An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Castlelack National School
Bandon, Co. Cork
Uimhir rolla: 08972I

Date of inspection: 11 April 2011
1. Introduction

Castlelack National School is a rural co-educational school under the patronage of the catholic Bishop of Cork and Ross and has a current enrolment of 70 pupils. Pupil attendance levels are high and school practice to encourage same is in line with National Education Welfare Board (NEWB) and Departmental guidelines. The board of management of the school was given an opportunity to comment on the findings and recommendations of the report; the board chose to accept the report without response.

The school participates in a variety of initiatives and programmes which include Primary Science, RTE Radio Play Initiative, Green Schools, Cork History Project, Irish Aid Project and Samaritans Purse Christmas Appeal. During the whole-school evaluation, teaching and learning was observed in three mainstream classrooms and in three additional teaching support settings. Questionnaires were issued to all parents and to pupils from third to sixth classes.

2. Summary of Findings and Recommendations for Further Development

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

- The school is well run and provides a balanced education in line with the principles of the primary curriculum. Ninety-one percent of parents surveyed consider the school to be well run.
- The principal discharges her duties effectively and is instrumental in creating positive working conditions in the school, endorsed by the fact that 100% of parents state that their children like school.
- The quality of teaching in the school is good generally, with ninety-four percent of parents agreeing.
- School facilities are good. This is also fully endorsed by parents.
- Progress in relation to key literacy and numeracy objectives is commendable. Ninety-seven percent of parents agree that the school is helping their children with reading and the same percentage agree that the school is helping them to progress in Mathematics.
- The board of management discharges its duties and supports the work of the school effectively.

The following main recommendations are made:

- It is recommended that existing good practice relating to self-evaluation be developed further on a whole-school basis.
- It is recommended that the parents’ role in formulating school policies be extended.
- It is recommended that further attention be paid to the writing process at whole-school level.
- It is recommended that greater attention be paid to the Monthly Progress Records as a means of reflecting more clearly on teaching and learning over specific periods.
3. Quality of School Management

- The board of management is properly constituted, supports the work of the school effectively and oversees the financial affairs of the school with care. However, it is recommended that accounts be certified for future reference. A modern and well resourced building is provided together with high quality recreational areas.

- The formal in-school management team is comprised of the principal and deputy principal. Appropriate duties have been agreed and are subject to review. The importance of this work was discussed at the time of the evaluation and it is now recommended that the in-school management team present reports to the board at agreed intervals.

- The school is very well resourced in support of teaching and learning and significant investment has been made in Information and Communication Technology (ICT).

- The parents’ association is active and is formally affiliated to the National Parents’ Council. It has been involved in the development of a range of school policies and assists with fund-raising and also with pupil-related activities. Increased involvement of parents in the development of curricular policies relating to the areas of literacy and numeracy, for example, is recommended.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- School planning is good and is reviewed on a regular basis. Commendable emphasis is placed on the extent of planning developments over recent years and some school plans are on display in the school. It is felt that this practice could be profitably developed to include appropriate curricular policies. Advice was provided in this regard at the time of the evaluation.

- All members of the teaching staff complete useful long-term and short-term work plans in respect of the curricular areas. However, advice was provided regarding the relationship between short-term preparation and the monthly progress record.

- The 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

- The overall quality of teaching and learning is good. Most pupils (88.5%) consider their lessons to be interesting and almost all parents (97%) believe that their children do well in school. In addition, the board of management and the representatives of the parents’ association, when interviewed, expressed their satisfaction with the quality of education provided in the school.
• Müintear an Ghaeilge go cúramach ag leibhéil éagsúla sa scoil. Moltar an aire a dhírítear ar ionchur teanga soiléir i ranganna ar leith mar leis an gcomhtháthú a chothaitear idir na príomhscileanna teanga go minic. Meastar, áfach, gur gá díriú a thuilleadh feasta ar an dtéanga chumarsáideach, ar shaorscríbhneoireacht na ndaltaí. Cuireadh comhairle ar fáil ina leith seo.

Irish is taught carefully at various levels throughout the school. Commendable emphasis is placed on clarity of new language input in some classes, as well as the effective integration of principal language skills on a regular basis. However, it is felt that additional emphasis should now be placed on communicative language, on textual variety in reading and also on the pupils’ independent writing skills. Advice was provided on these matters.

• The pupils’ aural and oral language skills in English are systematically nurtured at various class levels, so that some pupils communicate with commendable confidence. Fruitful emphasis is also placed on the relevant skills of reading and writing at various levels. Pupil questionnaires indicate that almost all pupils (92.3%) believe that they are doing well in reading. Advice was provided regarding the need to further clarify some teaching objectives and also in relation to encouraging some additional pupil participation.

• Mathematics teaching is effective at all levels in the school. Almost all parents (97.1%) believe that the school is helping their children to progress in Mathematics and over eighty-eight percent of pupils also believe that they are doing well at Mathematics. Activity learning and group work are prominent features of the mathematics lessons and key concepts and skills are duly reinforced. Relevant resources, including ICT, are used regularly and good use is made of the pupils’ immediate environment to make the work more meaningful. Suitable mathematics centres are provided in all classrooms. Additional strategies designed to further enhance the pupils’ problem solving capacity were discussed during the evaluation and advice was provided.

• Music is taught regularly throughout the school. The lessons are carefully structured and many pupils actively participate, especially in relation to rhythm exercises and tuneful song singing. They also benefit from some attractive instrumental work. It is now recommended that tunefulness in this area be further promoted through the use of a suitable instrument.

6. Quality of Support for Pupils

• Provision for pupils with special educational needs is supported by one full-time Resource Teacher and by a shared Learning Support Teacher and also by a part-time Resource Teacher. These teachers work in close collaboration with their mainstream colleagues, with parents and with other relevant professionals. Clear learning objectives have been drawn up and commendable progress is noted generally. In this regard, the focus placed on assessment for learning (AfL) is significant and a wide range of learning stimuli is competently used on a regular basis. The wider use of diagnostic testing was recommended during the evaluation.

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