Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Scoil Náisiúnta Cheathrú na Laithigh
Brownsgrove, Tuam, Co. Galway
Uimhir rolla: 12138V

Date of inspection: 2 June 2010
WHOLE-SCHOOL EVALUATION

A whole-school evaluation of Scoil Náisiúnta Cheathrú na Laithigh was undertaken in June 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 the Visual Arts. The board of management of the school 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

Scoil Náisiúnta Cheathrú na Laithigh is situated in Browngrove, in the parish of Tuam, County Galway, around six kilometres north of the town of Tuam. The core of the present school building dates from 1880. A substantial extension to the original building was completed in 2004. The extension provided the school with useful additional rooms and facilities, including a learning-support room, an office and a staffroom. The school is very well maintained inside and outside. An attractive playground is available for pupils’ use in the school grounds.

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

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<tr>
<th>Number</th>
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<tr>
<td>Pupils enrolled in the school</td>
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<td>Mainstream classes in the school</td>
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<td>Teachers on the school staff</td>
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<td>Mainstream class teachers</td>
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<td>Teachers working in support roles</td>
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<td>Special needs assistants</td>
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1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT

1.1 Characteristic spirit, mission or vision

The school is under the patronage of the Catholic Archbishop of Tuam. There is a positive learning atmosphere in the school. All pupils are helped to reach their potential. The school’s mission statement refers to the desire to encourage the “full and harmonious development of the pupils, including their relationship with others and the environment”. The school is characterised by a clear sense of identity and by its vision to develop a vibrant and progressive learning centre at the heart of the community.

1.2 Board of management

The board of management is constituted in accordance with Department of Education and Skills regulations. The board of management meets at least four times a year, more often when necessary. Members of the board have attended training provided by the Catholic Primary School Managers’ Association (CPSMA). The treasurer gives a financial report at each meeting of the board of management. It is recommended that the board of management have school accounts certified or audited annually in accordance with section 18 (1) of the Education Act, 1998.

Minutes are kept of the proceedings of each board meeting. According to the minutes of recent board meetings, the retirement of the former school principal and the appointment of a new...
principal formed the basis of much discussion. Following the appointment of the new principal, the board of management has begun to address a wide variety of issues including fund-raising matters, the upgrading and purchase of teaching aids and resources, the development of the school plan and the formation of a parents’ association. This list of issues and priorities provides evidence of the board of management’s commitment to school improvement. An impressive range of new teaching resources has already been purchased. There are plans in place to expand the range of resources available, most significantly the provision of interactive whiteboards for each mainstream classroom.

1.3 In-school management
The principal and one special-duties teacher form the in-school management team. The principal of the school is newly appointed. The whole-school evaluation on which this report is based took place during the principal’s first term in the school. Credit is due to the principal for the manner in which the general preparation for this evaluation was undertaken. The work covered in organising school records and documentation demonstrates the principal’s skill in administrative and management matters. The principal is a competent and diligent classroom teacher. She is very enthusiastic in her work and has a clear vision for the development of the school. This includes increasing the use of information and communication technology (ICT) to enhance teaching and learning, placing more emphasis on Science, and securing the school’s first Green Flag.

The special-duties teacher makes a commendable contribution to the management of the school. She undertakes appropriate curricular, organisational and pastoral work, and deputises for the principal when necessary. It is recommended, however, that a formal contract be drawn up to set out these responsibilities in writing. The contract should then be signed and dated.

The work of the special-needs assistant and school secretary is carried out conscientiously and contributes effectively to the smooth running of the school.

1.4 Management of relationships and communication with the school community
While there is no parents’ association in the school at present, it is planned to establish a parents’ association at the beginning of the next school year. During the whole-school evaluation, the parents’ representatives on the board of management reported that parents in the school are very positive about the future. They feel that the appointment of the new principal will provide a fresh start for the school.

Parents are involved in a variety of fund-raising activities for the school. They are keen to improve the resources and facilities available. There is effective communication between the teachers and parents. Parents are kept well informed of school events through regular notes and newsletters from the principal. Parents have been involved in the review of some school policies, for example the code of discipline. It is recommended that this work be expanded as the school plan is further developed.

Formal parent-teacher meetings are held annually in accordance with Department guidelines. A school report on their children’s progress is sent to parents at the end of each school year.

1.5 Management of pupils
The pupils are well behaved. They are enthusiastic in participating in the lessons and activities organised. The pupils are appropriately supervised during activities in class and in the schoolyard.
2. QUALITY OF SCHOOL PLANNING

2.1 Whole-school and classroom planning
While there is scope for development in the quality of whole-school planning, the work covered in developing school policies since the appointment of the new principal is to be commended. A range of policies and curricular plans is available. Most of the whole-school plans and policies have been signed and ratified by the chairperson of the board of management. It is recommended that a three-year school development plan be put together to provide a clear focus for the whole-school planning process in the future. This action plan should prioritise issues that will have most impact on the quality of pupils’ learning.

