An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Gurtagarry National School
Toomevara, Nenagh, Co Tipperary
Uimhir rolla: 11384I

Date of inspection: 17 October 2011
1. Introduction

Gurtagarry National School (NS) is a co-educational primary school under the patronage of the Catholic Bishop of Killaloe. It is located approximately seven kilometres from the village of Toomevara in North Tipperary. The present, modern school building was constructed in 2006. Enrolment figures have remained close to the current figure of 47 pupils since the last school report was furnished in 2002. Attendance levels are very good.

This report presents the findings of a whole-school evaluation undertaken in the school in October 2011. The evaluation focused on the quality of teaching and learning in Irish, English, Mathematics and Physical Education (PE). 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.

2. Summary of Findings and Recommendations for Further Development

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

- The dedication and positive work ethic of the teachers, combined with a deep sense of care for pupils’ welfare, is highly commended.
- The school provides a safe and inclusive environment for pupils.
- Gurtagarry NS is at the heart of a close-knit and vibrant community.
- Pupils’ behaviour is exemplary.
- The board of management is commended for extensive development work carried out in recent years and for maintaining the building and grounds in very good order.
- The school, with the support of parents, has a strong tradition of successful participation in interschool games.
- Good standards are achieved in the curriculum areas evaluated.

The following main recommendations are made:

- The board should promote greater involvement of the parent body in the formulation and ratification of school policies.
- The further development of the school’s self-evaluation processes should focus on more rigorous analysis of data, the setting of specific targets for improvement and greater consultation with the board and parents.
- Development of provision in PE needs to focus on the full implementation of a broad and balanced programme to include an adequate delivery of all strands of the curriculum.
3. Quality of School Management

- The board of management is properly constituted. Members are experienced and dedicated and support the work of the school in various practical ways. The board is commended for the manner in which it has developed and maintained an attractive and highly suitable infrastructure for learning. The board meets regularly and minutes are recorded and maintained. Financial transactions are carefully documented and discussed at each board meeting. The school accounts should be audited or certified on an annual basis. The board should promote greater involvement of the parent body in the formulation and ratification of school policies.

- The quality of in-school management is good, with much effective practice in evidence. Clearly established systems and procedures have been put in place, led largely by the principal. Leadership functions and tasks are shared appropriately and the staff concerned work together collaboratively and in mutually supportive ways. Individual members demonstrate high levels of willingness to adapt to the school’s needs, and competence and diligence in fulfilling their roles. It is recommended that the board make formal provision for a regular review of post-holder duties in accordance with Circular 07/03.

- The school and grounds are maintained to a high standard. The grounds are spacious and attractive and include a playing pitch and a hard surface play area. Adjacent to the school there is a small community hall which is used for physical education and other activities, particularly during inclement weather. There is a plentiful supply of modern resources available to enhance the teaching and learning process.

- The pupils are managed very well and behave in an exemplary fashion. Pupil-teacher interactions are marked by a strong sense of mutual respect in an inclusive and caring atmosphere. Analysis of questionnaires administered to pupils indicates that all pupils feel safe in class and in the school yard and that everyone is treated fairly.

- This school is the key focal point in the community it serves and parents support both curricular and extra curricular activities in a positive and helpful manner. The vast majority of parents surveyed are happy overall with the school and feel that their children like school. Parents are informed of pupils’ progress through both formal and informal meetings and yearly written reports.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- A wide-ranging review of school policy documents was carried out by the school prior to the evaluation. Policies governing delivery of all areas of the curriculum are in place. These documents are of a high standard and they provide useful guidance on key issues and common approaches. A comprehensive range of administrative policies has been ratified and these policies are clearly effective in contributing to the smooth running of the school. The business of ongoing policy review and ratification could be made more manageable by having a schedule for this work in place.

- The members of staff are commended for their engagement in a worthwhile process of whole school self-evaluation. Data from standardised tests were collated and analysed at a whole school level to evaluate overall school performance in literacy and numeracy. Other areas were reviewed through discussion at school level. Through this process the teachers have developed a strategic plan that prioritises relevant curriculum and organisational areas. To further enhance the process of self-evaluation more rigorous
analysis of data, the setting of specific targets for improvement and greater consultation with the board and parents are recommended.

