Whole School Evaluation REPORT

Scoil Náisiúnta Oir Cheann Eyeries, Co.Cork
Uimhir rolla: 12259K

Date of inspection: 08 October 2009
WHOLE-SCHOOL EVALUATION

A whole-school evaluation of Urhan National School (Scoil Náisiúnta Oir Cheann) was undertaken in October 2009. 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 Social, Personal and Health Education. 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

Urhan National School is a two-teacher, co-educational, rural school under the patronage of the Bishop of Kerry. It is situated on the Beara Peninsula, approximately 10km west of Castletownbere and has a relatively small catchment area. The building was originally constructed in 1968 with the addition of an extension in 2007. The school creates a stimulating learning environment for pupils who treat the building and surrounds with great care. Mutual respect between teachers and pupils is readily apparent. The school benefits from the service of a part-time caretaker, cleaner and secretary who work diligently in the discharge of their duties.

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

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<thead>
<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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There were thirty-six pupils on roll in September 2009 and it is expected that the enrolment will remain stable for the foreseeable future. It is reported that pupil attendance levels are very good. The school currently does not have any pupils in fourth class.

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT

1.1 Board of management

The board of management is properly constituted in accordance with Department of Education and Skills (DES) guidelines. In general the board meets once a term and expresses a willingness to convene on a more frequent basis if required. Minutes of meetings are carefully maintained. These minutes indicate that discussions have taken place with regard to pupils’ achievement and standardised test results. The treasurer presents a financial report at each board meeting, however, accounts have not been audited to date. It is recommended that accounts be submitted regularly for certification in line with Section 18(1) of the Education Act, 1998. Some board members have not been assigned specific duties. It would benefit the efficiency and effectiveness of the work of
the board if members were allocated particular tasks. The chairperson, in accordance with her supportive role, maintains regular contact with the principal, staff and pupils. The board ratifies a range of curricular and organisational policies. However, it is advised that the board take a more proactive role in any proposed review of curricular plans. A number of board members have attended training seminars organised by the patron. The board’s work to date on the development and maintenance of the school building and grounds to a high standard is acknowledged.

2.2 In-school management
The in-school management team consists of the principal and the special duties teacher. The principal was appointed to her position in September 2008. She fulfils both teaching and administrative duties, displays a clear vision for the school and is committed to improving achievement standards of pupils. Due to her endeavours the school is characterised by a constructive learning atmosphere, in which positive pupil engagement and open communication with the wider school community are cultivated. Roll books are completed and maintained satisfactorily. However, no school registrar (Clár Leabhair) is available in the school. It is recommended that this be obtained and retained appropriately. The current attendance register (Leabhar Tinrimh) dates from April 2007 and is only partially maintained. It is essential, in accordance with Rule123(1) of the Rules for National Schools, that all official records be fully completed.

The principal is ably assisted in her role by the special duties teacher and a very positive working relationship is in evidence. There are curricular, organisational and pastoral aspects ascribed to her role with particular emphasis on the development of Physical Education and Visual Arts. Regular staff meetings take place and minutes are recorded. Both teachers have been systematically engaged in school development planning and regularly attend professional development courses.

1.3 Management of relationships and communication with the school community
The school promotes good communication and builds trust and respect between parents and teachers. Home-school links are facilitated through the frequent distribution of a school newsletter, religious ceremonies and sporting activities. Parent-teacher meetings are held annually which offer parents the opportunity to discuss their children’s progress. Written reports are provided for parents at the end of the school year and frequent contact is maintained throughout the year. An induction day is organised annually for new pupils to introduce them to school life. A transfer programme to post-primary school is also successfully operated.

The inspector met with the parents’ representatives on the Board of Management who commented favourably on the openness and welcome afforded to all parents by the staff. Satisfaction was expressed with the quality and standard of teaching and the educational progress being made by their children. Levels of communication between staff and parents are reported to be appropriate. Regular written communication provides parents with information about school activities. Parents also stated that there are many opportunities, both formal and informal, for them to discuss their children’s attainment and progress with teachers.

