Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Presentation Primary School,
Carrick-on-Suir, Co. Tipperary.
Uimhir rolla:11872V

Date of inspection: 2 March 2010
WHOLE-SCHOOL EVALUATION

A whole-school evaluation of Presentation Primary School was undertaken in March 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 Music. 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.

INTRODUCTION – SCHOOL CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pupils enrolled in the school</td>
<td>397</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainstream classes in the school</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers on the school staff</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainstream class teachers</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers working in support roles</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special needs assistants</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT

1.1 Characteristic spirit, mission or vision

Presentation Primary School is situated in Carrick-on-Suir, Co. Tipperary. The school caters for boys and girls from infants to first class, and girls from second to sixth class. As outlined in the mission statement, the school caters for the full and harmonious development of each child by providing a broad and relevant curriculum. Since 2000, the school has benefited from inclusion in the Giving Children an Even Break scheme, resulting in additional teaching posts and a reduction in the pupil-teacher ratio in the junior classes.

1.2 Board of management

The school is managed by a committed board of management which meets regularly. Duties and responsibilities are allocated equitably among the board members and a strong sense of teamwork is evident. A number of board members have received training provided by the Catholic Primary Schools Management Association. The chairperson, who has served many terms on the board, visits the school on a regular basis and maintains on-going communication with the principal and staff. The board has close links with the parents’ association and encourages the contribution of parents to the policy-development process. Parental input has been welcomed in the recent formulation of policies on healthy eating and anti-bullying. Financial matters are appropriately managed and the trustees arrange for certification of accounts.

In keeping with best practice the board is directly involved in the whole-school planning process. Organisational policies are discussed and ratified at its meetings. It is now advised that board members become more involved in the review of curricular policies, in collaboration with staff. A determined effort is made by the board to provide appropriate resources to support teaching and learning and the school is equipped to a high standard with Information Communication
Technology (ICT). Allocation of classes and distribution of pupils are decided by the principal in consultation with the staff and it is noted that some staff rotation among teaching posts has taken place over the last number of years. Management is advised to consider the benefits of adopting a policy on rotation in order to provide staff with an opportunity to teach in a variety of classes and contexts.

Currently, a significant number of pupils have been retained throughout the school and in junior infants in particular. This practice does not comply with Department of Education and Skills requirements. The board is advised to take the appropriate steps to address this issue as a matter of priority.

1.3 In-school management

The principal is very well respected by staff, parents and by pupils. She displays a high degree of dedication and commitment in the performance of her role, in providing leadership and support to staff. She attaches significant priority to the pastoral care-needs of pupils. She demonstrates excellent organisational skills and is proud of the school’s ethos as part of the Presentation Order. The principal promotes a positive and welcoming school climate and, with the active co-operation of colleagues, is effective in ensuring that whole-school planning is comprehensively addressed. In the formulation of various administrative and curricular plans there is much evidence that the principal motivates members of the school community in decision-making. Purposeful management and effective leadership of teachers provide direction for the work of the school community. Staff meetings are held at least once a term and more frequently should the need arise. The dedication of staff is evident in their involvement in a wide variety of projects and initiatives undertaken with pupils. These include engagement with the local education network and the College for Kids programme which operated until recently in conjunction with the Tipperary Rural and Business Development Initiative.

The in-school management team is comprised of a deputy principal, three assistant principals and eight special-duties teachers. Due attention is given to carrying out the various tasks attached to each post. Areas of responsibility reflect the school’s priorities and cover curricular, organisational and pastoral duties. Members of the in-school management team are commended for their enthusiasm and commitment to all pupils. Meetings between the principal and team members, collectively and individually, are convened regularly.

1.4 Management of relationships and communication with the school community

The school endeavours to promote good communication and to build trust and respect between parents and teachers. Home-school links are promoted through parent/teacher meetings, school concerts, religious ceremonies, sporting activities and informal meetings between teachers and parents. Parent-teacher meetings are held annually and provide an opportunity for parents to discuss their children’s progress. Written reports on pupil’s progress are provided for parents at the end of each school year. The parents’ association, which is affiliated to the National Parents’ Council, meets once a month and makes a significant contribution to the school through: the organisation of table quizzes for pupils from third to sixth class; fundraising events; attendance at celebrations and green flag activities. It facilitates social activities to coincide with church ceremonies and is instrumental in the organisation of the annual sports-day. The association maintains close communication with the principal who attends for part of the monthly meeting. The parents’ association communicates with the broader school community through a newsletter and plans to explore the use of the school website to further enhance this work. The association is involved in elements of the whole-school planning process and contributes to the development of
some organisational policies. The inspectors met with representatives of the parents’ association as part of the whole-school evaluation process. The officers commented on the openness and welcome afforded to all parents by staff. They reported that parents are pleased with the overall education provision offered to pupils and commented on the manner in which staff support and encourage their children. Parents also expressed satisfaction with the level of communication between home and school.

