Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Kilgobnet National School,
Kilgobnet, Beaufort, Killarney, Co. Kerry
Uimhir rolla: 07841L

Date of inspection: 10th May 2010
WHOLE-SCHOOL EVALUATION

A whole-school evaluation of Kilgobnet 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 Irish, English, Mathematics and Visual Arts. 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

Kilgobnet National School is a four-teacher, co-educational, rural school situated west of Killarney in the parish of Beaufort. It is a Catholic school under the patronage of the Bishop of Kerry. It has a relatively small catchment area. The school building was originally built in 1988 and it provides a stimulating learning environment for pupils. It is noted that the pupils treat the building and surrounds with great care.

A part-time resource teacher attends for 11.5 hours weekly. A Spanish teacher provides language and cultural experiences for pupils and staff as part of the Modern Languages Initiative. The school also benefits from a part-time secretary and caretaker. Both work diligently in the discharge of their duties.

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>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pupils enrolled in the school</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainstream classes in the school</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers on the school staff</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers working in support roles</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special needs assistants</td>
<td>1.5</td>
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The school’s enrolment on 30 September 2009 was ninety-seven pupils with stable pupil numbers in evidence. It is reported that pupil attendance levels are excellent.

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT

1.1 Board of management

The board of management is properly constituted in accordance with Department of Education and Skills’ (DES) guidelines. In general the board meets every six weeks and expresses a willingness to convene on a more frequent basis if required. Although not all board members have been assigned specific duties, it is reported that their expertise in various areas of management are utilised effectively. Some board members have attended training seminars provided by the patron. The chairperson, in accordance with her supportive role, maintains regular contact with the principal, staff and pupils. The board supports the work of the school by ensuring that required resources are provided and by the regular promotion of teachers’ professional development.
Minutes of meetings are maintained carefully and these indicate that discussion has taken place with regard to a broad range of issues including a review of organisational policies. The treasurer presents a financial report at each board meeting. Accounts have not been audited to date. It is recommended that financial records be submitted regularly for certification in line with Section 18(1) of the Education Act, 1998. While the board ratifies a range of curricular and organisational policies, it is advised that it takes a more proactive role in any proposed review of curricular plans. The board’s work to date with regard to the development and maintenance of the school building and grounds to a high standard is acknowledged. A maintenance programme is in place which includes work being carried out on the building each summer.

2.2 In-school management
The in-school management team consists of the principal, deputy principal and the special duties teacher. The principal fulfils both teaching and administrative duties and she demonstrates a clear vision for the school. She is sincerely committed to improving the achievement standards of pupils. Due to her endeavours, the school is characterised by a constructive learning atmosphere, in which positive pupil engagement and open communication with the wider school community are cultivated. Roll books are completed and maintained satisfactorily.

The principal is ably assisted in her role by the deputy principal and the special duties teacher. A very positive working relationship is in evidence. There are curricular, organisational and pastoral aspects ascribed to their roles with current emphasis on the development of Physical Education and Information and Communication Technologies (ICT). Members of the in-school-management team are committed to supporting the development of the school and they discharge their duties conscientiously. However, there is an absence of overarching structures and procedures underpinning their work. It is recommended that contributions of the management team be further harnessed through formal in-school management meetings. Regular staff meetings take place and minutes are recorded.

1.3 Management of relationships and communication with the school community
The school promotes good communication and builds trust and respect between parents and teachers. Home-school links are facilitated through the frequent distribution of a school newsletter and the organisation of religious ceremonies and sporting activities. Parent-teacher meetings are held annually and provide an opportunity for parents to discuss their children’s progress.

The committed and dedicated parents’ association, which was established in 2000, meets monthly and convenes an annual general meeting (AGM). Some members have attended training seminars. Its main priorities are health and safety issues, the promotion of healthy eating and the organisation of fundraising activities. The chairperson liaises with the principal before and after each meeting to discuss issues of mutual interest. At present it is carrying out a survey of all parents in relation to the introduction of a school uniform. The parents’ association contributes regularly to the school’s newsletter and also publishes one of its own annually.

The parents’ representatives commented favourably on the openness and welcome afforded to all parents by the staff. Satisfaction was expressed with the quality and standard of teaching and the educational progress being made by their children. High levels of communication between staff and parents are reported. Parents also stated that there are many opportunities, both formal and informal, for them to discuss their children’s attainment and progress with teachers.
1.4 Management of pupils

The management of pupils in this school is of a high standard. The board of management and the staff have devised a code of behaviour and anti-bullying policies that are implemented consistently. This code of behaviour is circulated to parents on enrolment. The pupils are well behaved and relate positively towards their peers and adults. They are eager to engage in discussion and participate fully in their learning.

2. Quality of School Planning

2.1 Whole-school and classroom planning

A broad range of policies has been devised by the staff. While some policies have been ratified, signed and dated by the board of management, it is advised that all policies be finalised in a similar manner. The school maintains a developmental planning folder which records decisions made in relation to policies. A planning diary is also available detailing time frames for review of various plans. The existing enrolment policy should be reviewed to ensure it complies with legislation and Department of Education and Skills’ circulars. The further involvement of the board and parents in policy formulation is advised.