1.4 Management of pupils
The management of pupils in this school is of a high standard. The board of management and staff have devised a code of behaviour and anti-bullying policies that are implemented consistently. This code of behaviour is circulated to parents annually. The pupils are well behaved and relate positively towards their peers and adults. They are eager to engage in discussion and participate fully in their learning.
2. QUALITY OF SCHOOL PLANNING

2.1 Whole-school and classroom planning

A broad range of policies have been devised by the school staff. Some policies have been ratified by the board of management. It is advised that all policies be ratified, signed, dated and include a review date. The existing enrolment policy should be reviewed to ensure it complies with section 29 of the Education Act (1998) and Department of Education and Skills circulars. It would be beneficial to the school for the board and parents to have a more central role in the drafting of policies.

Curriculum plans have been devised by the staff and, in general, are contextualised to the school. However, these plans do not include provision for assessment, differentiation or resources. Classroom planning would benefit positively if such provision were made in the school plan. It is also recommended that these plans be devised using the strands and strand units of the Primary School Curriculum (1999).

A whole-school plan for English has been devised by staff. This plan should be further developed to include whole-school approaches to specific reading strategies at each class level. Clearer guidelines on the use of assessment results in developing individual reading programmes to match pupils’ needs should also be included. A whole-school approach to the implementation of the school plan would impact positively on learning outcomes.

A whole-school plan in Mathematics has been developed. It is recommended that this plan be revised outlining the strands to be taught and the skills to be developed at each class level. Review of the plan to include agreed mathematical language, teaching methodologies and clearer strategies on approaches to problem-solving would benefit teaching and learning throughout the school.

All teachers prepare short-term and long-term plans to inform their teaching. Mainstream class teachers use different formats to document planning. It is recommended that the detail provided in short-term plans be more closely linked to curriculum objectives. The use of an agreed format would facilitate greater continuity and progression and a more efficient monitoring of achieved learning outcomes.

2.2 Child protection policy and procedures

Confirmation was provided that, in compliance with Department of Education and Skills Primary Circular 0061/2006, the board of management has formally adopted the Department’s Child Protection Guidelines for Primary Schools (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 plean scoile curtha le chéile don Ghaeilge ach b’fhiú athbhreithnú a dhéanamh ar an bplean ina iomláine. Tá prionta shaibhir agus ábhar léirithe ar taispeáints roinnt seomraí ranga. Moltar an dea-chleachtas seo a leathnú ar fud na scoile. Úsáideann na hoidí roinnt modhanna múinte gníomhacha, ach, is léir nach bhfuil ag éiri le ina gcuid iarraidh a dhéanamh ar an fhíorchumarsáid a fhorbairt i measc na ndaltaí féin. Baineann siad úsáid as modh claiomhthartha, as modh clois pháirtí agus as rannta chun an teanga a theagasc ach tá mórchuid de na ndaltaí ar fhíorbheagán líofachta. Bhí sé soiléir ó idirghníomhaíochta chugigire nach bhfuil an Chomhlacht in ann iad féin a chur in iúl agus cáiliúil go raibh easpa cíosóideachta acu ar an dteanga. Moltar tuiscint na ndaltaí a fhorbairt agus a threisiú go córasach. B’innnolra anois plean cuimsitheach a leagadh siúd chun a chinn. Baintear úsáid as téacsleabhair chun an léitheoireacht a chur chun chinne. B’fhiú réimse níos leithne de théacsanna suimiúla a chur in aghaidh an teanga. Cláraíonn na ndaltaí an t-ábhar scríbhneoireachta sna cóipleabhair go slachtmharc. Tá na cléachtaí scríbhneoireachta bunaithe ar cléachtaí tuisceana ins na téacsleabhair agus ins na leabhair saothair. B’fhiú a bheith in ann de chuid na ndaltaí a bhairgheann don chuid chumarsáide de na ndaltaí a tharlaíonn. Moltar anois go gcuirfeadh scileanna suimiúla a thart aici. Tá an t-ábhar scríbhneoireachta go slachtmharc agus an dhuaisne a oiriúnú. Tá an chuid is mó de na ndaltaí in ann a chur in iúl agus go raibh easpa cíosóideachta acu ar an dteanga. Moltar tuiscint na ndaltaí a threisiú go córasach. B’innnolra anois plean cuimsitheach a leagadh siúd chun a chinn.