1.5 Management of pupils

Focus on pupils’ personal development and well-being is prioritised. The level of care extended to pupils is very high. The school strives to develop within each pupil a strong sense of worth, and self-realisation of potential. The school’s participation in Department projects and other local initiatives contributes greatly to enabling pupils reach their potential in a caring and inclusive environment. These initiatives include engagement with the Barnardos programme, the Clancy Festival and the Green Schools Initiative, wherein the school has experienced considerable success. Pupils’ behaviour is very good. They demonstrate sensitivity towards one another and respect for their school environment. Teachers regularly acknowledge and praise pupils’ efforts.

2. Quality of School Planning

2.1 Whole-school and classroom planning

The quality of whole-school planning is very good. Considerable work has been undertaken in the formulation of curricular and organisational policies. Planning documentation indicates that the process is inclusive and that several teachers have taken on leadership roles. An extensive range of organisational policies has been developed by staff and ratified by the board, with dates of review recorded for many policies. Policies developed in respect of statutory obligations are comprehensively delineated.

At classroom level, the teachers are focused on delivering a broad and balanced curriculum, which is rich and challenging. Teachers diligently prepare long and short-term plans and record progress in each of the curriculum areas. Classroom planning reflects teacher awareness of the whole-school curricular plans. Short-term planning is prepared on an agreed template, which also serves as a record of monthly progress. In some instances, planning is objective-focused and includes differentiated approaches to enhance pupils’ learning. It is advised that this good practice be extended throughout the school. Monthly progress reports are currently filed in subject-specific sections per class. The school would benefit from further use of the information contained in these records to inform future planning at a whole-school level and to impact positively on the school’s self-evaluation practices.

2.2 Child protection policy and procedures

Confirmation was provided that, in compliance with 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

The teachers promote pupils’ interest in Irish through the presentation of lively, stimulating lessons. Learning content is based on topics that relate to the pupils’ lives, and a scheme of textbooks supports teaching and learning. In general, Irish is used to some degree as a medium of instruction during lessons and teachers’ use of Irish in giving direction throughout the day is praiseworthy. Creditable emphasis is also placed in the majority of classes on enabling pupils to recite rhyme and poetry. Short plays, language games and paired conversation are employed effectively in infant classes to provide the children with opportunities to speak the language. Interesting activities are organised and suitable use is made of a wide range of resources, songs, poems and CDs. Pupils show high participation levels in these activities and they willingly take part in lessons. A good standard of spoken Irish is attained in the junior section of the school. In the case of some other classes, greater attention should be given to ensuring more pupil-talk during lessons. It would benefit staff to discuss and implement existing good practices and also the underling principles of the communicative approach. In this regard it would be beneficial to insert more guidance in the school plan that would support teachers in their work. The provision of further opportunities for pupils to use Irish during the school day would significantly enrich their learning. In Irish reading, a suitable emphasis is placed on the development of the pupils’ understanding through written activities and through discussion and conversation. Written work is laid out neatly and clearly. Writing activities engaged in are primarily of a functional nature. It is recommended that pupils’ independent writing be further encouraged and promoted. It is advised to extend the opportunities for pupils to undertake writing tasks, and to regularly apply differentiation to this work.
English
The teaching of English is of a high standard. A broad and balanced range of experiences is provided and pupils benefit from the implementation of an extensive programme in oral aspects of language. A praiseworthy emphasis is placed on the development of pupils’ vocabulary and language on a cross-curricular basis. Pupils are encouraged to ask and answer questions and to express their thoughts and feelings using a wide and varied vocabulary. The acquisition of vocabulary and the development of oral-language skills are supported by a whole-school focus on discrete oral language. The listener/speaker relationship is well developed and appropriate emphasis is placed on the development of pupils’ higher-order thinking skills. In general, pupils display good competency and confidence in the themes explored and they enjoy the language games presented. Poetry is explored for enjoyment purposes in all classes and pupils can confidently recite a number of selected rhymes and poems. Suitable emphasis is also attached to composition of poetry which is on display in many classes. A language-experience approach is used in a competent manner in infant and junior classes, while ICT is effectively used to foster pupils’ thinking and stimulate interest in middle and senior classes.

