An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Donoughmore National School, Donoughmore, Donard, County Wicklow
Uimhir rolla: 12413R

Date of inspection: 22 November 2010
1. Introduction

Donoughmore National School is a three-teacher, co-educational primary school serving the parish of Donoughmore, Donard, Dunlavin. It is under the patronage of the Church of Ireland Archbishop of Glendalough and caters for pupils from infants to sixth class. The attendance of the 60 pupils enrolled is very good. The board of management was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the evaluation, and the response of the board will be found in the appendix to this report.

2. Summary of Findings and Recommendations for Further Development

The following are the main strengths of the work of the school:

- The education and welfare of pupils guides the board of management in all its endeavours.
- The principal works conscientiously to ensure successful whole-school partnerships. Staff members contribute effectively to maintaining a collaborative school climate.
- Parents are supportive of the work of the school.
- Pupils are managed in a mutually respectful manner.
- Tá ard-chaidheáin ag baint le teagasc agus le fighlaíonn na Gaeilge agus tá dearadh deargadh leis na teangeolaíochta. There is a high standard of teaching and learning in Irish and a positive attitude towards the language is evident.
- Classrooms are well organised and there is a positive learning atmosphere in the school.

The following main recommendations are made:

- A review of the enrolment policy is recommended to guarantee due adherence to the Education Act 21(2) in relation to the enrolment of pupils with special educational needs.
- Further involvement of parents in the formulation of all school policies is recommended.
- The school’s assessment policy should direct consistent classroom assessment practices across the curriculum.
- Clear objectives should be set within individual teachers’ planning to ensure that the needs of all pupils are met. Using varied methodologies to support all pupils’ skill development should be integral to this.
- It is recommended that parents have more formal input into the development and review of their child’s Individual Education Plan.

3. Quality of School Management

- The properly-constituted board of management maintains detailed minutes of the regular meetings held. The board is cognisant of its obligations to whole-school development and is commended for its level of commitment to the school and to the welfare of pupils.
Accounts are audited annually. Board members avail of training provided by the Church of Ireland. The learning environment is maintained to a very high standard and board members, supported by the wider school community, contribute significantly to this work.

- The principal is committed to pupils' holistic development. She works conscientiously to ensure successful whole-school partnerships. School improvement is integral to her work. The deputy principal competently supports the principal in the successful execution of her duties. Staff members contribute effectively to sustaining a collaborative school climate.

- The school boasts a committed, vibrant and hardworking parents’ association. They are responsible for social events and fundraising which assists in the purchase of relevant resources. Annual parent-teacher meetings and end of year reports inform them of their child’s progress. Parental questionnaires indicate that all parents feel welcome in the school.

- There is an ethos of mutual respect regarding the management of pupils. Positive relationships exist among the whole school community. A high standard of behaviour is expected from pupils and they respond accordingly. Teachers acknowledge pupils’ efforts and achievements in all aspects of school life.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- The quality of school planning and self-evaluation is satisfactory. The board contributes to, and ratifies all school policies and has developed a comprehensive action plan for the ongoing development of the school plan. The board reviews plans on a cyclical basis. A review of the enrolment policy is recommended to guarantee due adherence to the Education Act 21(2) in relation to the enrolment of pupils with special educational needs. Further involvement of parents in the formulation of school policies is recommended.

- Curriculum plans for Irish and Mathematics are of a good standard. The proposed review of the English policy is timely. It is necessary to ensure that the History plan includes the particular topics to be addressed at each class level over a two year cycle. Differentiation for pupils with special educational needs as outlined in these plans should be addressed consistently in practice in all classes. It is recommended that the school’s assessment policy be used to direct consistent classroom assessment practices in a manner that would ensure a cyclical approach in all instances.

- Some excellent practice was observed in relation to individual classroom planning, practice that addresses the needs of all pupils through highlighting specific objectives, relevant methodologies and particular skills development. The sharing of this commendable work among all teachers is recommended. As a further means of extending this excellent practice, common planning templates should be considered.

Child protection policy and procedures

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**

- The quality of teaching and learning varies overall. Observed good practice includes the setting of clear objectives, well-paced lessons, group and pair work and skilful higher-order questioning. Teacher-directed whole-class teaching is the prime methodology used in other classrooms. It is recommended that a variety of teaching methods be employed in all classes to enhance pupils’ collaborative and independent learning, to ensure the development of problem-solving skills and to support pupils of all abilities. The print-rich classroom and corridor areas, and the manner in which pupils’ contributions are valued enhance the learning environment. Pupils’ questionnaires indicate that homework is corrected regularly and pupils are supported in improving their work.

