An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Rusheen National School
Coachford, Co Cork
Uimhir rolla: 12395S

Date of inspection: 19 Márta 2010
WHOLE-SCHOOL EVALUATION

A whole-school evaluation of Rusheen National 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 History. 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

Rusheen National School, a co-educational Catholic school, is situated north east of Macroom town in the parish of Aghinagh. In response to an increase in enrolment over the past number of years the school has successfully procured additional accommodation. This vibrant school plays a central role in the community it serves.

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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<tr>
<td>Teachers on the school staff</td>
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<td>Mainstream class teachers</td>
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<tr>
<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 vested under the patronage of the Catholic Bishop of Cloyne. It aims to promote the holistic development of the child in a caring and safe environment. The school endeavours to foster a climate in which pupils’ individuality is celebrated and achievements promoted. A structured, orderly and positive atmosphere permeates the school.

1.2 Board of management
The board of management is properly constituted. Members of the board have been allocated specific tasks and are commended for the conscientious manner in which they discharge their duties. Meetings are convened regularly and an effective system of recording minutes is in place. Detailed financial statements are furnished and accounts are audited externally. The board has a clear understanding of the school’s developmental needs and a strategic plan guides their work. A very high standard of maintenance pertains in the school and its environs.

1.3 In-school management
The in-school management team, comprising the principal, deputy principal and one special duties teacher is a valuable resource to the school. The principal, who has both teaching and
administrative duties, fosters an inclusive co-operative atmosphere and promotes meaningful involvement of the school’s partners. He inspires a shared sense of purpose among staff members and values their contribution in the overall development of the school. He has successfully progressed the school plan and admirably seeks to promote the delivery of the curriculum to a high standard. The principal’s leadership style is characterised by a primary concern for the welfare and education of pupils. His close familiarity with the wider community assists greatly in the day-to-day functioning of the school. The administrative duties of the principal are carried out in an efficient and competent manner.

The principal is ably supported in the organisation of the school by the in-school management team and very supportive working relationships are in evidence. The responsibilities of post-holders are clearly defined and are carried out conscientiously. In the further development of the in-school management team, it is advised to establish procedures to facilitate review of duties periodically in response to the identified needs of the school. It is also suggested that post-holders further develop their instructional leadership role in monitoring the implementation and on-going review of the curriculum. Regular in-school management meetings would further facilitate this development. The formulation of an annual plan of work by post-holders, in consultation with the principal, is also advised. Formal staff meetings are convened and detailed minutes are maintained which are reflective of collaborative decision-making among staff members.

1.4 Management of relationships and communication with the school community

Positive relationships between home and school are conscientiously promoted. Staff continuously seek to foster good communication among the school’s partners. A notice board, website and messaging service provide information regularly regarding all school activities. The production of a newsletter with the involvement of both pupils and parents would further enhance communication.

An induction meeting for prospective parents is held annually. This is complemented by the issuing of information booklets which address a range of practical issues while also detailing relevant policies. Individual consultation with parents is facilitated through parent-teacher meetings and the issuing of annual progress reports. Additional meetings are convened between teachers and parents when deemed necessary. The school has established supportive procedures to assist in the transfer of pupils to secondary school.

The parents’ association supports the school with a shared sense of purpose in organising events. The success of parents’ on-going fundraising activities has resulted in the provision of a wide range of additional resources. Funds raised are advantageously used to subsidise school activities. Parental expertise is welcomed in the delivery of some curricular areas. Consideration might now be given to the further involvement of parents in school life. Parents value the work of the school and representatives reported that they are very satisfied with the educational provision in the school.

1.5 Management of pupils

Pupils co-operate willingly and contribute enthusiastically to school life. They are very well-behaved and respond respectfully to one another and to staff. Teachers show a very supportive approach to the management of pupils and demonstrate a caring commitment to their general welfare. Great care is taken by all staff members to foster pupils’ self confidence through participation in a wide range of activities.
2. **Quality of School Planning**

2.1 **Whole-school and classroom planning**

The whole-school planning process has been progressed through the collaborative activity of the principal and teaching staff. The board of management also plays an active role in the consideration of school policies prior to formal ratification. Defined systems have been successfully established to involve parents in policy formulation. Teachers are commended for their engagement in action planning and as a result certain areas have been prioritised for review. It is advised, however, that pertinent statutory policies be given precedence in the review process. The school plan is readily available for viewing in the school.

A wide range of administrative policies have been purposefully formulated to ensure efficient in-school organisation. Useful curricular policies have also been devised on a systematic basis and individual staff members ensure the availability of resources for their implementation. It is recommended that review procedures be established to further enhance whole-school delivery of the curriculum.

