An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Holy Trinity National School
Westport, County Mayo.
Uimhir rolla: 08302J

Date of inspection: 4 February 2010
Whole-school evaluation

A whole-school evaluation of Holy Trinity 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 History. 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

Holy Trinity National School is a three-teacher co-educational school, situated in the heart of Westport. It is a very effective school with a dedicated and professional staff. The school building is almost two hundred years old and although it is well maintained and very well presented, it is inadequate for current needs.

The following table provides an overview of the enrolment and staffing in the school at the time of the evaluation:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pupils enrolled in the school</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mainstream classes in the school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers on the school staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainstream class teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers working in support roles</td>
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<tr>
<td>Special needs assistants</td>
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</table>

1. Quality of School Management

1.1 Characteristic spirit, mission or vision
This Church of Ireland school is under the patronage of the Bishop of Tuam, Killala and Achonry and has very close links with the church vestry. The school’s vision is clearly stated in its mission statement and there is a strong sense of common purpose among the school community.

1.2 Board of management
The board is very well informed, is properly constituted and meets regularly. Members of the board undertake their responsibilities very effectively, generously sharing their talents for the good of the school. Specific tasks are allocated and are undertaken in a professional and committed manner. The board’s policies, plans and decisions are disseminated effectively to the school community. There is a clearly defined system for tracking income and expenditure and accounts are certified annually. The present school building is inadequate for current needs. Both playground and classrooms are very cramped and the school lacks facilities such as principal’s office or storage space. It is recommended that the board make an application to the Planning Section of the Department of Education and Science in this regard. It is recommended that the board ensure that the length of the school day is in compliance with Circular 11/95 Time in School.

1.3 In-school management
The in-school management team consists of the principal, deputy principal and special-duties teacher. The principal’s work in leading and managing the school is highly effective. She inspires
and enthuses colleagues and exemplifies very high professional standards. She promotes a culture of teamwork and collaborative decision making. The other post-holders share many of the daily tasks and actively contribute to the smooth running of the school. Staff members demonstrate a strong commitment to school improvement and continuous professional development. School records are meticulously maintained. The openness with which the entire school staff engaged with the evaluation process is particularly praiseworthy.

1.4 Management of relationships and communication with the school community
The board of management facilitates the active involvement of the diversity of parents in the work of the school. The very active parents’ association provides a mentoring service for new families enrolling in the school. Parents support the implementation of the curriculum under the direction of the principal. Parent-teacher meetings are held in the first term of the school year and an annual written report is issued in June. Parents are encouraged to consult with teachers on an individual basis whenever they deem it necessary. It is school policy that all parental concerns are addressed at the earliest possible opportunity. Parent representatives were interviewed as part of the evaluation process and expressed a very high level of satisfaction with the quality of education provided by the school.

1.5 Management of pupils
The management of pupils in this school is very good. Assemblies are used to celebrate pupil achievement and to promote the school’s Christian ethos. Pupils are valued members of the school community and are treated with fairness, equality and respect.

2. Quality of school planning

2.1 Whole-school and classroom planning
The quality of whole-school planning is very good. Systematic arrangements are in place for the development, evaluation and review of the school’s policies and plans. Organisational plans are succinct, user friendly and specific to the needs of the school. High quality curricular plans provide the necessary support for the effective implementation of the curriculum at classroom level.

The quality of classroom planning is very good. It is informed by the principles of the curriculum and reflects the school’s multi-grade context. The special-education teachers collaborate very effectively with classroom teachers in meeting the wide range of needs of pupils in the mainstream classrooms. All teachers provide very attractive, stimulating learning environments for their pupils and a rich array of resources supports teaching and learning.

2.2 Child protection policy and procedures
Confirmation was provided that, in compliance with Department of Education and Science Primary Circular 0061/2006, the board of management has formally adopted the Child Protection Guidelines for Primary Schools (Department of Education and Science, 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**

Labhraíonn na hoidí an Ghaeilge go cruinn, líofa. Úsáidtear an Ghaeilge mar theanga chumarsáide sna ceachtanna Gaeilge. De ghnáth cuireann an floireann an iomarca béime ar chait an oide sna ceachtanna, ach uaireanta baineann siad úsáid as obair bheirte, as obair ghrúpa, as drámaíocht agus as cluichí éagsúla i roint ranganna. Moltar níos mó béime a chur ar na gnéithe seo i ngach rang chun scileanna cumarsáide a fhörbairt agus chun féinmhuinín a chothú. Is léir, ó bhreathnú ar cheachtanna, nach bhfaigheann na daltaí deiseanna cainte le linn an cheachta Gaeilge. Is léir ó cheistiú na ndaltaí na mbíonn taithí acu ar úsáid na Gaeilge mar theanga chumarsáide. Biónn deacrachtaí acu, go háirithe, le cruthú abairtí agus le húsáid na mbriathar. Tá gá le béim sa bhreis a chur ar an gcuir chuige cumarsáideach sa Ghaeilge.

Cruthaítear timpeallacht phhrionta saibhir sna seomraí ranga. Cothaítear an léitheoireacht go cúramach agus baintear úsáid maith as an scéim Séideán Sí. Sna hardranganna tugtar cleachtadh cuí do na daltaí san obair scríofa agus is breá an chaoi ina thaispeántrar a n-iarrachtai.