A good start has been made in the development of curricular plans. Some of the curricular plans provide detailed and useful information. There is a need to further develop the remaining curricular plans in a systematic way, to ensure that detailed plans are available for each curricular area.

Administrative policies, including an enrolment policy, school attendance strategy and a health-and-safety statement, have been developed. Some administrative policies, for example the code of discipline and anti-bullying policy, have recently been updated to reflect current Department guidelines. On the principal’s initiative, a positive staff relations policy has been adopted to ensure that members of staff work well together for the benefit of the pupils.

The quality of classroom planning is very good. Each teacher prepares clear and regular long-term and short-term schemes of work. Monthly progress records are maintained at each class level. An individual education plan is provided for each pupil who receives learning-support and resource teaching. Appropriate short-term plans are also prepared for these pupils. The quality of record keeping in the learning-support and resource service is good. Each teacher has set out an appropriate class timetable.

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 Department’s Child Protection Guidelines for Primary Schools (Published 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
Tá cáiliocht na foghlama agus an teagaisc sa Ghaeilge go maith sa scoil seo. Leagann na hoidí béim oiriúnach ar scileanna labhartha na ndaltaí a fhóbarth. Baineann siad úsáid éifeachtaí as amhráin, áiseanna léirithe, cluichí, drámaíocht, puipéid agus raing chun spéis na ndaltaí a spreagadh sa teanga agus chun foclóir nua a mheasadh. Déanann na hoidí iarracht innmholtas rampháirtíocht na ndaltaí uile a chothú na ceachtanna agus na cleachtáin. Moltar, áfach, go leagfaidh níos mó béime ar fhóbarth liofacht na ndaltaí.
The quality of learning and teaching in Irish in this school is good. The teachers place appropriate emphasis on the development of pupils’ oral-language skills. They make effective use of songs, visual aids, games, drama, puppets and rhymes to stimulate pupils’ interest in the language and to teach new vocabulary. The teachers make a commendable effort to encourage each pupil’s participation in the lessons and activities. It is recommended, however, that more emphasis be placed on developing the pupils’ fluency.

Pupils’ reading skills in Irish are fostered competently overall. A print-rich environment in Irish is to be seen throughout the school. Most of the pupils from second to sixth class read with understanding and expression. It is recommended that teachers read aloud to pupils more often to demonstrate good example and to improve pupils’ listening and pronunciation skills. It would be worthwhile also placing more emphasis on the teaching of new words in preparation for reading in some classes. Pupils’ writing in Irish is good. Commendable work samples are to be seen on display in the classrooms and in pupils’ copybooks.

The quality of learning and teaching in English is good overall. Pupil engagement in the lessons and activities organised is praiseworthy. Most pupils’ achievement in English is of a commendable standard. The quality of work covered in developing pupils’ oral-language skills at each class level is very good. Pupils can recite a wide range of poems, songs and rhymes.

There are many positive aspects to the teaching of reading in the school. A print-rich environment has been developed in each classroom and in public areas of the school. In the junior classes, worthwhile phonics-based activities are provided as part of the school’s pre-reading programme. Reading lessons in the middle and senior classes are well structured overall. Pupils clearly enjoy reading and they are enthusiastic in discussing what they have read.

As a means of building on the work already done, it is recommended that the school implement a range of strategies to further raise standards in reading at each class level. This should include more frequent modelling of the reading process by teachers. More regular opportunities should also be provided for pupils to read aloud. Class libraries and reading corners should be presented more attractively to encourage pupils to read for pleasure even more regularly. The organisation of the reading programmes implemented at each class level should be better co-ordinated. A clear record of the books read by each pupil should be maintained.

The standard of English writing in the school is very good. There is a strong tradition of handwriting in the school. This has resulted in the very high quality of presentation of pupils’ written work. Pupils are given regular opportunities to engage in creative and functional writing in a wide variety of genres. The writing process is fostered very effectively. The planning, drafting, editing, and publishing of pupils’ work receive due attention. The result of this approach
is evident in the very good written work in pupils’ copybooks and in the samples on display in each classroom.

3.2 Mathematics
The quality of learning and teaching in Mathematics is good overall. Pupil achievement in Mathematics is good in most respects, although there is scope for development in some areas. The recent purchase of a wide variety of mathematical resources has improved the status of Mathematics in the school. An impressive mathematics-rich environment has been developed in each mainstream classroom. In the lessons observed as part of this evaluation, concrete materials were used effectively to enhance learning.

