Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Scoil Náisiúnta Naomh Chárthach
Ballyfinane, Furies, Co.Kerry
Uimhir rolla: 07990F

Date of inspection: 05 February 2010
WHOLE-SCHOOL EVALUATION

A whole-school evaluation of Naomh Cháithchá National School was undertaken in February 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 Science. 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

Naomh Cháithchá National School is a two-teacher, co-educational, rural Catholic school under the patronage of the Bishop of Kerry. It is situated in Killtallagh Parish, between Farranfore and Castlemaine. The school was built in 1965 and has a relatively small catchment area. It creates a stimulating learning environment for pupils who treat the building and surrounds with great care. Mutual respect between teachers and pupils is readily apparent. Roll books indicate pupil attendance levels are excellent. The school currently does not have any pupils in first and fourth classes. A part-time cleaner and secretary are employed and 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:

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<tr>
<th>Number</th>
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<tr>
<td>Pupils enrolled in the school</td>
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<td>Mainstream classes in the school</td>
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<td>Teachers on the school staff</td>
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<td>Mainstream class teachers</td>
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<td>Teachers working in support roles</td>
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<td>Special needs assistants</td>
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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 of management meets once a term and expresses a willingness to convene on a more frequent basis if required. Minutes of meetings are carefully maintained and indicate that discussion has taken place on policy development, child protection and welfare, maintenance issues and the appointment of a new principal and assistant teacher. The treasurer presents a financial report at each meeting. Board accounts are audited annually in line with Section 18(1) of the Education Act, 1998. The board ratifies a range of curricular and organisational policies. However, it is recommended that the board takes a more proactive role in any proposed review of curricular plans. A number of board members have attended training seminars organised by the patron. Some board members have been assigned specific duties and these are carried out diligently. Priorities have been identified by the board.
which include child protection, health and safety and the quality of education provision. The chairperson, in accordance with her supportive role, maintains regular contact with the principal, staff and pupils. The board works diligently, provides high quality resources and maintains the school building and grounds to a high standard.

1.2 In-school management

The in-school management team consists of the principal and the special duties teacher. The principal is recently appointed. She has both teaching and administrative duties. She has a clear vision for the school and is committed to improving standards of achievement. 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 special duties teacher and a very positive working relationship is in evidence. There are curricular, organisational and pastoral aspects ascribed to her role with particular emphasis on the development of information and communications technology (ICT). Regular staff and in-school management meetings take place. Both teachers have been systematically engaged in school development planning and regularly attend professional development courses, a practice that enhances the work of the school.

1.3 Management of relationships and communication with the school community

The school promotes open communication and builds trust and respect between parents and teachers. Home-school links are facilitated through parent-teacher meetings, the frequent distribution of a school newsletter, religious ceremonies and sporting activities. Parent-teacher meetings are held annually and provide an opportunity for parents to discuss their children’s progress. Written reports are provided for parents at the end of the school year and frequent contact is maintained throughout the year.

The school has an active parents’ association. It is recommended that consideration be given to affiliating to the National Parents’ Council (Primary). The inspector met with the parents’ representatives on the Board of Management and they commented on the openness and welcome afforded to all parents. They expressed satisfaction with the quality and standard of teaching and the educational progress made by their children. Parents also expressed satisfaction with the level of communication between staff and parents. Regular written communication provides parents with information about school activities. 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 throughout the school. The code of behaviour is circulated to parents. Pupils are well behaved and relate constructively towards their peers and adults. They are eager to engage in discussion and participate fully in their learning.

An induction day is organised each May for new pupils to introduce them to school life. A transfer programme to post primary school is also operated.
2. QUALITY OF SCHOOL PLANNING

2.1 Whole-school and classroom planning
A broad range of curricular and organisational policies has been devised by the school. Policies have been ratified by the board of management, signed and dated. Organisational policies have been forwarded to the patron by the board, for advice, prior to ratification. Although parents have been invited to make written submissions on some policies, it would be beneficial for parents to have a more central role in the drafting of policies. The school has devised an enrolment and health and safety policy. It is recommended that these policies be reviewed to ensure compliance with legislation. A range of comprehensive curriculum plans have been devised by the staff. It is advised that these be signed and dated with a review date noted.