**Irish**

There is a school plan for Irish. However, a review of the plan as a complete document would be beneficial. A print-rich environment and visual materials are displayed in some classrooms. It is recommended that this good practice be extended to all classrooms. Teachers employ some active teaching methodologies but it is apparent that pupils are not benefiting from teachers' efforts to develop their communicative skills. Various strategies and resources, such as listening tasks, audio-visual tasks and rhymes are used to teach the language, yet, a significant number of pupils have a very basic level of fluency. It was evident from the inspector’s interaction with them that they were not able to express themselves and that they lacked understanding of the language. It is recommended that pupils' understanding of the language be developed and reinforced in a systematic manner. A comprehensive programme should be devised to ensure that specific language targets are being achieved by pupils. Pupils in the junior section know and enjoy reciting rhymes and Irish poems.

Commercially produced textbooks are in use in the middle and senior classes in order to develop pupils' reading ability. It is recommended that additional suitable reading material be sourced to promote pupils' interest in Irish reading. Pupils record written work in copybooks, and neat presentation is encouraged. Written exercises, for the most part, are based on comprehension activities in textbooks and workbooks. It would be beneficial to pupils if they were provided with opportunities to engage in various writing activities. It is now recommended that staff devise a plan of work to meet the needs of the school with regard to the development of Irish as a communicative language.
**English**

Some good practices in the teaching of English were evident at all class levels. However, learning outcomes for some pupils do not reflect the quality of teaching. Oral language is a prominent feature in some classes. A range of approaches and methodologies are employed in these classes to develop pupils’ oracy skills. Pupils can recite a selection of rhymes and poems. Most pupils possess a good command of oral language and some utilise a wide vocabulary competently. It is recommended that the good practice regarding the development of oral language be extended on a whole-school basis. It is also recommended that a structured programme for oral language development be devised and implemented.

A good foundation of basic reading skills is taught with appropriate emphasis placed on phonological awareness in the junior classes. However, a wide range of word attack skills should be further developed. Class novels enrich the reading programme and pupils display competence in responding to texts. The skills of scanning, comprehension and analysis of written text are also appropriately developed. Some library material is available in classrooms. Pupils would benefit from the further expansion and development of classroom libraries. There is scope for improvement in the standards achieved in English reading.

Pupils in senior classes benefit from emphasis placed on the writing process. Collaborative writing exercises, brainstorming and scaffolding are features of the writing programme and this is in line with good practice. It is recommended that all pupils be given opportunities to write in a variety of genres and for a variety of audiences.

**3.2 Mathematics**

The teaching of Mathematics is supported by the creation of mathematics-rich learning environments in some classes. It is advised that this good practice be extended to all classes. There is an appropriate balance in the delivery of the programme between strands with some commendable practice in the areas of data, measure, shape and space. Due emphasis is placed on the development of number skills in the infants’ classes and on place value in the junior and middle classes. Opportunities for pupils to engage in well-structured mental calculation activities are regularly provided. However, further opportunities for pupils to develop problem-solving strategies at all class levels are advised. Activity-based learning with appropriate use of resources is afforded to pupils in all classes. Pupils engage enthusiastically in the mathematics activities selected and the activities themselves provide for the systematic development of their mathematical competence.

Effective use is made of in-class differentiated approaches in response to varying ability levels and learning needs of pupils in all classes. The appropriate use of concrete materials in junior and middle classes and calculators in the senior classes benefits pupils’ conceptual understanding. A review of work previously completed confirms appropriate achievement levels across the mathematics programme with pupils’ written work being regularly and appropriately monitored. The standard of pupils’ learning is generally satisfactory.

