An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Dunmanway Model National School
Dunmanway, Co. Cork
Uimhir rolla: 05636A

Date of inspection: 9 December 2010
1. Introduction

Dunmanway Model NS is a non-denominational, co-educational primary school under the patronage of the Department of Education and Skills. Currently, fifty-four pupils attend the school and there are three mainstream class teachers. General enrolment patterns are stable. School practices with regard to pupil attendance are proactive and in conformity with National Educational Welfare Board (NEWB) guidelines.

This whole-school evaluation focused on the quality of teaching and learning in Irish, English, Mathematics and Science. 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

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

- The school is managed efficiently and effectively.
- The school building is a well resourced facility which is well suited to the provision of primary education.
- The atmosphere in the school is very positive and activity-based learning is facilitated. Pupils’ behaviour is very good and they engage with keen interest in their learning.
- There is an appropriate commitment to the holistic development of each pupil and a broad and balanced curriculum, in line with the Department’s expectations, is provided in support of that objective.
- The principal and staff are dedicated professionals who work collaboratively and who place the needs of pupils at the heart of the internal school decision-making process.
- Relationships between the board, the staff, the parents, the pupils and the wider school community are positive and clear channels of communication exist.

The following main recommendations are made:

- It is recommended that the board devise, within an appropriate time-frame, a strategic plan to optimise the use of the model school premises, consulting externally as appropriate.
- It is recommended that the principal and other teachers develop a common monthly report template to facilitate engagement and professional dialogue, within the school, on the continuity and progression of learning in each curricular area.
- It is recommended that additional targeted cross-curricular initiatives which focus on pupils in the high achieving percentile bands be introduced and implemented within specific time-frames.
3. Quality of School Management

- The board of management is properly constituted and plays an active role in school affairs. It is committed to the effective provision of a holistic education and strives to incorporate, where possible, the views and concerns of all groups within the school community. It is evident that relationships between the board and other partners and stakeholders are well developed. The financial and administrative affairs of the school are managed efficiently. Almost all (93.1%) parents, through questionnaire responses, expressed satisfaction with the overall management of the school and an equally high percentage (97%) consider it to be well run.

- Dunmanway Model School first opened its doors in 1849 as a non-denominational school for boys and girls with residential accommodation for staff as well as boarding accommodation for up to eight candidate teachers. An agricultural college and a fifteen-acre model farm were also attached at that time. The building has seen much change, including periods of relative inactivity, since that time and the ‘model school’ concept has been eroded by educational change. However, the impressive original building still stands. This has been renovated extensively in recent years (2001) by the Department of Education and Skills and, though some necessary adaptations have occurred, the original character of the building has been preserved. Currently, almost all of the ground floor premises is occupied by the school and a very good standard of accommodation is evident. Classrooms are spacious and comfortable and good quality learning environments are provided. There are good standards of cleaning and maintenance and the health and safety of pupils, staff, management and visitors is given necessary attention. The challenge for the board, now, is to complete the renovation of the upstairs premises and to ensure optimal use of the building into the future. It is recommended that the board devise a time-bound strategic plan for the use of the model school premises, consulting externally as appropriate. The opportunities available through the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Scheme are worthy of exploration.

- Resource provision in the school is very good and all classrooms have a suitable variety of teaching and learning aids which are used to facilitate active learning and stimulate pupils’ imagination and creativity. Good use is made of school resources by all staff members. Investment in information and communication technology (ICT) is very well advanced in the school and its use is a feature of many lessons. Almost all parents (93.3%) believe that school facilities are good.

- The stated mission of the school is to be child-centred and to provide a holistic education. This is evident in the daily routines of the school and in the variety of extracurricular activity which occurs. Pupils participate in swimming, inter-school sporting and athletic competitions carol singing, charity fundraising and other community/social events. Almost all parents (97%) believe that teaching in the school is good and that their children are doing well. All pupils from third to sixth class were surveyed and they all said they enjoyed coming to school and felt safe there. In addition, 96% of pupils said they enjoyed their lessons and learning. These are very positive findings.

- The Department currently provides for the appointment of a principal, a deputy principal and one additional post of responsibility holder in the school. These posts have been filled accordingly and assigned duties appropriately reflect current school administrative, curricular and pastoral needs. Currently, a member of the in-school management team is on career-break and her assigned duties have been delegated to non-post-holder staff members with their consent and full co-operation. This is indicative of the strength of the in-school management team and of the commendable measure of collegiality and mutual support that is apparent between all staff members. The principal has facilitated the
development of a democratic and collegial working environment and has most successfully empowered leadership at all levels within the school community. All other staff members deserve praise for the professional manner in which they regularly engage with the whole-school decision-making process.

