An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

S.N. Mhuire de Lourdes,
Lixnaw, Co. Kerry
Uimhir rolla:10957B

Date of inspection: 29 April 2010
WHOLE-SCHOOL EVALUATION
A whole-school evaluation of S.N. Mhuire de Lourdes, Lixnaw was undertaken in April 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 Visual Arts. 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.

INTRODUCTION – SCHOOL CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND
S.N. Mhuire de Lourdes is an all boys’ school situated in the village of Lixnaw. The school is under the patronage of the Catholic Bishop of Kerry. There are three schools in the parish of Lixnaw. Drumclough N.S. is a co-educational school situated six km from the village. Scoil Mhuire gan Smal is situated in the village approximately one km from S.N. Mhuire de Lourdes, and in general, boys transfer from this school to S.N. Mhuire de Lourdes on completing the infant cycle. These two schools agreed to amalgamate in May of 2003 and in March 2007, a site for a new school, provided by the diocese, was approved by the Department of Education and Science. However, since that date, no progress has been made in relation to the building of a new, co-educational mainstream school. The present school building has significant limitations. The main building consists of two classrooms and a storage room of very limited proportions. This space is presently being utilised by the resource teacher for pupils with special educational needs. A prefabricated building is utilised as a third classroom and as a learning-support room. This building is also of limited proportion and is unsuited to purpose. There is no staff room or principal’s office. The grounds of the school are spacious and well maintained and the school building is regularly cleaned. At the pre-evaluation meeting, the board of management expressed serious concerns in relation to the suitability of the school accommodation. The appointment of a full time resource teacher for pupils with special educational needs in September 2010 presents another challenge to the board because there is no suitable room to accommodate this teacher. The board is in the process of submitting an application to the Department for the provision of temporary accommodation. The board is of the opinion that this should be viewed as a stop-gap measure and that a more appropriate response to the present accommodation needs, should be provided as a matter of urgency. Pupil attendance is of a notably high standard and the school is highly praised in this regard.

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>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pupils enrolled in the school</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainstream classes in the school</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers on the school staff</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainstream class teachers</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers working in support roles</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special needs assistants</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT

1.1 Characteristic spirit, mission or vision
The school has articulated its vision, school aims and ethos. These outline its desire to provide a happy, secure environment in which the pupils are facilitated to reach their potential personally, morally, academically and socially. Copies are contained in the whole-school plan. This stated vision should be displayed in the school and should be available to all stakeholders.

1.2 Board of management
The board of management is properly constituted and it meets at least four times a year. Minutes of meetings are recorded and finances are prudently managed. It is recommended however that board finances be certified on an annual basis. The work of the board has centred on the refurbishment and improvement of the school accommodation. The board is praised for the completion of a number of significant improvements to the school premises. It is now recommended that the board outline a strategic plan to address the more pressing school accommodation issues in the short-term. During the evaluation period it was noted that the school is poorly equipped with resources to support the learning and teaching process, particularly in relation to information and communication technology (ICT). It is therefore recommended that an audit of desirable resources be drafted and that the board purchase a much greater range of resources to support the implementation of the Primary School Curriculum (1999).

1.3 In-school management
The in-school management team is comprised of the principal and deputy principal. Together, this team play a pivotal role in the promotion of positive pupil behaviour and attendance. The principal is very effective in leading and managing the school. He exemplifies very high professional standards and sets high expectations for the staff and the pupils in all their daily routines. A clear and purposeful range of duties have been delegated to the deputy principal and these are very effectively discharged. It is now recommended that the in-school management team work towards the promotion of more effective means of school self-evaluation. This should involve facilitating the school community to reflect systematically on their work and to evaluate how well the school provides for its pupils.

1.4 Management of relationships and communication with the school community
At the pre-evaluation meeting parent representatives on the board of management expressed a high level of satisfaction with the manner in which the school communicates with parents and with the quality of educational provision for the pupils. Parent-teacher meetings are held annually. Annual reports on pupil progress are communicated to parents. Periodic newsletters inform parents of up-coming events. At present there is no parents’ association but the board has outlined its intention to encourage and facilitate the formation of a parents’ association in September of 2010. Key whole-school organisational policies are communicated to parents.

1.5 Management of pupils
The school is highly praised for the promotion of a positive school climate where mutual trust and respect are evident and where the staff is alert and responsive to the emotional, physical and social needs of individual pupils. Pupils are encouraged to participate in a wide range of extra-curricular activities and they have achieved considerable success in sporting events and quizzes. Pupils show independence of mind and co-operate well with others both socially and in school.
work. They display confidence in their own knowledge and skills and are making very good progress towards the development of positive self-esteem.