**3.3 Social, Personal and Health Education**

The programme in this area of the curriculum strongly supports the ethos of the school. A positive school climate is nurtured and pupils are conscientiously guided in developing respectful attitudes towards other people. Affirmation of achievements and delegation of responsibilities further nurtures pupils’ self-esteem and confidence. There is a palpable atmosphere of respect throughout the school, with the encouragement of respectful language, good communication and the boosting of self-esteem. Teachers implement a balanced programme within their classrooms. Discussion,
story, poetry, games and circle time are effectively used to focus pupils’ attention on feelings and emotions and to enable them communicate their thoughts.

A number of programmes, including Stay Safe, Relationships and Sexuality Education, Walk Tall and Alive-O are in place to ensure that the needs of pupils in these areas of the curriculum are met. Content matter is dealt with in a sensitive and appropriate manner by teachers.

3.4 Assessment
Teachers make appropriate use of a range of assessment modes, including teacher observation, teacher-devised tests, standardised and diagnostic tests. Systematic monitoring of pupils’ written work was noted at all class levels. Teachers appropriately provide pupils with constructive feedback for improvement, especially in relation to their written work. However, greater analysis of assessment data is warranted. It is advised that information regarding pupils’ progress be used on a more ongoing basis to inform planning, teaching and learning. The data gathered should inform differentiated programmes of learning for pupils with special needs. Greater emphasis should be placed on promoting assessment for learning, as outlined in the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) guidelines.

4. QUALITY OF SUPPORT FOR PUPILS

4.1 Pupils with special educational needs
A comprehensive whole-school policy on the provision of support for pupils with special educational needs has been devised. Clear identification procedures for the selection of pupils have been established, with appropriate emphasis placed on early intervention strategies. The school has the service of a part-time learning-support teacher for seven-and-a-half hours a week under the general allocation scheme. The teacher utilises one hour of this allocation weekly for preparation. It is recommended that this practice be reviewed immediately in order to maximise contact time with pupils. The board stated at the post evaluation meeting that it has experienced some difficulty acquiring the services of a qualified primary teacher for the resource teaching post due to the location of the school and the limited number of hours involved per week.

Provision, both in numeracy and literacy, is currently on a withdrawal basis with some in-class support being provided. The learning-support teacher also provides early intervention in the areas of phonics and writing for the senior infant class. It is recommended that consideration be given to further developing in-class support reflective of current learning needs on a whole-school basis. The learning-support room, which is also a staff room, is bright, visually stimulating and adequately resourced. Supplementary teaching observed in the learning support context was targeted at and delivered to pupils in a structured manner, scaffolding pupil’s learning in a positive and reassuring environment. Individual education plans (IEPs) have been devised and include learning targets and dates for when these targets were achieved. IEPs are devised in consultation with the principal, class teacher and parents. A copy of each pupil’s IEP is made available to the class teacher. Consideration should now be given to issuing a copy to parents.

4.2 Other supports for pupils: disadvantaged, minority and other groups
Dedicated provision for pupils from disadvantaged, minority or other groups was not required in the school at the time of the evaluation.
5. CONCLUSION

The school has strengths in the following areas:

- The principal is aware of the challenges facing the school and has, since taking up her position, begun to address some of these.
- The commitment of the teaching staff and their concern for the welfare of pupils is evident.
- Good co-operation exists between management, parents and staff to the benefit of pupils.
- The board of management supports school improvement and has been proactive in consultation with in-school management in addressing accommodation needs.

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

- A review of the school plan should be initiated and a collaborative approach adopted involving all education partners.
- It is recommended that a review of the school’s enrolment policy be undertaken to ensure it complies with legislation and with Department of Education and Skills circulars.
- It is recommended that a common approach to classroom planning which is objective-based should be agreed and implemented.
- Moltar cur chuige cumarsáide a chur i bhfeidhm i múinéadh agus i bhfoghlaím na Gaeilge Chun líofacht, tuiscint agus muinín na ndaltaí a threisiú sa teanga. (A communicative approach to the teaching and learning of Irish should be implemented to develop pupils’ fluency, understanding and confidence in the language.)
- A review of standards of achievement in English reading is recommended.
- It is recommended that a variety of writing genres be developed in both English and in Irish.
- Management should endeavour to source qualified personnel to provide supplementary teaching in the learning support setting.

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 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 have acknowledged the report and are implementing its recommendations.