Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Scoil Náisiúnta Ioseph
Drinagh, Dunmanway, County Cork
Uimhir rolla: 11931L

Date of inspection: 13 September 2010
1. Introduction

SN Ioseph, Drinagh is a rural, co-educational school under the patronage of the Catholic Bishop of Cork and Ross. Currently, it has two mainstream class teachers and there are twenty-five pupils enrolled in the school. General enrolment patterns are stable and levels of pupil attendance are high. At the time of the evaluation, the process of appointing a new principal was underway.

This report presents the findings of a whole-school evaluation undertaken in the school in September 2010. The evaluation focused on the quality of teaching and learning in Irish, English, Mathematics and Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE). 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

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<th>The following are the main strengths of the work of the school:</th>
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<td>• The school is an important focal point in the local area and is supported by the local community.</td>
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<td>• Good leadership is provided at all levels in the school.</td>
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<td>• A broad and balanced curriculum in line with Departmental guidelines is delivered and suitable teaching methodologies are used.</td>
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<td>• The school is pursuing an agenda for improvement by engaging positively with educational change, maximising the use of its human, physical and material resources, embracing the use of new technologies as teaching and learning tools and developing expertise and resources in support of the diagnosed needs of individual learners.</td>
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<th>The following main recommendations are made:</th>
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<td>• It is recommended that the board of management facilitate the establishment of a parents’ association and, in so doing, explore the advantages of affiliation to a national association of parents.</td>
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<td>• To facilitate the smooth transition of leadership and to minimise possible disruption to pupils when a new principal is appointed, it is recommended that the board ensure that all relevant whole-school documentation, including policies and practices, is up to date and accessible.</td>
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<td>• It is recommended that the board of management develop a school action plan which sets out the school’s future priorities and targets in relation to maintenance and infrastructural development, staff development, communication and public relations, administrative efficiency, curriculum planning and levels of pupil achievement.</td>
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<td>• It is recommended that the newly appointed principal, in consultation with her colleagues, conduct in-depth analyses of available quantitative data on pupils’ achievement in order to position the school’s attainment in the broader context of normal distribution patterns.</td>
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3. Quality of School Management

- The board of management is properly constituted and it manages the work of the school effectively and efficiently. It plays an active role in policy formation, displaying a familiarity with and a confidence in the work of the teachers and in the general standards of pupil achievement. It communicates effectively with the wider school community and oversees the administrative and financial affairs of the school responsibly.

- The physical environment of the school is well developed and efficiently maintained. The health and safety of pupils is a priority of the board of management and a wide range of interesting and stimulating teaching and learning materials is available in the school.

- Investment in information and communication technology (ICT) is very well advanced in the school. Its effective use is a feature of many lessons.

- Attention to the pastoral care of all the pupils is evident from, for example, the broad range of extracurricular and co-curricular activity that occurs. The school encourages participation in, and the active celebration of, local community and religious events. Pupils participate in swimming, inter-school sporting and athletic competitions. The individuality of pupils is carefully fostered and nurtured.

- In-school management practices are in line with Departmental guidelines. Success in this regard is facilitated by the principal who is a democratic and open in her dealings with all partners and stakeholders and who uses her excellent communication skills to foster a positive team ethos and a healthy working environment.

- Ancillary staff employed by the board includes a part-time secretary, a part-time cleaner and a part-time caretaker. All perform their duties to a satisfactory standard.

- The daily practices and routines of the school indicate satisfactory compliance with current legislation and with departmental regulations with regard to the length of the school year, enrolment and retention of pupils, health and safety and the provision of a broad and balanced curriculum.

- Though relationships with the parents and the school community are very good, it is recommended that the board facilitate the development of a parents’ association as envisaged in section 26 of the Education Act 1998. This would give greater official recognition to the key role of parents as partners in education.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- School planning is underpinned by an appropriate consultative process in which the board, the teaching staff and parents are involved. Administrative and curricular school plans are well informed and a useful guide to the work of the school. Classroom planning is logical, practical and outcomes-focused. Monthly records of work completed are maintained and used to facilitate continuity and progression in pupils’ learning. The school planning process supports the work of the board and the school community in the achievement of suitable standards of teaching and learning.

- Some reflection on standards and some self-evaluation occur within the school. These activities are mainly based on observation and on anecdotal and documentary evidence. The analysis of standardised test results is, primarily, focused on the identification of pupils in need of additional supports. There is scope for further development here. A
deeper analysis of standardised test data leading to target setting in key curricular areas would be a further improvement on current school practice. This should apply, in particular, to the key areas of literacy and numeracy and it would shift the focus of assessment from accountability and diagnosis to development and improvement in the standards of pupil attainment.

