An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation REPORT

SN Naomh Colm Cille
Westport, County Mayo.
Uimhir rolla: 13145A

Date of inspection: 25 March 2010
WHOLE-SCHOOL EVALUATION

A whole-school evaluation of SN Naomh Colm Cille 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 Science. 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
SN Naomh Colm Cille is a thirteen-teacher co-educational school, situated at Westport Quay. It has grown significantly over the past number of years. Pupils attend the school from a wide catchment area in the hinterland of Westport. The building, which was recently extended, is very attractively presented. 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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<tbody>
<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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<tr>
<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’s mission statement is published in the school plan. The school community aspires to assist every pupil “so that he/she will have the necessary skills, values and attitudes to live a useful life in a changing society”. A strong emphasis is also placed on promoting citizenship and community involvement.

1.2 Board of management
The board is well informed, is properly constituted and meets regularly. Specific tasks are allocated and are undertaken in a professional and committed manner. The board is to be commended for the effective manner in which it has ensured that the school building project has been successfully completed. The board undertakes regular reviews of school policies. Accounts are audited annually. Strong effective links exist among the board, staff, parents and the wider community. The board is advised to review the current staffing arrangements. It is reminded of the need to ensure as far as possible that there is an equitable distribution of pupils in the nine mainstream classes in the school and that the differential between the largest and smallest class size is kept to a minimum. The board is also advised to provide written contracts for all ancillary staff.

1.3 In-school management
The in-school management team consists of the principal, deputy principal and four special-duties post holders. The principal is commended for the manner in which he has engaged in promoting the school, assisting the procurement of additional resources for the school and fundraising for the development and expansion of the building. He works diligently to project a favourable image of
the school in the community. He liaises regularly with the chairperson of the board of management, with outside agencies and with the representatives of the parents’ association. The deputy principal and other post-holders share many of the daily tasks and actively contribute to the smooth running of the school. Their willingness to share skills and talents and to take on particular responsibilities is commendable. Post holders report at staff meetings on the duties that they have undertaken. At present there are no formal meetings of the in-school management team. It is recommended that they now develop a team structure with an emphasis on providing curricular leadership to promote school improvement.

1.4 Management of relationships and communication with the school community
The school has been very effective in harnessing the goodwill of the parent body to enhance the learning experiences of the pupils. Parents very willingly share with the school their interests, skills and expertise. They have produced the Christmas show, painted the school building, assisted with the school garden and they work in a voluntary capacity to run the school library. Regular newsletters keep parents informed of school events and successes. These good practices are highly commended. Parent-teacher meetings are held in the first term of the school year and an annual written report is issued in June. Parents are encouraged to consult with teachers on an individual basis whenever they deem it necessary.

1.5 Management of pupils
The school has recently reviewed its code of behaviour. The management of pupils in this school is generally good. In most classes, pupils were enthusiastic about their learning and co-operative and well behaved.

2. QUALITY OF SCHOOL PLANNING

2.1 Whole-school and classroom planning
The quality of whole-school organisational planning is good. These plans are succinct and specific to the needs of the school. Some curricular plans are in need of review to ensure that they reflect the specific school context and assist in the implementation of the curriculum at classroom level. The good practice observed during the course of the evaluation should be documented in the school plan.

The quality of classroom planning shows some scope for development. In many cases both long-term and short-term plans are over reliant on textbooks with insufficient differentiation planned. A very useful agreed format has been devised for recording progress. It is recommended that a similar format be devised for short-term planning. Teachers provide very attractive, stimulating learning environments for their pupils and a wealth of resources supports teaching and learning.

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 *Child Protection Guidelines for Primary Schools* (Department of Education and Science, 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 caighdeán na Gaeilge go maith. Labhraíonn na hoi dí an Ghaeilge go cruinn, liofa agus tá Gaeilge den scoth ag cuid acu. Rinneadh athbhreithnìochta ar an bplean scoile don Ghaeilge le déanaí agus d’aithníodh na straitéisí chu’n úsáid na teanga agus an cur i bhfeidhm a rheidhtriú. Tá leanúnachas le feiceáil idir an plean scoile agus pleannanna na n-oidí. Úsáidtear an Ghaeilge mar teanga chumarsáide sna ceachtanna Gaeilge. Leirionn formhór na ndaltaí tuiscint mhaith ar Ghaeilge bhunúsach. Aithrisíonn daltaí i roint ranganna cuasach deas filiochta go taitneamhach, le dea-thbhreithnìochta. Chun breis forbartha a dheanamh ar shaibhreas teanga na ndaltaí b’fhiú an scéalafocht a chleachtaidh go rialta i ngach rang, cuasach filiochta a chur de ghlanmheabhair, agus dul siar go rialta ar dhánta atá fighlama cheana féin. Baintear úsáid as obair ghrúpa, as drámaíocht agus as cluichí éagsúla i roint ranganna. Moltar níos mó béime a chur ar na ndaltaí toisc an scéalaíocht a chleachtadh go rialta i ngach rang. B’fhiú níos mó deiseanna scríbhneoirí a chruthú sna hardranganna, chun taithí a thabhairt do dhaltaí ar théacsanna éagsúla a chumadh, mar shampla nuacht laethúil, litreacha chuig cairde, ríomhphoist agus scéalta simplí. Tá sé socraithe ag an bhfoireann atmaisféar don Ghaeilge a chur in n-ála go mór le suim agus seachtadh dearfadh a shaothrú i measc na ndaltaí.