- The ancillary staff employed by the board include one full-time and one part-time special needs assistant (SNA), a part-time secretary, and a part-time caretaker. Based on the evidence available, all perform their duties to a satisfactory standard.

- The daily practices and routines of the school comply with current legislation and with Departmental regulations with regard to the length of the school year, enrolment and retention of pupils, health and safety and the provision of a broad and balanced curriculum.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- The board has, in compliance with the Education Act 1998, made provision for the development, review and regular updating of a school plan. This plan is in line with Departmental expectations and provides guidance on administrative practices and policies as well as on educational provision in each of the prescribed curricular areas. The principal has played a central, co-ordinating role in whole-school planning and satisfactory collaboration has occurred with other relevant partners and stakeholders. The school plan reflects the unique context of the school and is consistent with the stated mission of the board. The school seeks to identify areas of strength and those in need of improvement through reflection on the impact of whole-school planning process and policies on teaching and learning.

- The implementation of the school plan is facilitated by the support and co-operation of staff members as well as through dialogue and regular critical reviews of students’ progress reports. Current practices might be further enhanced by the regular collection of monthly progress records and by their on-going analysis at staff meeting and at meetings of the in-school management team.

- Individual teachers prepare long term and short term plans which highlight the educational programmes being implemented in their respective learning contexts. Different styles are used but there is a consistent focus on the production of a programme of work and on the desired learning outcomes for each classroom setting. The continuity and progression of learning across the classes would be enhanced by a common template for the recording of monthly progress records.

- 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, 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.
5. Quality of Teaching, Learning and Pupil Achievement

- Teaching and learning is good in the school. Suitable methodologies are used, a broad and balanced programme, in line with the principles of the primary curriculum is devised and implemented and work is consolidated on a regular basis.

- Déantar sár-iarracht caighdeán oiriúnach a bhaint amach i bhfoghlaim agus i dteagasc na Gaeilge. Moltar struchtúr na gceachtanna agus an tsí ina gcóthaitear atmaisféar taitnemhach foghlaíma. Úsáidtear modhanna múinte suimíula agus is inmholta an úsáid a bhaintear as an gclár bán idirghníomhmhach. Dá réir sin, cuirtear bheim chuí ar ionchur teanga nua. Moltar ranpháirtíocht na ndaltaí san obair agus trí chúilich, cleachtaí drámaíocha agus trí plé oiriúnach sroichtear caighdeán inmholta sa chaint fhoirmiúil, sa léitheoireacht agus sa scribhneoireacht. Is léir ó shaothar na ndaltaí agus ó bheith ag labhairt le chuid acu sna ranganna éagsúla go bhfuil dul chun cinn a dhéanamh ag a bhfhoirmhór. Chun cur leis an obair a thuilleadh moltar don bhfoireann clár éisteachta a bhunú don scoil agus trí chluichí, cleachtaí drámaíocha agus trí plé oiriúnach sroichtear caighdeán inmholta sa chaint fhoirmiúil, sa léitheoireacht agus sa scribhneoireacht. Is léir ó shaothar na ndaltaí agus ó bheith ag labhairt le chuid acu sna ranganna éagsúla go bhfuil dul chun cinn a dhéanamh ag a bhfhoirmhór. Chun cur leis an obair a thuilleadh moltar don bhfoireann clár éisteachta a bhunú don scoil agus trí chluichí, cleachtaí drámaíocha agus trí plé oiriúnach sroichtear caighdeán inmholta sa chaint fhoirmiúil, sa léitheoireacht agus sa scribhneoireacht. Is léir ó shaothar na ndaltaí agus ó bheith ag labhairt le chuid acu sna ranganna éagsúla go bhfuil dul chun cinn a dhéanamh ag a bhfhoirmhór.

Very good efforts are made to reach appropriate standards in the teaching and learning of Irish. Lessons are well structured and commendable efforts are made to create a pleasant learning environment. Interesting teaching methods are used and the use of interactive whiteboards is commended. There is an appropriate emphasis on the input of new language during the lessons. The active involvement of pupils is promoted and by means of games, drama and through discussion a creditable standard is reached in structured dialogue, reading and writing. It is apparent from the work samples of pupils and from interaction with some of them at the various class levels that the majority are making satisfactory progress. In order to further enhance the standard it is recommended that the staff develop a programme of listening activities and develop further the opportunities for pupils to use Irish communicatively in various contexts.