Teachers provide useful long-term and short-term planning documents. These plans are detailed and provide a constructive overview of curriculum content. There is evidence of well thought-out programmes of work clearly linked to the strands of the curriculum with provision for the use of a range of methodologies and resources. Templates for short-term planning, designed to enable the implementation of the school plan in a consistent manner, have been adapted. A greater focus on pupils’ expected learning outcomes in terms of skill and conceptual development would further enhance teaching and learning. It is also necessary to differentiate programmes of learning to meet the individual needs of pupils, particularly the needs of more able pupils.

Clear procedures are in place for the recording of monthly progress. Of particular note is the participation of all teachers in reflective practice on a regular basis. It is recommended that further use be made of data emanating from monthly progress records to inform review of curricular policies.

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 scoil leagtha amach don Ghaeilge ina n-áirítear na haidhmeanna i leith na teanga agus straitéisei oiriúnachta chun í a thhorbaír mar theanga chumarsáide. Is inmholta mar a rianaítear sa phlean eiseamlárí teanga atá feiliniúna d’imeachtait an lá scoile. B’fhiú tógáil ar an dearfóibrí agus na heiseamlárí teanga do na ceachtanna foirmiúla a thhorbaír i gcomhthéacs na dteamaí sa churaclam. B’inmhainithe, chomh maith, cur chuige i leith gnéithe éagsúla den chlár a aontá agus a chur i bhfeidhm ar bhonn uile-scoile.

Cothaítear dearcadh dearfach i leith na Gaeilge sa scoil agus baineann na daltaí tuineamh as a bhfoghlaíonn siad. Cruthaithe timpeallacht Ghaeil chuí ábhar léirithe i nGaeilge ach ar seachtai i gcomhfad phlean eiseamlárí teanga atá feiliniúna d’aistealaithe agus a thairgeadh agus a tharlaítear trí an tréimhse a thairgeadh. B’fhiú tógáil ar an déal a bhfuil i gcumhacht anseo. Múinteart réimeas leathan rann agus amhrán chun fuaimíonn a bhaint amach i leith i nGaeilge. B’fhiú tógáil ar an lá náisiúnta leathan a bhaint amach i leith. B’fhiú tógáil ar an gceist teictheacht a bhaint amach i leith. B’fhiú tógáil ar an gceist fearrthóraíochta a bhaint amach i leith. B'fhiú tógáil ar an leithscóil a bhaint amach i leith.

Cothaítear scil na héisteachta go fónta trí ghníomh aistritheachtaí a chur i gceist. Léiríonn siad cumas maith teictheacht. B’fhiú tógáil ar an leithscóil a bhaint amach i leith. B’fhiú tógáil ar an gceist fearrthóraíochta a bhaint amach i leith. B'fhiú tógáil ar an leithscóil a bhaint amach i leith. B’fhiú tógáil ar an gceist fearrthóraíochta a bhaint amach i leith.
**Irish**

The school plan for Irish outlines the aims of the subject and suitable strategies for its implementation as a communicative language are clearly documented. Appropriate language exemplars for the use of Irish informally during school activities has been delineated appropriately for each class level. It is suggested that language exemplars for the themes in the curriculum be similarly developed. It is also desirable that other pertinent aspects of the Irish school plan be agreed and implemented on a whole-school basis.

A positive attitude to Irish is fostered among pupils and they enjoy learning the language. An environment which supports the Irish curriculum is constructed through the display of Irish language material throughout the school. Creditable use is made of incidental Irish during classroom activities. Listening skills are purposefully developed through a range of suitable exercises. A wide range of poems and rhymes is taught to familiarise pupils with the sound and structure of the language. Consequently, pupils display a very good understanding of Irish and pupils recite a wide range of poetry with enjoyment.

Effective strategies are used skilfully to develop pupils’ communicative competency in the language including language games, pair work, role-play and drama. Suitable vocabulary and language input is taught and sufficient practice is given to pupils to consolidate language structures. Most pupils are capable of asking and answering questions, structuring sentences and using them in different scenarios. Pupils’ fluency in language is gainfully promoted. Suitable emphasis is placed on good pronunciation and accuracy of language. To further enhance this good work, it is recommended that story be used in the further acquisition and enrichment of language. To this end, a wider range of story books in Irish and other suitable reading material should be provided.

Reading is systematically taught. A range of imaginative strategies is used to promote pupils’ interest and to develop their reading skills. Group reading activities are skilfully employed to enhance pupil understanding of the text. Excerpts from workbooks and in some classes, real books, are judiciously used to develop pupils’ reading skills. Most pupils read with fluency and with accuracy. To further promote competency in Irish reading a broader range of reading material should be provided. It is also necessary to devise and implement a structured early literacy programme.