- Tá ard-chaighdeán ag baint le teagasc agus le foghlaim na Gaeilge agus tá dearcadh déarfach i leith na teanga le sonrú. Forbraítear scileanna ó bhéal agus cluastuisceana go hoiriúnach. Baintear úsáid éifeachtach as filíocht agus amhráin chun an fhoghlaim a threisiú. Glacann na daltaí páirt i ngníomhaíochtaí le muintir. Úsáideann an Ghaeilge go héifeachtach mar mheán cumarsáide i rith an lae. Cé go gcuirtear béim oiriúnach ar theagasc na scribhneoireachta, bunaitear an scribhneoireacht ar an iomlán ar leabhair shaothair. Tugann na daltaí faoi na tascanna scribhneoireachta go curamach agus ceartaítear an obair scríofa go rialta. Moltar scribhneoireacht chruthaitheach na ndaltaí sna hardranganna a chothú. Chuirfeadh samplaí de shaothair scribhneoireachta na ndaltaí le saibhreas ábhair phriontáilte na scoile sa Ghaeilge.

There is a high standard of teaching and learning in Irish and a positive attitude towards the language is evident. Oral and aural skills are appropriately developed. Poetry and songs are used effectively to reinforce learning. Pupils participate in activities with confidence. Irish is used effectively as a medium of communication throughout the day. While satisfactory attention is given to the teaching of writing, activities are generally workbook-based. Pupils complete exercises carefully and work is corrected vigilantly. It is recommended that pupils’ creative writing skills in the senior classes be promoted. Samples of pupils’ writing endeavours should contribute to the print-rich environment in Irish.

- The standard of teaching and learning in English is good. In oral language, pupils participate well in class discussions and the majority talk confidently and discuss topics with increasing fluency. Good questioning techniques are employed to expand thinking skills. Every effort is made to develop pupils’ listening skills. Due attention is given to the development of reading strategies. The majority of pupils read accurately and are developing appropriate comprehension skills. Poetry and rhyme are used consistently to advance pupils’ abilities across the strands. The writing process is well scaffolded and pupils write in a variety of genres and for a variety of audiences. Consideration should be given to extending the displays of written work in some classes to celebrate pupils’ writing achievements more fully. The use of computers to enhance this work is advised. It is recommended that clear objectives are set within individual teacher’s planning to ensure that the needs of all pupils are met across the English curriculum. Pupil questionnaires indicate that most pupils feel they are doing well at English.

- The quality of teaching and learning in Mathematics varies. Pupils generally have a good understanding of the mathematical concepts being taught and the majority are achieving well in mathematics. Mathematical language is appropriately addressed and written work is diligently corrected. Where good practice was observed, oral work is used constructively to extend pupils’ mathematical thinking, resources are carefully selected, methodologies vary to meet individual pupil’s learning needs and pupils’ competence in problem solving is suitably addressed. In other instances, teacher-directed whole-class teaching is the predominant methodology with an over-emphasis on textbook-based work. It is recommended that all teachers use a variety of methodologies including...
hands-on discovery methods to support pupils’ skill development in Mathematics. It is further recommended that assigned Mathematics tasks take cognisance of varying pupil needs and abilities. Pupils’ questionnaires indicate that they feel they are achieving well in Mathematics.

- The standard of teaching in History is high in some instances. Where good practice is observed, project work and the integration of the history programme with many curriculum areas is a praiseworthy feature. Photographs, time lines and history displays enhance this work. There is an over-emphasis on the textbook in some classes. The sharing of the good practice observed is recommended so that all pupils’ skills as historians can be developed optimally. Talk and discussion are regular features of lessons and pupils present their findings competently in all classes.

6. Quality of Support for Pupils

- Some good practice is evident in the special educational setting. Individual Education Plans (IEPs) are organised after consultation with parents and class teachers. Targets are reviewed twice yearly. It is recommended that parents have more formal input into the development and review of their child’s IEP. In order to facilitate a focus on the specific needs of individual pupils in classroom planning, it is further recommended that classroom teachers be provided with the relevant copies of these IEPs.

- Individual pupil targets are prioritised in weekly plans through the implementation of specific programmes and activities. The inclusion of clear objectives and methodologies is advised to enhance these plans. There is both formal and informal liaison between the special educational setting and class teachers regarding individual pupil progress. Well-structured lessons ensure that pupils make appropriate progress at their own level.

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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 B.O.M. would like to thank the D.E.S. Inspector who visited our school for her courtesy, professionalism and guidance.

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 staff and B.O.M. are in the process of implementing the recommendations given in the Report through planning and the reviewing of policies.