Oral language in Mathematics is effectively developed and early mathematical activities are well organised in the infant classes. Mathematical concepts are taught through guided discovery and active learning. Pupil engagement is very good in the practical group work and co-operative learning activities organised. Pupils’ copybooks and workbooks indicate a wide range of work covered across the various strands of the curriculum. Appropriate emphasis is placed on the development of pupils’ estimation skills. While the majority of pupils demonstrate good problem-solving skills, it is recommended that the development of these skills be further emphasised as part of each mathematics lesson. Most pupils at each class level demonstrate good mastery of number facts (tables), although it is recommended that more attention be given to this work to aid in the further development of pupils’ computation skills.

3.3 Visual Arts
The quality of learning and teaching in the Visual Arts is very good. There is impressive breadth and balance in the visual arts programme implemented in the school. Pupils’ observation skills, curiosity and imagination are well developed in the lessons and activities provided. An appropriate balance is achieved between two-dimensional and three-dimensional artwork. There are creditable work samples from the six strands of the curriculum on display in classrooms and in public areas of the school.

Pupils regularly participate in effective group activities in the Visual Arts, for example producing highly commendable friezes. These attractive exhibits combine work in a variety of strands and provide evidence of the use of a wide variety of art materials. Pupils at each class level are given regular opportunities to look at and respond to art. Particularly good lessons are organised on the work of famous artists.

3.4 Assessment
The range of assessment modes used in the school includes teacher observation, teacher-designed tests, project work, work samples and the monitoring and correction of pupils’ work. Standardised tests are administered in English and Mathematics to pupils from first class onwards. The results of these tests are stored centrally and a copy of the results is kept in each teacher’s files. Plans are in place to computerise the results of standardised tests. This should assist in more effective identification of pupils’ learning needs.

The overall quality of record keeping and reporting in the school is good. A review is currently being undertaken to measure the effect of assessment on teaching and learning, with a view to improving and enhancing the quality of support offered. This work is to be commended.
4. QUALITY OF SUPPORT FOR PUPILS

4.1 Pupils with special educational needs
The quality of support provided for pupils with special educational needs is good. The school has a learning-support and resource policy that contains much worthwhile information. This includes useful detail on the staged approach to providing support for pupils with special educational needs. There is a need, however, to regularly review this policy to ensure that it always accurately reflects the current situation in the school.

A good start has been made in developing an attractive and stimulating learning environment in the learning-support and resource classroom. The classroom is comfortable and spacious, although it is recommended that a print-rich and mathematics-rich environment be further developed. The school provides in-class early-intervention support for pupils in senior infants. It is recommended that more in-class support be provided in future, as a means of further enhancing the quality of service provided.

4.2 Other supports for pupils: disadvantaged, minority and other groups
The school has an open enrolment policy. At present, there are no pupils in the school who are identified as belonging to disadvantaged, minority or other groups.

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

- The board of management is very committed to improving the school and has provided for the acquisition of a creditable range of teaching resources.
- There is a strong community atmosphere locally, of which the school is the focal point.
- The principal has made a highly commendable start in her post. She is a dedicated and competent teacher. She displays effective leadership skills.
- Each member of staff is committed to improving the quality of education provided in the school.
- A variety of effective teaching methods is used at each class level.
- Pupils have achieved a commendable standard in Irish.
- The quality of teaching and learning in English writing is impressive.
- Stimulating active-learning experiences are provided for pupils in Mathematics.
- There is commendable breadth and balance in the work covered in Visual Arts.

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

- It is recommended that a three-year action plan be adopted to assist in the school planning process.
- It is recommended that more emphasis be placed on various aspects of the teaching of English reading. This should include the introduction of a structured school-wide programme to ensure each pupil reads a number of books every year. Class libraries should be presented in a more stimulating manner to enhance pupils’ interest in reading.
- It is recommended that more in-class support be provided to assist pupils with learning difficulties and special educational needs.
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.
Appendix

School response to the report

Submitted by the Board of Management
Area 1  Observations on the content of the inspection report

The staff and Board of Management are very pleased with the report we received following the WSE. We found it a very positive experience and took from it worthwhile recommendations which we will put into place. We thank the Inspector for his fair and positive report.

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 Board of Management and staff will take on board the recommendations given to us in the WSE. We have put some of the recommendations into operation already.

1. A Parents’ Association has been formed.
2. Library restocked.
3. Bookworm clubs started.
4. More in-class support provided by Special Educational Needs teacher.