

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**

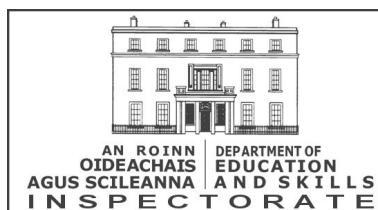
**Department of Education and Skills**

**Whole School Evaluation  
Management, Leadership and Learning**

**REPORT**

**Niall Mór National School,  
Killybegs, Co. Donegal  
Uimhir rolla:118430**

**Date of inspection: 16 October 2013**



## Whole-School Evaluation – Management, Leadership and Learning Report

### Introduction

A Whole-School Evaluation – Management, Leadership and Learning (WSE-MLL) was undertaken in Niall Mór National School, Killybegs in October, 2013. This report is based on a selection of lessons observed in a range of learning settings in the school, interaction with pupils and review of their work, meetings with the principal and with board and parent representatives, completed parent and pupil questionnaires, and a selection of school documents.

Niall Mór National School has an enrolment of 183 pupils. Enrolment figures are stable and attendance levels are good. The board of management was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the report, and the response of the board will be found in the appendix of this report.

The school has **strengths** in the following areas:

- The principal demonstrates an admirable commitment to the school and, together with the board, the teachers and the staff, has been very effective in creating a collaborative, inclusive school culture.
- The quality of teaching is commendable, ranging between good and very good. Lessons are interesting, well-structured and pupils engage with enthusiasm.
- The school has engaged very effectively in the school self-evaluation process and this is having a positive impact on pupils' learning.
- The emphasis placed on inculcating a spirit of inclusion in the school, through developing connections between pupils in mainstream classes and pupils in support classes is very commendable. It contributes significantly to the positive, affirming school culture of Niall Mór National School.

The following **main recommendations** are made:

- In some instances, lessons could be more challenging. Further thought is required at the planning stage in order to better correlate learning objectives with the general ability levels of pupils.
- While the collaborative way in which support and mainstream teachers work towards creating the optimum learning contexts for pupils is commendable, in some instances the model of team-teaching could be further refined to make more use of teacher directed groupwork within the mainstream setting thereby enhancing pupil learning.

### Findings

#### 1. The learning achievements of pupils

- The learning achievements of pupils range from good to very good. The teachers are providing a broad range of purposeful, stimulating experiences for pupils across all curricular areas. Pupils engage in lessons with enthusiasm. While curriculum subjects receive an appropriate allocation of time, there is scope in some timetables to review lesson length, as the lesson length described in the timetable is too long. In some instances, lessons could be more challenging with further thought required at the planning stage in order to better correlate learning objectives with general pupil ability levels.
- In literacy, the school has prioritised the development of pupils' oral language skills as part of its School Improvement Plan. Strategies under this plan are being implemented very effectively throughout the school and are having a very positive impact on pupils' learning. Pupils have a good vocabulary and speak confidently and

coherently in both small group and whole-class contexts. Pupils read well, with fluency and understanding. There is scope to make skill development in reading more explicit to middle and senior pupils during their reading lessons, thereby enhancing their personal understanding of how they are developing as readers. Examples of pupils' independent writing are displayed to good effect in classrooms and corridors and this serves to celebrate pupils' attainment in writing. Commendable attention is paid throughout the school to encouraging pupils to present their written work clearly and neatly although, in some classes, letter formation requires attention. Many pupils demonstrate a good ability to write independently with good spelling and sentence structure. In some classes pupils are enabled to cultivate a richness of language in their writing and the practices observed in these classes should be extended across all classes.

- The quality of pupils learning in numeracy is very good. Collaborative learning approaches are used very successfully to develop pupils' problem-solving abilities and pupils of varying ability levels demonstrate a good ability to convert number stories to word problems. Computation skills are very good. Pupils demonstrate a good understanding of concepts across the full range of the mathematics curriculum. Visual and concrete resources are used to good effect to enhance understanding while teachers are also effective in making pupils aware of the practical application of their learning to real-life contexts.
- Tá scileanna éisteachta agus tuisceana na ndaltaí forbartha go breá sa Ghaeilge. Tá na daltaí in ann abairtí a struchturú i gceart. Léann siad le tuisceant agus líofacht. Déantar cúram maith den scríbhneoireacht. Eagraítear gníomhaíochtaí scríbhneoireachta go rialta agus tá samplaí tarraingteacha de scríbhneoireacht phearsanta na ndaltaí ar taispeáint. Moltar go gcuirfí béim sa bhreis ar scríbhneoireacht neamhspleách na ndaltaí a fhorbairt. *Listening and speaking skills are developed well in Irish. Pupils are able to structure sentences correctly. They read with understanding and fluency. Good attention is paid to writing. Writing activities are organised regularly and there are samples of pupils' independent writing displayed attractively. It is suggested that an additional emphasis be placed on developing pupils' independent writing skills.*
- Pupils in receipt of additional support are making good progress relative to their abilities and needs. Effective planning for these pupils ensures that the additional support they receive is appropriately focused.