- The standard of teaching in English is very good in the school and there is a consistent emphasis on the development of literacy skills from an early age. Pupils are, generally, articulate, confident and display high levels of self-esteem. Their standardised test results indicate very good progress in almost all instances. Good practice also occurs in relation to pupils experiencing difficulty and there is a commendable emphasis on early identification and guided intervention programmes for the individual pupil. English language learning occurs across the curriculum. Pre-reading activities are structured and reading skills are taught effectively. Throughout the school pupils read with confidence and their interest in books and other printed material is cultivated expertly. Print rich classrooms provide a suitably stimulating environment and pupils were observed to be engaged and active in the learning process. The quality of pupils’ written work is very good and the cumulative efforts of all staff members are apparent in the quality of the work of senior pupils. Sufficient emphasis is also placed on grammar, punctuation and spelling without negatively impacting on pupils’ creativity and imagination.

- Significant strengths were observed in the teaching of Mathematics. Pupils display a solid understanding of concepts and receive a thorough grounding in number work and in computational skills. Though school textbook are used to define the programme of work in Mathematics, active methodologies are used in all classes to explore the underlying concepts and skills. Concrete materials are used effectively in the exploration of concepts and there is an emphasis on the development of the language of mathematics at all levels. Standardised test results in Mathematics indicate good progress in almost all instances. Almost all (96.2%) of the third to sixth class pupils surveyed as part of the evaluation considered themselves to be doing well at Mathematics and 93.3% of parents felt that the school is making a significant contribution to this success. In order to further develop mathematics education in the school it is recommended that, where possible,
mathematical skills and concepts are tested in practical situations and that a formal programme of problem-solving be incorporated into the work programme.

- Science provision is very good and a broad and balanced programme is delivered in each class. Good use is made of the environment, investigation tables, ICT and environmental awareness and care is promoted through re-cycling and focused project work. Science is integrated with other areas of the curriculum and discussion and activity-based learning are some of the key approaches used to promote understanding. In order to further enhance Science education in the school and, given that the school was once the base for a very successful agricultural college, it is recommended that the board and the staff investigate the potential of developing school gardens or explore the possibility of using poly-tunnels or a glasshouse to facilitate focused activity based project work in Science and horticulture.

6. Quality of Support for Pupils

- Pupils with special educational needs are currently catered for by a team of five staff members: three learning support/resource (LS/RT) teachers and two SNAs. Two of the LS/RT posts are shared and one is part-time. The support team is very effective. Its members combine their respective strengths, share information, collaborate with mainstream colleagues and engage in a variety of effective practices to support pupils experiencing educational difficulties and those with long term educational needs.

- Individual and group withdrawal, in-class support, team teaching and whole-class teaching, where appropriate, are used to good effect by the support team. Early intervention is promoted and there is a suitable emphasis on formative assessment.

- The high quality of the interventions results, in almost all cases, in suitable progress being made by the pupils in receipt of additional support. School practices also facilitate the involvement of parents and effective information sharing practices exist. Almost all (96%) of parents were happy with the arrangements for parent-teacher meetings and a further majority (94%) trusted the accuracy of the information provided by the school.

- It is recommended that the quality of support for pupils be further enhanced through the introduction of some targeted cross-curricular initiatives for high achieving and exceptionally gifted pupils, to be implemented within specific time-frames.

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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

We found the whole process of evaluation very affirming. Schools can be quite isolated from each other and it was lovely to know that we are doing things right. It was great to have an inspector commend the standard of our academic subjects as well as the enthusiasm with which we do other more practical ones! We are glad that our holistic approach to education was evident. Our thanks to the inspector who conducted the evaluation.

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 inspector made thoughtful observations in his report which we will gladly take on board.

- We have been working on a scheme to optimise usage of the Model school premises (as he suggested) and hope that this will help with maintenance in the future.
- We have been viewing monthly report templates which could facilitate dialogue in school next year and hopefully enhance continuity of education.
- We are cognisant of the need for exceptionally able/gifted children in our school to have extra stimulation and feel that this may be achieved using our ever improving I.C.T. facilities.