Curriculum plans have been devised by the staff and are reviewed on a regular basis. This work was accomplished with the support of the School Development Planning Service and the Primary Curriculum Support Programme. Plans are comprehensive and are based on the strands and strand units of the Primary Curriculum (1999).

All teachers prepare short-term and long-term plans to inform their teaching in compliance with Rule 126 of the Rules for National Schools. Most schemes of work are comprehensive and informative. It is recommended that this good practice be extended throughout the school. Monthly progress records are carefully maintained.

2.2 Child protection policy and procedures

Confirmation was provided that, in compliance with Primary Circular 0061/2006, the board of management has formally adopted the Department’s Child Protection Guidelines for Primary Schools (DES, 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

Tá plean scoile cuimsitheach curtha le chéile don Ghaeilge. Rinneadh athbhreithniú iomlán ar an bplean seo le déanáil. Tá prionta shaibhir agus ábhar léirithe ar taispeáint i seomraí ranga áirithe. Moltar an dea-chleachtas seo a leathnú ar fud na scoile. Úsáideann chuid mhaith de na hoidí modhanna gníomhacha múinte. Baineann siad úsáid as modh closlabhartha, modh closamharc agus as gníomhalochtaí chun an teanga a theagasc go h-éifeachtach. Léirigh na daltaí tuiscint chuí
Irish
A comprehensive plan for Irish has been formulated and was recently revised. A print-rich environment is provided and there are visual displays in some classrooms. It is recommended that this good practice be extended to all classrooms. The use of some active teaching methodologies is evident in most classrooms. Various methods and resources, such as listening tasks, audio-visual tasks, songs and rhymes are used to encourage pupils to communicate in the language. Pupils display suitable comprehension abilities. Pupils know and enjoy reciting Irish rhymes, poems and songs. Pair work and role-play are employed fruitfully to provide opportunities for pupils to use the language. It is recommended that this good practice be extended throughout the school.

Pre-reading activities are appropriately provided in the junior section. Commercially produced textbooks are purposefully used to develop pupils’ reading competence in the middle and senior classes. It is recommended that a further stock of suitable texts should be sourced to provide pupils with a wider reading experience.

Pupils record written work in their copybooks and neat presentation is encouraged. In general writing exercises are based on comprehension activities in textbooks and workbooks. Some variety was noted in the range of writing genres experienced in some classes. It would be beneficial if pupils were given greater opportunities to write in a wider range of genres and for various audiences.

English
The teaching of English is of a high standard and in general pupil achievement is good. Teachers provide and use a wide range of resources to support teaching and learning. Each classroom provides a suitable print-rich environment and class libraries are well stocked with a variety of books. Samples of pupils’ personal writing and project work are displayed attractively in most classes. English is integrated well with many other subject areas throughout the school. In general, teachers employ a variety of effective teaching approaches to ensure pupils can engage purposefully with all aspects of the subject.

A number of very good oral language lessons were observed particularly those that incorporated focused opportunities for language acquisition and development. In many classes teachers make effective use of a variety of strategies including games, group work, discussion and drama to maximise interactions between pupils. In these lessons, pupils were observed to be articulate and
confident when expressing themselves. Poetry is a feature of the curriculum programme in all classes. Pupils experience a range of genres and are afforded opportunities to compose their own poems.

Reading skills are appropriately developed throughout the school and, for the most part, pupils are fluent and confident readers. A high standard of work in the area of phonological awareness, and word recognition skills was observed in the junior classes which forms a solid foundation for the further development of pupils’ reading skills. A number of effective pre-reading activities are employed in junior classes and are supported by rhymes, word games and other suitable resources. A wide variety of reading materials successfully supports the teaching of reading in this school. Reading groups are used advantageously in the infant classes. Pupils in middle and senior classes read a variety of genres to a high standard and class novels are a feature of the reading programme from third class to sixth class. Teachers have gainfully compiled supporting material to enhance the exploration of novels. Pupils were observed engaging enthusiastically with these reading materials. A paired-reading programme was recently established in some classes. This good practice is acknowledged, the extension of which would benefit pupils in other classes.

The teaching of writing is systematically developed throughout the school. A variety of pupils’ writing is attractively displayed in each classroom. Pupils’ abilities are appropriately developed from pre-writing activities in infant classes to a suitable standard of creative writing in senior classes. Teachers employ a range of effective methodologies and frequently link pupils’ written work with other curricular areas. Pupils are provided with opportunities to write regularly and creative writing activities include the writing of poetry, the compilation of personal accounts and reviews of the month. In a majority of classes, pupils are encouraged and supported in the skills of drafting and editing. It is recommended that this good practice be extended to all relevant classes. Pupils’ abilities in functional writing are suitably developed and lessons include the promotion of strategies to support accurate spelling and grammar. Teachers teach and promote neat handwriting. It is recommended that this be further developed through the careful demonstration and modelling of good penmanship skills by teachers.