Pupils are enabled to write functional and creative texts. They write short texts based on themes and complete functional exercises from workbooks. Pupils engage in some personal writing activities supported by teacher scaffolding. Pupils would benefit from further development of independent writing skills. A comprehensive whole-school plan for process writing should be devised and implemented to enable pupils to plan, draft and edit their work systematically. In general, pupils should be further challenged during Irish lessons.

**English**

A whole-school plan has been developed for English with a clear delineation of work in some aspects of the programme. In the further development of this plan, staff are advised to agree and to document guidelines for teaching and learning in a number of areas such as oral language development, early literacy, the use of the novel and penmanship.

Pupils’ oral language skills are conscientiously developed during reading and writing activities. Language is also appropriately explored through cross-curricular approaches. Talk, discussion
and debate in whole-class settings are employed meaningfully to promote oral language competency. Pupils’ higher-order thinking skills are gainfully developed through teachers’ judicious questioning. The majority of pupils display a good standard of competence and confidence in the use of language. A whole-school co-ordinated approach to discrete oral language activities is advised. Pupils’ response to and appreciation of poetry is actively nurtured and they are skilfully facilitated to create their own poetry. A compilation of suitable poems for all class levels would further promote poetry recitation.

Emergent reading skills are developed gainfully in the junior classes. Suitable emphasis is placed on reading readiness activities including knowledge of the conventions of print, basic sight vocabulary and word identification strategies. Productive use is made of large format books during shared reading experiences. Commercial resources are used purposefully in the development of pupils’ phonological and phonemic awareness. Reading skills are aptly developed as pupils progress through the school. Pupils demonstrate a keen interest in reading and positive reading standards appropriate to pupils’ ability are in evidence. Graded reading schemes and parallel readers are skilfully used to extend pupils’ accuracy and comprehension. Class novels are used to foster positive attitudes to reading. It is advised, however, that class readers be supplemented to a greater extent by the use of novels. Greater emphasis on reading aloud would also enhance pupils’ fluency and it is suggested that a log of pupils’ reading be maintained.

Structured writing lessons where pupils are stimulated to write and are systematically taught specific strategies are noteworthy features of provision. Good use is made of the interactive white board to promote the language experience approach. Pupils are regularly exposed to writing in a variety of genres for a range of purposes and audiences, with effective use being made of process writing approaches. The frequency of pupil engagement in independent writing should be further extended. Pupils’ writing is monitored regularly and constructive comments are noted. A dictation approach to spelling, recently initiated, is proving beneficial. There is potential to further integrate information and communication technology (ICT) into the process writing approach.

A keen emphasis is placed on the development of pupils’ letter formation and handwriting skills. While an examination of copybooks indicates that pupils’ skills are being appropriately developed it is suggested that further attention be paid to pupils’ cursive writing ability aided by more consistent use of penmanship copybooks. The quality of presentation is very good.

3.2 Mathematics
Lessons in Mathematics are well structured and skilfully paced. Teachers give clear explanation and address content through detailed questioning. Active methodologies are employed consistently to encourage pupils to learn co-operatively and appropriate emphasis is placed on the use of mathematical games. Suitable resources are adeptly employed and attractive mathematical environments are created.

Early mathematical activity is successfully underpinned by purposeful use of hands-on approaches. The recitation of rhymes augments pupils’ understanding of number. Considerable emphasis is placed in all classes on the development of mathematical language and prediction and estimation skills are gainfully developed.

Judicious use is made of ICT. Pupils’ written work is carefully recorded and regularly monitored. Test results testify to a very good standard of achievement in Mathematics. To further promote pupil competence attention should now be directed to developing oral mathematical ability. Opportunities for pupils to engage in problem-solving activities related to their own experiences
are also advised. In some classes pupils at the high achieving spectrum should be assigned purposeful differentiated work to provide greater cognitive challenge.

3.3 History
Teaching of History is supported by the use and display of documents, artefacts and primary historical sources. Lessons are well structured. Storytelling and discussion are among the approaches productively used to engage pupils in historical enquiry. Suitable topics are chosen at each class level and due attention is given to the development of pupils’ historical language.

Appropriate emphasis is placed on pupils acting as historians, working in groups, participating in trails and looking for evidence about life in the past. Pupils’ understanding of change and continuity is promoted by exploring similarities between past and present through photographs and engagement with visiting speakers. Project work, with an appropriate focus on local history, has been undertaken and pupils present their findings with confidence and enthusiasm. Themes from History are successfully linked with other curricular areas. ICT is used to good effect. Pupils’ recording of learning should include a wider range of reporting strategies, and a greater balance between knowledge and skill-based learning is advised.

3.4 Assessment
A whole-school policy to guide assessment of pupils’ progress has been carefully devised. A variety of assessment strategies is employed at individual class level. It is advised that these good practices be shared among staff and a whole-school approach to assessment be adopted.

