama a mheas go bliantúil. (There is scope for development in the quality of teaching in Irish. To develop the pupils’ communication skills further, it is recommended that ICT be used regularly during lessons. A greater range of reading material should be sourced to develop the pupils’ interests. The Drumcondra Irish Test should be used annually to assess learning standards.)

- Provision for pupils with additional and special educational needs is very good overall. In particular, the provision for learning support, through a variety of means in literacy and numeracy, is highly commenable. Teachers track pupils’ progress carefully and are vigilant in terms of identifying pupils who might benefit from extra support.

- Current assessment of learning practices are good. In questionnaire responses, all pupils indicated that homework is checked by teachers. Going forward, assessment for learning strategies, including self and peer-assessment, should be developed.
3. Support for pupils’ well-being
   - The management of pupils is highly praiseworthy in most classrooms. Classroom support plans should be drawn up, where necessary, to support pupils’ needs.
   - Teachers show great care for and commitment to their pupils. Pupils’ work and achievements, both curricular and non-curricular, are celebrated regularly. A book rental scheme is implemented successfully. External tutors, funded by SCP grants, are employed periodically to provide beneficial additional tuition to pupils.
   - In questionnaire responses, almost all parents indicated that they are happy with the school and that their children feel safe there and are well looked after. While nearly all pupils indicated that they felt safe in the classroom, a few indicated that they felt unsafe in the playground. Any concerns pupils might have with regard to yard safety should be explored further at school level as part of the Social, Personal and Health Education programme.
   - Confirmation was provided that the board of management has formally adopted the *Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-primary Schools* without modification and that the school is compliant with the requirements of the *Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools*.

4. Leadership and Management
   - The board of management functions very effectively and is committed to school development. The parent-teacher association supports the school through regular fundraising activities. While the board shares policies with parents, a web site would provide continued access to key policies.
   - It is imperative that the board, in consultation with parents, endeavours to ensure that all pupils are in school at the official assembly time of 9.10am. Currently, pupils arrive between 9.10am and 9.20am.
   - The in-school management team comprises the principal, the deputy principal and one post holder. The teaching principal succeeds in creating a very stimulating and productive learning environment for the pupils. Duties carried out by other members of the management team impact very positively on pupils’ learning experiences.
   - To date, there has been limited teacher rotation. It is important that teachers are deployed in ways which meet the needs of the pupils and that they have opportunities to teach in a range of classroom contexts. A policy on staff rotation is recommended.
   - The school communicates in a very comprehensive manner with parents. In questionnaire responses, all parents reported that they feel welcome in the school, that there is a good atmosphere and that the school is well run.

5. School Self-evaluation
   - There is very good engagement with school self-evaluation. The targeted actions for improvement in the school improvement plan are impacting positively on pupils’ learning in literacy.

Conclusion
Given the considerable commitment and the reflective approach of the staff and their keen desire to improve pupils’ learning experiences, the school’s capacity to develop further is very good.

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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 of Convoy Joint N.S. welcomes the recent WSE-MLL report that affirms the high quality of teaching and learning in our school. We are pleased that the report recognises the many strengths of the school and acknowledges the dedication and commitment of staff, pupils, parents and management.

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

The Board and staff are working together to implement the recommendations of the report.