3.3 Mathematics:
The quality of teaching in Mathematics is good. Lessons are structured and developed in an effective manner and pupils’ application to tasks is managed skilfully. Classrooms are well resourced with concrete materials and mathematical resources. Early mathematical activities are effectively promoted in the junior classes. The organisation of group learning in some classes and the opportunities provided to develop pupils’ estimation skills are praiseworthy. It is recommended that this good practice be extended to all classes. Calculators are used regularly by pupils from fourth class.

Throughout the school pupils enjoy Mathematics and actively participate in lessons. In the junior classes they display competent counting skills, a very good concept of number, satisfactory understanding of pattern and an appropriate knowledge of shape in the classroom environment. Working collaboratively is promoted. In the middle classes pupils demonstrate satisfactory addition and subtraction skills. In the senior classes pupils demonstrate a good operational understanding of fractions. Satisfactory problem-solving skills are evident throughout the school. Pupils’ written work is neatly presented, particularly in the junior and middle classes. Across the school pupils’ attainment in standardised tests is good.
3.4 Visual Arts
An appropriate visual arts plan has been devised and pupils in all classes explore a wide range of media. Effective use is made of existing corridor display space and available wall areas to exhibit pupils’ art. This work is of a high standard, in terms of skill, use of materials, imagination and creativity. Pupils create art in all strand areas covering drawing, paint and colour, print, clay, construction and fabric and fibre. The stimulus for many activities comes from other areas of the curriculum. Accordingly, Visual Arts is very satisfactorily integrated with other subject areas. All pupils participate enthusiastically in the visual arts activities. Portfolios of pupil’s work are maintained in some classes and this practice should be extended throughout the school. Pupils are afforded productive opportunities to study the lives and works of major artists. They respond in a variety of ways to these works and to the artistic endeavours of their classmates.

3.5 Assessment
The school has formulated a relevant assessment policy. A range of assessment modes is employed successfully throughout the school. Standardised testing in both Mathematics and English is carried out annually from first class to sixth class and records are maintained carefully. The Middle Infant Screening Test (MIST) is administered to pupils in senior infants. The MIST results are used to instigate early intervention programmes. Work samples, test results, and checklists are all carefully maintained. Copies and workbooks are monitored regularly. The quality of record keeping is good.

4. QUALITY OF SUPPORT FOR PUPILS

4.1 Pupils with special educational needs
The school is very inclusive of pupils with special educational needs. Overall the quality of provision in this area is of a high standard. A special educational needs policy has been recently revised and it clearly outlines the responsibilities of all the education partners in attending to the needs of pupils requiring special education support in the school. It also incorporates the staged approach as per Department of Education and Skills’ circular 02/05.

Planning systems are well established in respect of pupils with special educational needs. Individual Education Plans (IEPs) and pupils’ profiles are appropriately formulated in consultation with class teachers. Consideration should also be given to providing class teachers and parents with a copy of the IEPs when formulated and when updated.

The teaching of pupils with special education needs is effective. Lessons are well structured and a range of teaching resources, including ICT appropriate to the needs and learning styles of pupils, is available. Pupils engage positively in learning activities. Learning support is organised on a group basis taking pupils’ needs into consideration.

Learning support is provided in literacy and numeracy. Support is provided both on a withdrawal and in-class basis. In the further development of in-class support, station teaching might be considered. During the evaluation, good rapport was observed between teacher and pupils in the learning-support setting and relationships were kind and respectful. Consultation with mainstream teachers is frequent but informal. Formal meetings should now be considered in order to monitor the progress of pupils in terms of specific learning targets. Special needs assistants (SNAs) work closely and effectively with pupils and teachers. Guidelines have been formulated for the work of SNAs.
4.2 Other supports for pupils: disadvantaged, minority and other groups
Currently specific provision is not required in respect of pupils attending the school from disadvantaged, minority or other groups.

5. CONCLUSION

The school has strengths in the following areas:

- The board of management supports the work of the school and maintains the building and grounds to a high standard.
- The commitment and dedication of the teaching staff and their concern for the welfare of pupils is noteworthy.
- Good co-operation exists between management, parents and staff to the benefit of pupils.
- A comprehensive school plan has been formulated and contains a planning diary for regular review.
- Teaching standards and the achievement of pupils are high
- A broad and balanced curriculum is delivered
- Teachers have access to and use a wide range of teaching resources and methodologies.

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

- It is recommended that parents be afforded greater opportunity to be involved in policy formulation
- It is recommended that the school’s financial accounts be independently audited on a regular basis
- It is recommended that the enrolment policy be revised to comply with relevant legislation
- It is recommended that the role of the in-school management team be further harnessed through formal in-school management meetings
- It is recommended that aspects of best practice in planning and teaching affirmed in this report be extended to all class settings to ensure consistency of provision throughout the school
- It is recommended that formal meetings be arranged in order to monitor the progress of pupils receiving additional support and that IEPs be provided to class teachers and to parents.

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.

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