## 2. Quality of teaching

- The overall quality of teaching in the school ranges between good and very good. Lessons have very clear objectives and it is commendable that these are shared explicitly with pupils. A wide variety of active and collaborative learning approaches are used in lessons while a range of appropriate resources enhances interest and develops understanding. There are some areas within the curriculum such as writing in English and Irish and literacy in Music where a programme delineated clearly for each class level would enhance pupils' learning. Good efforts are made to help pupils develop skills in assessing their own progress in learning. There are examples of exemplary practice in assessment, particularly in terms of analysing pupils' learning and using it to inform future teaching. The collaborative way in which support and mainstream teachers work towards creating the optimum learning contexts for pupils is commendable. In some instances the model of team teaching could be further refined to make more use of teacher-directed groupwork within the mainstream setting thereby enhancing pupil learning.
- The quality of teaching provided for pupils in the special classes ranges between good and very good. All settings present as attractive and ordered learning environments. Planning in all instances is focused and appropriate with some of particularly good quality. There is scope to make learning objectives and content for language more explicit within plans, particularly in terms of language learning in other curriculum areas. Learning activities correlate well with pupils' needs and teacher-pupil interactions are affirming and effective. It is commendable that pupils are accessing a broad curricular programme. While team-teaching for Social, Environmental and Scientific Education (SESE) works well, its use in literacy should

be reviewed regularly to ensure learning outcomes are maximised for pupils. Very good records of pupils' progress are maintained.

### **3. Support for pupils' well-being**

- A safe, ordered and affirming learning environment has been successfully created. Great care is taken to know and address individual pupils' needs. The emphasis placed on inculcating a spirit of inclusion in the school, through developing connections between pupils in mainstream classes and pupils in support classes is very commendable and contributes significantly to the positive, affirming school culture. In a questionnaire completed by pupils from third to sixth class as part of the evaluation, pupils express strong levels of satisfaction with the extent to which they feel they are cared for within the school and with how they feel they are progressing in their learning. A questionnaire completed by parents echoes these strong levels of satisfaction.
- Confirmation was provided that the board of management has formally adopted the Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools without modification and that the school is compliant with the requirements of the Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools.

### **4. Leadership and Management**

- An effectively-functioning board of management demonstrates a good knowledge and understanding of current priorities for the development of pupils' learning. The principal demonstrates an admirable commitment to the development of the school and he nurtures a culture of teacher collaboration very successfully. The adoption of an action-planning approach to the ongoing development of curriculum provision by the in-school management team is very effective. It lends a co-ordinated and strategic dimension to this work.

### **5. School Self-evaluation**

- The school has engaged very effectively in the process of school self-evaluation, taking time to carefully identify its learning priorities for development and to putting worthwhile action plans in place. These action plans are being systematically implemented throughout the school and are having a positive impact on pupils' learning.

## **Conclusion**

The school's capacity to engage in school improvement is very good, notably in terms of the leadership qualities of the principal, the positive attitude and collaborative working relationships among teachers, their interest in their pupils and their good quality teaching approaches.

## **Appendix**

**School response to the report**

**Submitted by the Board of Management**

### **Area 1: Observations on the content of the inspection report**

The Board endorses the many strengths acknowledged in the evaluation, notably:

- The collaborative and inclusive culture promoted in the school under the inspired leadership of the principal working effectively with the Board, teachers and staff.
- The high standards of teaching and learning.
- The school's positive engagement in the process of School Self-evaluation.
- The school's positive engagement in fostering integration of pupils in mainstream classes and pupils in support classes.
- The Board is greatly encouraged by the very positive feedback from the parent and pupil questionnaires which reflect their satisfaction with the school.

The report offers a constructive analysis of the work of our school, enabling us to develop our strengths while embracing the outlined recommendations.

### **Area 2: Follow-up actions planned or undertaken since the completion of the inspection activity to implement the findings and recommendations of the inspection**

The teachers, under the guidance of the Senior Management Team, are actively engaged in fine-tuning lesson planning where necessary.

Team teaching is a very innovative and welcome initiative in the school which is being refined and reviewed on an on-going basis.