- Teachers’ dedication to the provision of good classroom planning and preparation is commendable. Common approaches and templates have been adopted in an effort to ensure continuity in the delivery of a broad and balanced curriculum and the recording of progress.

- 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 quality of overall teaching, learning and pupil achievement is of a high standard. The learning environments are stimulating and feature attractive displays of pupils’ work. Pupils are encouraged to present work neatly in a neat cursive style and this work is carefully monitored by the teachers. Lessons are taught in a lively and thoughtful manner and pupils engage very positively with the learning process. The results of standardised tests administered annually in Mathematics and English reading indicate that pupils are achieving very well in both curriculum areas.

- Déantar an Ghaeilge a theagasc go cumasach tarraingteach. Cuirtear le taitneamh agus éifeachtúlacht na foghlama trí aithris rann beoga agus trí bhogábhar oiriúnach agus áiseanna fóinteacha eile a úsáid go cruthaitheach. Leagtar béim inmholta ar an ngramadach, ar litriú agus ar leathnú foclóra, go háirithe sna meán agus sna hard ranganna. Moltar úsáid níos rialta a bhaint as obair bhéire agus as úsáid na Gaeilge in gnáthchaint an lae chun cumas labhairtha na ndaltaí a theireáil. Forbraítear na scileanna léitheoireachta go córasach agus léann na daltaí le tuiscint mhaith. Sonraíodh cumas inmholta sa saorscribhneoireachta ag cuid mhaith daltaí sna hardranganna. Irish is taught in a capable and engaging fashion. The enjoyment and efficacy of the learning are enhanced by the recitation of lively rhymes and the creative use of suitable software and other helpful resources. Grammar, spelling and vocabulary extension are suitably emphasised, particularly in the middle and senior classes. It is recommended that more frequent use be made of paired work, and of Irish as used in everyday contexts, to strengthen pupils’ conversational ability. Reading skills are developed systematically and pupils read with good understanding. A praiseworthy standard of free writing was observed among a good number of pupils in the senior classes.

- The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in English is good. Oral language skills are competently developed through talk and discussion, brainstorming, games, rhymes and stories. Emergent reading skills and phonological awareness are very well attended to. Pupils are encouraged to read widely as they progress through the school. Due attention is paid to writing in various genres and pupils are given worthwhile efforts to prepare, draft, redraft, revise and edit their work. Activities are appropriately differentiated and writing tasks are suitably chosen to meet the needs of individual pupils.

- The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in Mathematics is of a high standard. Pupils’ understanding and internalisation of key concepts is facilitated through
purposeful discussion, guided activities and good use of manipulatives. Commendable efforts are made to teach specific terminology and to make mental Mathematics an integral part of lessons. Results of standardised tests indicate that the pupils make steady progress as they move through the various class levels. Further analysis of standardised test results should enable teachers to prioritise for development particular aspects of the mathematics programme.

- The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in Physical Education (PE) is commendable. Lessons observed in the games and dance strands of the PE curriculum were well structured and managed with due regard for optimising time available for pupils' engagement with the various activities. Pupils exhibit a wide range of skills and clearly enjoy PE. The school's participation in various inter-school competitions, particularly in hurling and football, is considerable and is facilitated through the commitment of teachers and the involvement and support of dedicated parents. Development of provision in PE needs to focus on the full implementation of a broad and balanced programme to include an adequate delivery of all strands of the curriculum.

6. Quality of Support for Pupils

- A learning-support teacher and a resource teacher, both of whom are shared with local schools support pupils with special educational needs. Pupils in need of support are chosen carefully on the basis of the greatest need. Support is provided to individuals and groups on a withdrawal basis and consideration needs to be given to in-class support. Plans are in place to implement an early intervention strategy for literacy in senior infants in the second term.

- Careful planning for the specific needs of pupils and recording of progress is undertaken collaboratively by support teachers and class teachers. It is recommended that copies of individual education plans (IEPs) be shared with relevant parents. Lessons observed in the support setting were well structured, suitably paced and successfully focused on pupils’ needs. Provision includes Reading Recovery and it is noted that consideration is being given to use the Reading Recovery expertise to implement Literacy Lift-off.

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