An interest in reading is encouraged and supported through well-stocked libraries. Reading records are maintained in many classrooms. Pupils’ phonological skills are developed in a structured manner. Very good use is made of the large-format book in junior classes as a springboard for developing pupils’ vocabulary, comprehension and prediction skills. Many pupils can read fluently and these pupils display good comprehension levels as they progress through the school. Pupils in middle and senior classes respond well to a range of class novels, which is used effectively to complement formal reading schemes. A developmental approach to writing is implemented on a whole-school basis. Pupils engage in a range of pre-writing activities in infant classes and daily writing experiences are promoted. It is advised that continued emphasis is placed on early writing strategies and on the further development of free-writing activities. Pupils in middle and senior classes are afforded suitable opportunities to engage in a variety of writing genres, which extends across curricular areas. A good balance is achieved between functional and creative writing and ICT is used to support the pupils’ presentation of written work. Brainstorming strategies are employed effectively to stimulate pupils’ thinking and to build on their existing vocabulary. Some effective work in shared-writing experiences was observed in senior classes. Pupils have achieved a good understanding of writing conventions. A cursive handwriting style is introduced in middle classes and pupils’ written work is presented to a high standard and displayed extensively in all classes.

3.2 Mathematics
The overall quality of teaching in Mathematics is good. The school has invested in an extensive range of mathematical resources to support activity-based methodologies. Mathematical lessons are well structured. Teachers purposefully avail of opportunities to link activities to the pupils’ own environment and the use of mathematics trails enhances pupils’ awareness of their mathematical surroundings. A section of the display area in classrooms is appropriately allocated to augment the mathematics-rich environment.

At infant level the pupils acquire an appropriate early-mathematical vocabulary and meaningful opportunities are created to purposefully utilise the language taught through an imaginative use and manipulation of concrete materials. Pupils keenly engage in lessons and they experience a broad variety of activities in concept formation through practical tasks such as matching, sequencing and exploration of 3D shapes. This work is continued in the junior classes where
pupils’ understanding of number and awareness of shape, measure and data are incrementally developed. Commendable emphasis is placed on the expansion of mathematical vocabulary. Whole-class teaching is appropriately supported by pair and collaborative group-work. Further development of this approach, which fosters co-operative learning skills and facilitates teachers to support individual pupils, is recommended. Innovative methodologies are employed in many classes to enable pupils to learn tables, including mathematical games and the use of action songs. As pupils progress through the school they continue to develop their understanding of mathematical concepts and are presented with more challenging problem-solving activities. To further enhance this good work, it is advised that more attention is afforded to group work and to discussion and analysis of mathematical concepts and to their application in everyday situations.

3.3 Music

The quality of teaching and learning in Music is very high. The school is fortunate to have a wealth of musical expertise among the teaching staff. This musical talent is strongly in evidence and is used to positive effect in the design and implementation of lessons. The curriculum is underpinned by a detailed school plan which includes a comprehensive list of resources. ICT resources have also been identified and interactive whiteboards are used to very good effect in many classrooms to enhance the quality of teaching and learning. A music co-ordinator has been appointed to monitor implementation of the curriculum.

Lessons observed in Music were characterised by skilled teaching, by reinforcement of the musical elements taught and by the obvious enjoyment of the content by pupils. They are exposed to Music of different styles, periods and cultures. Their understanding of musical elements is being developed through the implementation of a range of interrelated activities. Approaches to teaching song-singing, instrumental work and pupil performance are very good, as are the standards being achieved. Listening and responding activities are well structured and material is astutely selected to enable pupils to develop the full range of musical concepts in an informal and enjoyable manner. Pupils sing a broad selection of songs from different traditions, genres and styles as they progress through the school. Songs are appropriately pitched and are effectively linked to other strands. Instrumental work in many cases encompasses the use of percussion instruments and the learning of tin whistle in some classes. To further enhance the very good work in Music, it is advised that the playing of the tin whistle be extended throughout the school. Some classes have made percussion instruments. This work has been linked effectively to the exploration of sound and to the development of the skills of making and designing as part of the Science curriculum.

Pupils’ learning in Music successfully contributes to whole-school events, including religious services and concerts. A music literacy programme operates throughout and there is consistent use of rhythmic vocalisation in all classes. Composition skills are also addressed at each class level and pupils’ abilities to use a variety of sources to create sound stories are praised. They display interest in and knowledge of the life and works of musicians. In particular, through effective use of ICT, pupils in infant classes demonstrate familiarity with the works of famous composers and are encouraged to respond through movement to the works of Offenbach, Joplin and Tchaikovsky.

