

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

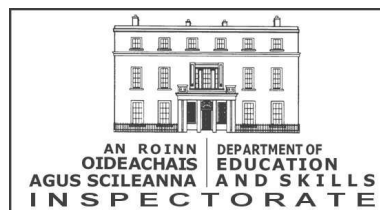
Department of Education and Skills

**Whole School Evaluation
Management, Leadership and Learning**

REPORT

**Rusnacahara National School
Ahakista, Durrus, Bantry, Co. Cork
Uimhir rolla: 12685E**

Date of inspection: 14 October 2013



Whole-School Evaluation – Management, Leadership and Learning Report

Introduction

A Whole-School Evaluation – Management, Leadership and Learning (WSE - MLL) was undertaken in Rusnacadara National School in October 2013. This report is based on a selection of lessons observed in a range of learning settings in the school, interaction with pupils and review of their work, meetings with the principal and with board and parent representatives, completed parent and pupil questionnaires and a review of a representative sample of school documents. 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.

Rusnacadara National School is a rural two teacher mixed school under the patronage of the Catholic Bishop of Cork and Ross. School enrolment trends are positive and pupil numbers have increased from fourteen in 2009 to twenty six pupils in 2013. Enrolment projections for the next four years suggest that further growth will occur.

The school has **strengths** in the following areas:

- The school enjoys high levels of community support.
- The school is effectively managed and capably led.
- The standard of teaching in the school is very good.
- The current cohort of pupils is positively disposed to learning.
- The learning achievements of pupils are satisfactory.
- There is a clear focus on school improvement.

The following areas **require improvement**:

- There is a need to address the accommodation needs in the school as a matter of urgency.
- School accounts must be, in the future, certified annually in line with Departmental and Diocesan guidelines.
- The communicative approach to language-learning should be further developed in Irish.
- The educational experiences of pupils should be further developed through more purposeful exploration of the educational opportunities of the school environment and by expanding the range and frequency of extra-curricular and co-curricular learning opportunities.
- The board should advise the newly formed parents' support group to consider the benefits of affiliation to the National Parents' Council.

Findings

1. The learning achievements of pupils

- The overall learning attainment of pupils are, generally, good. There is a consistent focus on development and improvement as they move from class level to class level. With respect to literacy and numeracy attainment, a very efficient tracking system has been put in place to enable easy analysis of the progress of individual pupils. Scope for development still exists in terms of the analysis of the learning achievements of pupils with regard to specific strands and strand units in particular subject area.
- Pupils at risk of underachieving make good progress and good supports, based on well-informed diagnostic practices, are in place for them.

2. The quality of teaching

- The overall quality of teaching in the school is very good. This was clearly evident from the questionnaire responses of parents, none of whom disagreed with the statement 'Teaching is good in the school'. It was also evident from observed teacher practice. Lesson content was effectively differentiated and observed lessons were well structured and suited to the learning needs of the pupils. Teacher preparedness for lessons was of a high standard and good assessment practices provide them with a clear view of the learning needs of individual pupils, especially, with regard to literacy and numeracy. However, given that, in general, expected learning outcomes are defined by classroom textbooks it is especially important to ensure that these are in harmony with the prescribed curriculum for Primary School and that the correct breath and balance of curriculum content is maintained. There is also scope for development with respect to the exploration of the educational opportunities of the environment and a need to further explore extra-curricular and co-curricular learning opportunities. However, notwithstanding the above advisory comments much good practice was observed during the course of the evaluation.
- There was, for example, purposeful development of literacy across the curriculum and pupils are generally articulate, read at a level appropriate to their age and have well developed writing skills and creative abilities. A phonics programme is effectively implemented in the junior room and this provides a solid platform for the development of reading. This work is effectively built upon in the senior room where reading is also effectively promoted as a leisure activity.
- Mathematics was also observed to be effectively taught though the current dependence on textbooks needs to be balanced with more exploration, where possible, of the mathematical learning opportunities in the immediate school environment.
- Múintear an Ghaeilge go córasach agus spreagtar na daltaí chun suime go héifeachtach ach b'fhiú fós béim sa bhreis a chur ar chumarsáid agus ar úsáid teanga ar bhonn laethúil.
Though Irish is taught systematically and pupils are motivated effectively there is a need to further develop the communicative approach to language learning on a daily basis.
- Though scope for development exists a varied programme of Physical Education is provided despite the physical restrictions of the school environment and the lack of indoor facilities.
- Arts Education is effectively promoted and all pupils learn the tin whistle.
- Classrooms are well resourced and interactive whiteboards are available to support learning.

3. How well pupils are cared for and supported

- Pupils are very well managed in the school which provides, for them, an inclusive, supportive and stable learning environment. A positive code of behaviour is in place and home-school and teacher-pupil relationships are very good. Pupils are happy and contented young learners who are consistently affirmed for their efforts and for their achievements. They are proud of their school and have a strong sense of local identity.
- Confirmation was provided that the board of management has formally adopted the *Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools* without modification.

4. Leadership and management

- The board of management makes a positive contribution to school life, particularly, in building relationships and in promoting communication. Members are involved, to a limited extent, in the formulating of school policies and in long term strategic planning. However, they give of their time generously and maintain close contact with the parents, teachers and pupils. Parental questionnaire items which focused on the work of the board resulted in very positive community responses. The work of the board is also evident from the condition of the school building which, although dating back to the late nineteenth century, has been well maintained. However, even though the school is well resourced and comfortable a number of significant

challenges need to be addressed as a matter of priority. In the first instance, a strategic plan needs to be put in place to provide additional spaces for resource and learning support teaching purposes, for administrative and ancillary spaces, and a staff room. Currently, the only additional spaces available are porches and these are unsuitable from a health and welfare perspective. Secondly, it is also important that, in the future, school accounts be certified, annually, in order to ensure that financial management practices in the school are in line with Diocesan and Departmental guidelines. Thirdly, it is important that the board, in initiating a parental support group, advises them of the advantages of affiliation to the National Parents' Council.

- The principal, since her appointment in 2010, has made a valuable contribution to school life. She is committed to the development of the school as a child-friendly centre of learning and leads a school improvement agenda. She has built a positive environment for teaching and learning in which partnership is valued and her work to date has been of great value to the school community.
- Her mainstream colleague who has a special duties post provides invaluable assistance to the principal although her role needs to be formalised and linked to emerging and changing school priorities.
- Additional ancillary staff members (a part-time school secretary and a cleaner) greatly assist in the day-to-day operation of the school.

5. School self-evaluation

- The process of school self-evaluation (SSE) has commenced in the school and, currently, following an analysis of standardised test data, problem solving in mathematics and the development of comprehension skills have been identified as school priorities. The school's capacity to develop further will be aided by the successful implementation of its school improvement plan and the achievement of its agreed SSE targets based on the above priorities.

The school's capacity to make these necessary improvements and to develop further is good and there is a commitment to ongoing reflection and development.