2. QUALITY OF SCHOOL PLANNING

2.1 Whole-school and classroom planning
The quality of whole-school planning varies from being of a poor to a good standard. Whole-school curriculum plans for each subject area have been drafted. These plans should however be reviewed to ensure that they offer clear guidance to teachers in relation to the planning and delivery of a broad and balanced programme of work in which continuity and progression between class levels is assured. Criteria against which the implementation of these plans could be evaluated should also be outlined. A broad range of whole-school organisational policies have been drafted and the majority of these have been ratified by the board. These policies should also be reviewed to ensure that they reflect the context of the school. It is now recommended that the whole-school plan be reviewed to ensure that it conforms to the stated over-arching aims of the education system as expressed by statute, in curriculum guidelines, in the circulars of the Department and in accepted national policy reports and guidelines. Through the monitoring of teachers’ monthly progress reports the school should also ensure that the Relationships and Sexuality (RSE) policy is being implemented.

All teachers present long and short-term planning in preparation for their work. This planning guides the teachers’ work in the classroom and it contributes to successful 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
Sa Ghaeilge, cuirtear na ceachtanna foirmiúla i láthair go hábalta. Spreagtar na daltaí le ceisteanna agus lorg a iarracht iarracht uirthi le linn teagaisc. Cuirtear béim oiriúnaí ar thascanna éisteachta neamhfoirmiúla agus gníomhachta éisteachta foirmiúla a chur i láthair na ndaltaí. Léirionn na daltaí tuiscint mhaith ar an ábhar atá cloiste acu. Déantar aithris éifeachtach ar nathanna cainte agus ar sheanfhocail. Daingnitéar an t-ábhar, na struchtúir cainte agus an foclóir nua go cumasach i ngach rang. Feictear go bhfuil scileanna maithte labhartha ag na daltaí. Tá na daltaí cumasach ag tabhairt cuntais ó bhéal, ag déanamh cur síos agus ag freagraítear aisteanna oiriúnaí a chuisce aghas. Ar ócáidí, baintear feidhm as an mBéarla chun brí na gceachtanna a léiriú ach moltar deireadh a chuir leis an gcleachtais sin. Dírfeart aird ar scileanna léitheoireachta na ndaltaí trí straiteisc focal-bhhriseadh, anailís ar fhocail agus trí scileanna fóineolaíochta a chleachtadh tríd an scoil. Foghlaimíonn na daltaí cnuasach dán agus amhrán
Irish
Lessons in Irish are well taught. The pupils are motivated through questioning and the seeking of appropriate inputs from them during lessons. An appropriate emphasis is placed on presenting informal listening tasks and formal listening tasks to pupils. Pupils display a good understanding of what they have heard. Phrases and proverbs are repeated effectively. There is skilful consolidation in all classes of content, verbal structures and new vocabulary. Pupils have acquired good language skills. The pupils are competent in giving verbal accounts and descriptions and in asking and answering appropriate questions. On occasions English is used to explain the lessons and it is recommended that this practice should be discontinued. Emphasis is placed on improving and extending pupils’ reading skills, by practising strategies such as word-building, word analysis and phonological skills, throughout the school. Pupils learn a repertoire of Irish poems and songs by heart. Irish writing is taught regularly. Much of the work is based on activities in the textbooks. It is now recommended that increased opportunities for pupils to write in a range of different contexts be organised as is recommended in the curriculum. In general, it is evident that pupils are making systematic progress in their work and that the work of the teachers is evident in these results.

English
The quality of learning and teaching in English is of a good to very good standard. High expectations of the pupils’ engagement in learning are set and the pupils respond well to this. Under the teachers’ careful guidance, the pupils are developing their skills of working independently and they are facilitated to work with others in collaborative learning activities. Teachers encourage pupils to ask questions and to express views, share ideas and knowledge. They provide contexts for learning which are challenging and enjoyable and include creative and investigative activities where pupils use higher-order and critical thinking skills to solve problems and construct new meanings and understandings. Teaching strategies such as modelling, structured discussion and guided practice are utilised very effectively to scaffold the pupils’ cognitive development. As a result the pupils’ oral language skills are well developed. A rich variety of reading material is skilfully employed to develop the pupils’ reading skills. All pupils are making significant progress in their ability to read with understanding and fluency. Further emphasis might now be placed on encouraging the pupils to read with expression. In the teaching of English writing, commendable emphasis is placed on the provision of opportunities for pupils to write creatively and the quality of pupils’ essays, particularly in the senior classes, is of a very high standard. Formal writing exercises are undertaken at all class levels. It is recommended however that a wider range of writing genres be systematically addressed at each class level.