3.4 Assessment

The practice in assessment is guided by a recently formulated whole-school policy. A wide range of assessment tools is used to determine pupils’ understanding of concepts and the knowledge they have acquired. In all classes teachers closely observe pupils during activities and monitor
their work. Records of individual pupils’ progress based on teachers’ recorded observations are maintained in some classes. The Middle Infant Screening Test (MIST) test is administered to senior infant pupils to identify those experiencing difficulties with the development of early reading skills. The outcomes of this assessment contribute to the selection of pupils for supplementary teaching. Suitable diagnostic tests are administered to pupils experiencing learning difficulties. Standardised tests are administered to pupils from first to fifth class. Commendably these results are collated and analysed on a whole-school basis in order to build a comprehensive profile of achievement in the school. It is now advised that this practice be extended to track progress of class groupings and the progress of individual pupils as they move through the school. In order to facilitate a more comprehensive record of whole-school attainment it is recommended that pupils from sixth class be included in standardised testing. Future development of the school policy on assessment should address the need to move to more objective-based planning in order to provide an appropriate framework for extending assessment procedures. It is further advised that staff explore ways in which assessment for learning will lead to the planning of learning activities that closely match individual pupils’ needs and strengths.

4. QUALITY OF SUPPORT FOR PUPILS

4.1 Pupils with special educational needs

The support-teaching staff consists of five learning-support teachers and one resource teacher. A small number of pupils attend the resource teacher. Support for pupils with special educational needs is provided primarily in the areas of literacy and numeracy. Appropriate Individual Profile and Learning Programmes have been devised for pupils in receipt of learning support and resource teaching. Pupils’ progress is regularly recorded and reviewed at defined intervals during the school year. Stimulating print-rich learning environments are created and a range of commercial and teacher-designed resources are effectively employed to support learning. Lessons observed were well structured with teachers ensuring that pupils engaged in appropriate learning activities. The interactions between teachers and pupils receiving supplementary teaching were very affirming and encouraging of pupils.

Commendably, in-class support has been implemented in some classrooms, as an alternative to the withdrawal of pupils. Much of the supplementary teaching continues to take place on a withdrawal basis, either individually or in groups. It is strongly recommended that this practice is reviewed and that the staged approach to intervention be implemented in line with circular 02/05. This would involve the class teacher placing a greater emphasis on a differentiated programme within the classroom, in co-operation with the learning-support teacher. Where pupils are appropriately withdrawn for supplementary teaching, the group size should be sufficiently small so as to enable meaningful intervention by the support teacher with individual pupils.

4.2 Other supports for pupils: disadvantaged, minority and other groups

A number of newcomer pupils for whom English is an additional language (EAL) attend the school. School practices successfully promote inclusion and the cultures of newcomer pupils are actively celebrated. These pupils receive additional language support based on the outcomes of their assessed language learning needs. Suitable programmes of learning are devised following consultation with relevant class teachers. Language support is provided to these pupils primarily on a withdrawal basis with some in-class support. A combination of teaching approaches that includes direct instruction, teacher-modelling, games and structured group-work are purposefully used. A range of stimulating resources including appropriate use of ICT is employed to support
pupils’ learning. The planned formulation of a policy, detailing the school’s approaches to EAL provision, is to be commended.

There is a tradition in the school of providing practical, discreet support for pupils. Respectful, open relationship between parents and staff facilitates this practice. With financial support under the *Giving Children an Even Break* scheme the provision of text books to relevant pupils is ensured. School lunches, funded through the social inclusion unit of the Department are provided to ensure that all children receive nourishing food during the school day. In collaboration with local community groups after-school services in homework clubs, art and crafts and social skills are available to pupils. The school operates a *Rainbows* group for children who have suffered loss or bereavement.

5. **CONCLUSION**

The school has strengths in the following areas:

- The board of management provides effective management of the school and the parent body is most supportive of the work of the school.
- The commitment and dedication of the principal and all teachers has resulted in the creation of a very positive learning environment for all pupils.
- Pupils receive a high level of pastoral care and the school capably addresses the impact of educational disadvantage.
- A wide and useful range of curricular and organisational policies has been developed.
- Throughout the school, the standard of teaching is high.
- Very good attention is paid to pupils’ oral language development in English.
- A very good standard of spoken Irish is attained in the junior section of the school.
- The high quality and rich learning experiences provided in Music result in pupils displaying very good competence across all strands.

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

- The board is advised to take the appropriate steps to address the school’s adherence to Circular 32/03 regarding the retention of pupils.
- It is recommended that the school review its policy on the withdrawal of pupils for support teaching, particularly at junior infant level, in the context of implementing a staged approach to such intervention.
- Greater attention should be given to differentiated teaching and learning for all pupils in mainstream classes.

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 December 2010.*
Appendix

SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

Submitted by the Board of Management

Area 1: Observations on the content of the inspection report

The Board of Management and staff wish to thank the inspectors for their courtesy and professionalism during the W.S.E.

We are pleased that the positive aspects of the school, the teamwork, dedication and commitment of all involved are recognised and affirmed in the report.

The key recommendations have been noted and will be worked on at staff and management level.