All teachers prepare appropriate short-term and long-term plans for their teaching. Teachers are focused on delivering a broad and balanced curriculum. Mainstream class teachers use different formats to document their planning and to record progress. Some monthly progress reports are specific and concise. It is recommended that the use of an agreed format for these reports would facilitate greater continuity and progression and more efficient monitoring of achieved learning outcomes. Consideration might also be given to the type of detail recorded in short-term planning.

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 (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
Baintear úsáid as an nGaeilge go rialta mar theanga chaidrimh i ngnáthchaint an lae sna ranganna. Tá modh na cumarsáide á úsáid ach b’fhiú go mór an modh seo a thabhairt chun breis dhúshlán a thabhairt do dhaltaí. Baintear leas as drámaíocht, amhránaíocht, aithris agus cluichí teanga chun an Ghaeilge a chur chun cinn. Leagtar béim choir ar fhorbairt scileanna éisteachta agus labhartha na ndaltaí sna ranganna go léir. Tá na daltaí an-dhearfach ó thaobh na Gaeilge de. Tá foclóir leathan ar eolas acu agus tá caighdeán sásúil Gaeilge labhartha bainte amach ag tromlach na ndaltaí. Tá múineadh sásúil rannta agus dánta gearra ar eolas ag na daltaí agus déanann síad aithris go líofa.

Cuítear béim chuí ar na snáithanna sa litéireoiríocht agus sa scribhneoiríocht sna meánranganna agus sna hardranganna. Baintear úsáid scilíúil as téamaí an chomhchrídon litéireoiríocht. Léann na daltaí go cruinn agus is léir go bhfuil tuiscint bhreá a chruthú a bhfuil a léamh. Müinteoir gramadach fhoirmiúil go rialta sna ranganna sinsearacha. Tá caighdeán sásúil á bhall amach ag na daltaí sa scribhneoiríocht. Comhtháthaitear an scríbhneoiríocht go tairbheach leis an litéireoiríocht agus
leis an ábhar comhrá. Tá cnuasach foicléir ar taispeáint go rialta sna seomraí ranga mar thacaíocht d’fhorsbairt scileanna teanga na ndaltaí.

Irish

Irish is regularly used as the language of communication in classrooms. The communicative approach is used, however, it is recommended that this be further developed to challenge pupils to a greater extent. Drama, song singing, repetition and language games are used to implement the Irish programme. Proper emphasis is placed on developing pupils’ listening and speaking skills in all classes. Pupils display a very positive attitude towards Irish. They have a wide vocabulary and the majority of pupils have reached a satisfactory standard of spoken Irish. The teaching of poetry is praiseworthy. Pupils recite a range of rhymes and short poems fluently.

Proper emphasis is placed on the strands of reading and writing in the middle and senior classes. Skilful use is made of the themes from conversation sessions for reading lessons. Pupils read accurately and it is obvious that they have a good understanding of the reading material. Formal grammar is taught regularly in the senior classes. Pupils achieve a satisfactory standard in writing. Writing activities are purposefully integrated with the subject of the reading and conversation lessons. Word banks are regularly displayed to support the development of pupils’ language skills.

English

Oral language lessons are a feature of classroom practice in all classes. Rhymes and stories are used effectively in the junior classes to develop pupils’ language and phonological skills. Pupils can recite a wide repertoire of rhymes and poems in the junior and middle sections of the school, many with actions and movement. Effort is made to develop pupils’ oral language skills in a productive way across the curriculum. It is advised that a structured programme be implemented to further developed pupils’ language skills.

Significant emphasis is placed on the development of pupils’ emergent reading skills in the junior section. Class novels are used effectively to supplement the reading programme in the middle and senior classes. All classrooms have an adequate stock of supplementary reading materials. Pupils across the school display varying reading abilities with an isolated pocket of weakness evident. While the majority of pupils read confidently and have satisfactory word attack skills it is advised that specific reading and comprehension initiatives be implemented to address the attainment of weaker pupils. In that context opportunities for the involvement of parents in supporting reading development at home should be exploited.