3.2 Mathematics
Very good lessons were observed during the evaluation period in the teaching of Mathematics. Pupils, including those with learning difficulties, are attaining well and make very good progress from their prior levels of achievement. Their skills, knowledge and understanding reflect the learning outcomes outlined in the curriculum. Teachers share the purposes of the lessons with the pupils. Clear explanations are given and new content, that builds on previous learning and real-life, is presented successfully. Pupils’ understanding is clearly reflected in their questioning, their responses to questions, their oral work and their abilities to use higher-order thinking skills and apply what they have learned in a variety of contexts. A variety of teaching approaches is
employed that is well matched to pupils learning needs and stages of development. Teachers ensure that pupils master basic concepts and skills before moving on to the next steps of learning so that they can use these skills and competencies to access other areas of the curriculum. There is good attention placed on consolidating and reinforcing the content, concepts and skills during lessons. Teachers motivate pupils through the use of well-judged positive, feedback. It is now recommended that diagrams and illustrations feature to a greater extent in the written work of the pupils and that an agreed standard for the presentation of pupils’ written work be outlined.

3.3 Visual Arts
Teacher planning indicates that the pupils are facilitated to explore each of the six strand units in the visual arts curriculum. However there is an overemphasis on particular strand units. Additional emphasis should therefore be placed on ensuring that pupils have equal access to each strand of the curriculum and that the looking and responding strand unit is emphasised in all six strands. In the lessons observed the teachers provided a very good stimulus for the art activity and the planned lessons successfully supported learning in other curriculum areas. Each pupil was provided with suitable materials to enable him to actively engage in the planned activity. Interaction with pupils however indicates that an emphasis should be placed on the development of the elements of art and on the promotion of the creative process. Regular opportunities should be provided for pupils to explore, experiment, observe and to make independent and collaborative decisions through working in pairs and in groups during visual art lessons. Provision should also be made for the development of skills and techniques appropriate to the age of the pupils. It is therefore recommended that current practice in the teaching of Visual Arts be reviewed with a view to incorporating more fully the principles of the visual arts curriculum.

3.4 Assessment
The mainstream teachers utilise a range of effective assessment approaches to evaluate the quality of the pupils’ learning outcomes and to improve teaching. They monitor pupils’ work regularly and provide constructive feedback to pupils. Standardised tests in literacy and numeracy are administered annually and the results of these are maintained in order to monitor individual pupil progress from year to year. These good practices are praised. There exists, however, significant room for improvement in relation to the maintaining of records pertaining to individual pupils. It is therefore recommended that a file be maintained in which copies of annual pupil progress reports, individual education plans (IEPs) and other pupil records of significance be retained for a period of time.

4. QUALITY OF SUPPORT FOR PUPILS

4.1 Pupils with special educational needs
The school is praised for the manner in which it successfully integrates pupils with learning difficulties into school life. The provision for their needs within the mainstream classroom setting is of a very high standard. It is evident that they are making good to very good progress in their learning, commensurate with their abilities. A learning-support teacher and a resource teacher for special educational needs, both based in a neighbouring school, provide support, on a part-time basis, for pupils with learning difficulties. These teachers work from rooms which are unsuited to purpose. The dimensions of the rooms prohibit teachers from organising supportive displays or from storing or organising easy access to required resources and concrete materials. The limited space available in classrooms militates against the provision of in-class support and team-teaching. As a result, pupils are withdrawn from classes for support for the most part individually and, in a few incidents, in pairs. During the evaluation period, the quality of teaching observed in
these settings was of a good to a very good standard. However, there is significant scope for development in relation to the formulation, implementation and evaluation of pupils’ individual education plans (IEPs) and in the recording of pupil progress against identified learning targets. It is recommended that the planning and implementation of individual education plans be reviewed and improved. The school should also ensure that assessment data generated in the pupils’ previous school be made available to teachers and that a wider range of diagnostic tests be provided to the support team to assist them in identifying more effectively the learning needs of the pupils and to record their progress.

4.2 Other supports for pupils: disadvantaged, minority and other groups
The principles of inclusiveness, equality of access and participation are effectively promoted in the school. The board is sensitive to isolated instances of disadvantage among the pupils and it provides resources to ensure that all pupils have access to the full range of school activities.

5. CONCLUSION
The school has strengths in the following areas:

- The board of management is supportive of the work of the school.
- The quality of teaching and learning in Mathematics, English and Irish is of a good to very good standard.
- The in-school management team collaborate very effectively to ensure that a positive school climate is created in which the contributions of all are valued.
- The management of pupils is of a very good standard and it is evident that the pupils are enjoying and benefit from the educational experiences organised in the school.
- Mainstream teachers regularly assess pupil progress in a variety of subject areas and they differentiate the curriculum successfully to meet the needs of all pupils.

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 outline a strategic plan to address the more pressing school accommodation issues in the short-term.
- It is recommended that the whole-school plan be reviewed to ensure that it conforms to the stated over-arching aims of the education system as expressed by statute, in curriculum guidelines, in the circulars of the Department and in accepted national policy reports and guidelines.
- It is recommended that a file be maintained in which copies of annual pupil progress reports, individual education plans (IEPs) and other pupil records of significance be retained for a period of time.
- It is recommended that provision for pupils with special educational needs be reviewed.

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.

Published, November 2010