**Irish**

The teachers speak Irish fluently and accurately. Irish is used as the language of communication during lessons. Usually the staff places too much emphasis on teacher talk during lessons, but sometimes teachers use pair work, group work, drama and various games. It is recommended that there be greater emphasis on these to further the communication skills and confidence of the pupils. It is evident, from the lessons observed, that pupils do not get sufficient speaking opportunities during the Irish lesson. It is evident from questioning pupils that they lack experience of using the Irish language for communication. They have particular difficulty with constructing sentences and using verbs. There is a need for greater emphasis on the communicative approach in Irish.

A print-rich environment is created in all of the classrooms. Reading is cultivated carefully and good use is made of the scheme “Séideán Sí”. In the senior classes pupils are given appropriate experience of written work, and their efforts are very attractively displayed.

**English**

Very high standards are achieved in all aspects of the teaching and learning of English. Pupils demonstrate very impressive oral language skills in their ability to speak at length on a variety of themes. Teachers provide very effective teaching to enrich pupils’ oral language ability. Interesting lessons in poetry and analysis of characters encountered in novels provide opportunities to further extend pupils’ vocabulary.

Very effective teaching of phonics provides the younger pupils with proficient word attack skills. A wide variety of stimulating reading material is provided for all of the pupils and they speak very enthusiastically about their favourite authors and genres. Regular visits to the town library are a commendable use of facilities which are available adjacent to the school’s location. The high standards observed in reading are reflected in the very impressive results achieved in the most recent standardised tests of reading.

The quality of pupils’ written work is very good. Their projects, copybooks and samples on display in the classroom indicate that significant progress is made by pupils at each class level. A
whole-school approach to handwriting is effective in promoting attractively presented written work. It is recommended that pupils be encouraged to create a booklet of their best work over the course of the year. Teachers are to be commended for the systematic correction of pupils’ work and for providing pupils with positive and helpful suggestions for improvement.

3.2 Mathematics
The standard of Mathematics achievement is very good and this is reflected in impressive standardised test results. Very effective in-class support is provided by the special-education teachers, which ensures that differentiated programmes of work challenge the more able pupils and provide the necessary support for those who need it. Effective use is made of information and communication technology in providing pupils with the necessary drills to achieve mastery of number facts. A very clear school plan and whole-school approaches are successful in ensuring continuity and progression. Pupils are encouraged to ask questions and display a high level of motivation and commitment to the learning activities provided.

3.3 History
Teachers make very good provision for all strands of the History curriculum. Active pupil involvement is encouraged and there is breadth and balance in curriculum implementation. There is a valuable emphasis on the development of pupils’ skills in working as historians. Pupils’ understanding is clearly reflected in their responses to questions and their abilities to use higher order thinking skills. The school plan very effectively outlines the content to be undertaken in this multi-grade setting and there is very good use made of local resources. Older members of the community are interviewed for historical purposes. It is advised that these interviews be recorded as a useful resource for future generations.

3.4 Assessment
Significant strengths were observed in the school’s assessment practices. The school recognises that assessment is central to teaching and learning. The policy places an appropriate emphasis on pupil self-assessment as well as assessment of and for learning. Regular standardised testing is a feature of the work of the school and test results are analysed to evaluate learning and to plan future teaching. Results are recorded systematically and are compared with national norms.

Learning-support and resource teachers use a wide range of diagnostic assessments to monitor progress and to devise learning programmes. Pupils are given timely feedback about the quality of their work and they understand how well they are progressing towards learning targets.

4. QUALITY OF SUPPORT FOR PUPILS

4.1 Pupils with special educational needs
Very high quality practice was observed in special education. The special-education teacher has undertaken courses of professional development which have greatly enhanced the service she provides. There are very useful arrangements in place to ensure the dissemination of knowledge and skills within the school. It is school policy to provide in-class support where possible to minimise segregation and withdrawal. Team-teaching and station teaching are amongst the effective strategies observed. Very good practice was observed where the class teacher provided one-to-one support to pupils with the most challenging needs while the learning-support teacher provided support to less needy groups of children. Meticulous planning and careful collaboration ensure that pupil needs are very well managed.
Very good individual education plans are devised for pupils with special educational needs, in consultation with their parents and class teachers and copies are provided to them. These plans are based on data from assessment reports, school-based tests and systematic consultation with the class teacher. Realistic time-bound targets are recorded, monitored and assessed regularly. A good range of resources to support learning has been provided and a stimulating learning environment has been created. To further enhance this work it is advised that investment be made in additional resources to support teaching in Mathematics.

4.2 Other supports for pupils: disadvantaged, minority and other groups
School policies and procedures promote and celebrate interculturalism and inclusion.

5. CONCLUSION

The school has strengths in the following areas:

- The board of management is very supportive of the work of the school.
- The principal provides very strong leadership for the whole school community.
- All of the staff espouses a culture of co-operation and collaboration which ensures effective provision for all pupils.
- Very high quality teaching was observed in all classes.
- Pupils are courteous, confident and outgoing.
- Very good standards are in evidence in English, Mathematics and History.
- The school plan is well laid out and is based on the needs of the school.
- Very effective provision is made for pupils with special educational needs.

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

- It is recommended that the board of management initiate the process of replacing the current school building.
- Moltar béim sa bhreis a chur ar Ghaeilge labhartha chun scileanna teanga na ndaltaí a forbairt. (It is recommended that a greater emphasis be placed on oral Irish to develop the pupils’ language skills.)

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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