Regular testing enables teachers to monitor individual pupils’ acquisition of knowledge and concepts. Teachers maintain careful records of outcomes of all assessments and results are usefully shared between class teachers and support teachers. Standardised testing in literacy and in numeracy is administered annually. Staff carefully monitor and analyse pupil achievement to provide a whole-school perspective on attainment. This data is used constructively to inform future planning. Individual pupils’ performance is also tracked and recorded accurately. Effective screening processes are in place to identify pupils’ individual learning needs. The Belfield Infant Assessment Profiles (BIAP) and Middle Infants Screening Test (MIST) are administered purposefully to assist in the identification of pupils who may be experiencing difficulties with early literacy skills.

4. QUALITY OF SUPPORT FOR PUPILS

4.1 Pupils with special educational needs
The special education support team consists of a full-time learning support teacher and two part-time resource teachers. Clearly stated whole-school policies and procedures demonstrate the commitment of the school to meeting the needs of pupils with special educational needs. Appropriately these procedures incorporate the staged approach to assessment, identification and programme implementation as recommended in Department guidelines.

Supplementary teaching is provided in both literacy and numeracy in pupils’ mainstream classrooms or through individual or group withdrawal. A wide range of resources has been accessed. The learning-support room presents as a stimulating learning environment. It is suggested that other support settings be similarly developed and pupils’ work celebrated through display. Lessons are well structured and resources employed suitably to support learning. In general teachers employ a variety of teaching approaches and learning strategies to engage pupils
in a range of activities. The interactions observed between support teachers and pupils were affirming and encouraging of pupils.

Assessment results, consultation with class teachers and relevant information from parents are purposefully used in the development of individual learning programmes (IEPs). Teachers liaise regularly with parents regarding pupil progress and useful records of meetings are maintained. Detailed individual profile and learning programmes (IPLPs) have been devised. Recognition is due for the ordered system in place to record pupil progress in some settings. There is a need, however, to extend and co-ordinate these good practices on a whole-school basis.

A range of commendable strategies and approaches are used to meet the individual needs of pupils. An innovative programme, Súgradh, focuses admirably on the development of pupils' motor and social needs through appropriate activities. Early intervention programmes are gainfully implemented to address literacy and numeracy difficulties. It is recommended, however, that greater provision for more able pupils, led by the mainstream class teacher, be considered and that additional challenging independent learning opportunities be provided.

A model of in-class support and cooperative teaching approaches have been creatively established which enable support teachers to co-teach in mainstream classrooms. This good practice provides opportunities to target the specific needs of pupils in an integrated setting and in a differentiated manner. While the benefits of these approaches are acknowledged, it is recommended that these initiatives should be reviewed in order to cater further for the needs of pupils. In reviewing the delivery of the learning-support programme, consideration should also be given to the most effective deployment of personnel.

5. CONCLUSION

The school has strengths in the following areas:

- The school is characterised by a welcoming, caring and well-ordered school environment.
- Effective leadership and a dedicated staff support the delivery of the curriculum.
- Pupils are very responsive and participate with enthusiasm in all school activities, demonstrating positive attitudes to learning.
- The quality of teaching and learning results in pupils experiencing high levels of achievement.
- The board of management is supportive and keenly interested in the operation and development of the school.
- Parental involvement greatly enhances the work of the school and a strong sense of community is created.
- Commendable emphasis is placed on local History.

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

- It is recommended that post-holders further develop their instructional leadership role in the process of monitoring the implementation and on-going review of the curriculum.
- Regular and consistent review of curriculum plans is recommended.
- Moltar pléan céimniúil uile-scoile a dhearadh do thuiscint na léitheoireachta. (A whole-school structured early literacy programme in Irish reading is recommended.)
• It is recommended that supplementary teaching programmes be further co-ordinated with greater emphasis placed on meeting the learning needs of pupils experiencing difficulties. Greater provision for more able pupils, led by mainstream class teachers, should also be considered.

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 Board of Management and Staff of Rusheen N.S. welcome the Report on the Whole School Evaluation carried out during March, 2010. We appreciate the courtesy shown to us by the Inspector and the fair and constructive manner in which she carried out the inspection. We welcome the positive nature of the report and we are pleased to note the recognition given to the high quality of learning and teaching in our school.

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 and the Staff have reviewed the report and there is a commitment to build on the strengths identified and the recommendations made.

• Post holders are committed to further developing their instructional leadership role in the process of monitoring the implementation and ongoing review of the curriculum.

• The staff will address the development of a whole school structured literacy program in Irish Reading.

• A policy will be developed to cater for the needs of exceptionally able pupils.