Pupils benefit from the emphasis placed on the writing process and there are some good samples of writing in different genres to be found in all classrooms. Some very good teaching with regard to enriching pupils’ language prior to embarking on written activities was noted. There was evidence of good use of ICT to display pupils’ stories and poems. Pupils’ handwritten work is generally of a satisfactory standard across the school.

3.2 Mathematics

The quality of teaching and learning in Mathematics is of a high standard throughout the school. Lessons are taught effectively with appropriate attention given to the use of concrete materials to assist with pupils’ conceptual development. The language of Mathematics is given due attention. Consideration should now be given to the increased display of mathematical language. Practical assignments that engage pupils in active exploration and problem-solving activities are
acknowledged. Opportunities to integrate lesson themes with other curricular areas are exploited carefully.

Pupils engage enthusiastically in Mathematics lessons displaying confidence in their learning. Counting and predicting skills are developed appropriately among the younger pupils while the senior pupils display very satisfactory recall of number facts. Pupil performance in standardised assessments is generally satisfactory. Pupils’ copybooks and workbooks are monitored carefully.

3.3 Science

Evidence from pupils’ workbooks and copybooks, along with some commendable displays of work, indicate that pupils in both classrooms have covered a broad science programme including *Designing and Making* activities. In the junior classroom a high standard of teaching was observed. Pupils’ ideas were effectively sought through skilful questioning. Pupils had opportunity to engage in active, hands-on investigation and exploration and their natural curiosity was effectively channelled in simple investigations. In the senior room a task administered during the evaluation indicated that pupils had a very sound procedural knowledge of planning and designing simple investigations. They also displayed a good sense of fair testing.

3.4 Assessment

Teachers make use of a range of assessment modes, including teacher observation, teacher-devised tests, standardised and diagnostic tests. Systematic monitoring of pupils’ written work was noted at all class levels. Teachers appropriately provide pupils with constructive feedback for improvement, especially in relation to their written work. However, an analysis of assessment data merits further attention. It is recommended that information regarding pupil progress be used on a more ongoing basis to inform planning, teaching and learning. The data gathered should also inform differentiated programmes of learning for pupils with special needs. Greater emphasis should be placed on promoting assessment for learning, as outlined in the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment guidelines.

4. QUALITY OF SUPPORT FOR PUPILS

4.1 Pupils with special educational needs

A comprehensive whole-school policy on the provision of support for pupils with special educational needs has been devised. Clear identification procedures for the selection of pupils are in place. Provision, both in numeracy and literacy, is currently on a withdrawal basis. It is recommended that consideration be given to developing in-class support reflective of current learning outcomes on a whole-school basis. The learning-support room, which also serves as a staff room and secretary’s office, is not adequate as a learning-support classroom. It is recommended that consideration be given to the provision of appropriate accommodation as a matter of priority. Supplementary teaching observed in the learning-support context was targeted at and delivered to pupils in a structured manner, scaffolding pupil’s learning in a positive and reassuring environment. Individual education plans (IEPs) have been devised and these plans include dates of achievement of learning targets. IEPs are devised in consultation with the principal, class teacher and parents. While copies are made available to staff consideration should now be given to issuing a copy of the IEP to parents.
4.2 Other supports for pupils: disadvantaged, minority and other groups

Dedicated provision for pupils from disadvantaged, minority or other groups was not required in the school at the time of the evaluation.

5. CONCLUSION

The school has strengths in the following areas:

- The principal and staff are committed and dedicated.
- Good co-operation exists between management, parents and staff to the benefit of pupils.
- The board of management supports school improvement and provides a range of adequate resources.
- The pupils are well behaved, courteous and engage willingly with their teachers.
- A broad and balanced curriculum is delivered in the school.

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

- It is recommended that management give consideration to the provision of adequate accommodation for learning support as a matter of priority.
- It is recommended that the school’s enrolment policy be reviewed to ensure it complies with legislation and with Department of Education and Skills circulars.
- Moltar cur chuige cumarsáide a chur i bhfeidhm i múineadh agus i bhfoghlaim na Gaeilge. (It is recommended that a communicative approach to the teaching and learning of Irish be implemented.)
- It is advised that specific reading and comprehension programmes be implemented to support the reading development of weaker pupils.
- It is recommended that a common approach to objective-based classroom planning be devised.

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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