- 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

- Lessons are generally well paced and stimulating. A wide variety of resources is at hand to facilitate discovery and the dependence on textbooks is balanced. Appropriate. ICT is used effectively and exploration, discovery methods and debate are encouraged

- Múintear an Ghaeilge go h-ábalta. Úsáidtear modhán na múinte spreagúla agus is léir go bhfuil cumas cumarsáide na ndaltaí á tharla go fud na scoile. Moltar, ach go háirithe, an úsáid a bhaintear as an gclár bán idir ghníomhach agus na cleachtaí drámaíochta a spreagann na ndaltaí chun ranpháirtíochta. Is léir go bhfuil ataíf ar fud na scoile fábhach don teanga agus bionn dea-chleachtas le sonrú sná ceachtanna. Cuirtear béim are na snáitheanna uile (éisteacht, labhairt, léitheoireacht agus scribhneoreacht) agus déantar iarracht mhaith cumas na ndaltaí a fhorbairt. Moltar don bhfoireann achair cosúil le ceol, raidió, teileifis, aoí-chainteoir agus filí a úáidh chun scileanna éisteachta na ndaltaí a thullchaadh.

Irish is taught capably. Positive methodologies are used and it is clear that the fluency of pupils in Irish is being developed successfylly throughout the school. Especially praiseworthy is the use of the interactive whiteboard and various drama activities which motivate the pupils to participate in lessons. It is clear that the school promotes a favourable attitude to Irish and good practice occurs in lessons. All strands of the curriculum (listening, speaking, reading and writing) are taught and a creditable effort is made to develop the ability of pupils. It is recommended that areas like music, radio and TV, guest speakers and poets be used to further develop the listening skills of pupils.

- English is taught effectively in the school and there is appropriate and consistent emphasis of literacy development. Language development is emphasised across the curriculum. Reading skills are developed incrementally and a love for the printed word is fostered. Pupils are exposed to a wide variety of well chosen reading material. Standardised tests results indicate above average progress in many of the percentile bands. The standard of written work is creditable. Individual pupils experiencing difficulty are supported by means of a comprehensive programme of interventions which are based on informed analysis of appropriate assessment data. This work is based on effective use of diagnostic assessment tools and the adaptation of relevant material from a wide variety of programmes and resource materials. Whole school achievement in literacy could be further enhanced by the application of targets with regard to literacy achievement at the various class levels.

- There is a consistent emphasis on concept development in Mathematics throughout the school and active learning methodologies promote understanding of basic operational
procedures. Reasoning, estimation and thinking skills are also developed and lessons are related to the environment, where possible. Standardised test results indicate appropriate levels of success in the majority of instances. As a means of further enhancing the quality of learning in Mathematics the school is advised to consider the advantages of using programmes such as ‘Maths for Fun’ and of developing a formal plan for teaching the language of mathematics across the curriculum.

- Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) is taught effectively throughout the school. A balanced programme of appropriate themes is sensitively delivered. Pupils display confidence and high levels of self-esteem. Pupils’ responses to questionnaires indicate that almost all pupils feel safe in the school and in the classroom and the majority feel that they are treated fairly or can talk to a teacher when they are worried about something.

- Parents’ representatives express high levels of satisfaction with the standards of teaching and with the general levels of pupils attainment in all areas of the curriculum. They are particularly satisfied with the quality of relationships between teachers and pupils and the manner in which they are allowed access to all relevant data regarding their children’s progress. Pupils’ responses to questionnaires reflect positively on the atmosphere of the school, pupils’ self image and the quality of teacher-pupil relationships.

6. Quality of Supports for Pupils

- Support for pupils with special educational needs is provided by a shared resource/learning support teacher who is based in a nearby school. Her work is effective and underpinned by a spirit of partnership, collaboration and collegiality. Support is mainly offered on a group or class withdrawal basis. Assessment data and diagnostic test results are used to identify children in need of additional support and to refine learning targets for individual pupils. A wide variety of resources is made available to enhance the quality of interventions and software programmes are adapted to the specific needs of individual pupils. The quality of the school's interventions in this regard is very good.

- The quality of the school's interventions to support pupils with learning difficulties is very good. The quality of outcomes might be further enhanced by the use of interventions such as paired reading, literacy lift-off and the use of in-class support as a methodology.

- Parents are involved in the development of individual education plans (IEPs) and individual profile and learning programmes (IPLPs) and assessment data are shared in line with Departmental guidelines and best practice.

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