Irish

The quality of Irish is good. The teachers speak Irish fluently and accurately and some teachers have very good Irish. The school plan for Irish has been reviewed recently and strategies to improve the teaching and daily use of Irish were identified. Teachers’ individual planning generally links well with the contents of the school plan. Irish is used as the language of communication during lessons. The majority of pupils display a good understanding of basic Irish. Pupils in some classes recite a pleasant selection of poetry with enjoyment and good pronunciation. To further develop pupils’ richness of language, regular reading of stories, the memorisation of poetry and revision of poems previously taught are advised. In some classes, pair work, group work, drama and games are used. It is advised that this practice be extended to all classrooms to develop communication skills and confidence.

A print-rich environment is created in all of the classrooms. Reading is cultivated carefully and the use of small-format books is praised. Formal writing is started in senior infants. It is recommended that this work be started in second class, in accordance with the Primary School Curriculum. In the main, writing activities are drawn from the textbooks in use. It is recommended that pupils experience a wider range of writing genres in senior classes, for example the daily news, letters to friends, e-mails and simple stories. As has been identified by the staff, the raising of the profile of Irish should help to increase interest and foster a more positive attitude towards the subject.
**English**

The quality of pupil attainment in English reading is very good. A majority of pupils read with fluency and confidence. A suitable phonological-awareness programme is followed in the infant classes. The teachers are to be commended for their success in establishing a culture of reading across the school. A number of commendable practices are promoted in the school to emphasis reading for pleasure. This includes engagement with the *Bisto Book Awards*, the *MS Readathon*, regular and structured use of the school library, a paired-reading scheme between the infants and senior pupils, and the use of big books, class novels and supplementary books. Renowned authors are invited to the school on an annual basis to engage with the senior pupils. The practice of reading novels to a class as carried out by individual teachers is very effective and should be extended to all classes. Pupils enjoy discussing their favourite authors and display a great enthusiasm for reading. The quality of pupils’ reading could be further enhanced through the differentiation of texts at all class levels.

The quality of writing in English was most impressive in classrooms where teachers did not rely solely on textbook exercises. The effective practices observed during the course of the evaluation included the teaching of a wide range of genres and developing these genres consistently throughout the school year in a variety of curricular areas. A majority of teachers promote the writing process and good use is made of information and communication technology (ICT) to further this process. Some classes have produced class booklets which are proudly displayed. A majority of teachers encourage the development of high quality handwriting and presentation of written work.

All teachers teach discrete oral language lessons. It is recommended that such lessons include the development of pupils’ vocabulary and oral language skills through engagement with a range of oral contexts. Pupils in a majority of classes could recite poetry with feeling and enthusiasm.

**3.2 Mathematics**

Some very good work was observed in Mathematics, with a good focus on the development of appropriate language. The school is well-equipped and many very well structured activity-based lessons were observed. This approach to teaching in Mathematics has resulted in impressive standardised test results. The majority of teachers provide number rich environments with lots of visual materials which help pupils to remember what has already been taught. A mathematics trail has been developed in the school grounds. There is an effective system in place in the school to ensure that there is frequent revision of topics already covered. The school is advised to use assessment data to group pupils according to ability in Mathematics and to provide more differentiated approaches. The school has begun to use team-teaching and in-class support. This good work is praised and teachers are encouraged to further develop this aspect of the work. While some effective use was made of ICT to teach Mathematics, it is recommended that more use is made of this resource to enhance the learning opportunities for the pupils.

**3.3 Science**

The quality of teaching and learning in Science shows some scope for development. All classrooms have a display area or an investigation table with current experiments, learning resources and pupils’ work on display. The school is currently working towards its fourth green flag under the *Green Schools* initiative. A school garden has been established and the development of pupils’ life skills through this project is praiseworthy. Some teachers ensure a very clear balance between content and skills. However, there is a general over-reliance on textbooks which impedes the implementation of a broad and balanced programme. Learning was most effective in classrooms where pupils had a chance to engage with materials rather than
watch demonstrations, where there was more pupil-pupil interaction than teacher talk and where content was related to pupils’ lives and current knowledge. While all teachers make use of the local environment it is recommended that a number of trails are developed to ensure a consistent development of pupils’ knowledge of local flora and fauna.

3.4 Assessment
The quality of assessment shows some scope for development. Teacher observation, teacher-devised tests and monitoring of pupils’ written work are some of the assessment modes used regularly throughout the school. These are complemented by the administration of standardised tests. The Middle Infant Screening Test (MIST) is also administered to pupils in the second term of senior infants to assess pupil attainment in literacy and to identify pupils who may require supplementary support. The school is advised to review its assessment policy in the light of the recent NCCA publication *Assessment in the Primary School Curriculum* to develop assessment for learning (AfL), as well as assessment of learning. It is also recommended that the school administer the *Non-Reading Intelligence Test* and compare results with the standardised test results to monitor individual pupil progress. Test results are centrally stored and communicated to parents in an annual written report. The school has devised a system for tracking individual progress from year to year. Learning-support and resource teachers use a wide range of diagnostic assessments to monitor progress and to devise learning programmes.

4. **QUALITY OF SUPPORT FOR PUPILS**

4.1 Pupils with special educational needs
The quality of provision for pupils with special educational needs is good. The special education team consists of two full-time support teachers and three teachers shared with other schools. The three support teachers based in SN Naomh Colm Cille have completed courses in special education and a good quality professional service is provided. It is recommended that the current staffing arrangements for support teaching be reviewed to ensure that as little time as possible is spent travelling between schools. There is commendable co-operation between team members, class teachers and parents in the formulation and review of individual education and learning plans. These documents set out realistic learning targets for pupils with special educational needs. There is a very effective system in place which allows for the tracking of pupils’ needs throughout the school. All support teachers plan well for their lessons and their record keeping is meticulous. Assessment information is shared with class teachers. In general, teachers withdraw pupils for literacy and some in-class support is provided for Mathematics. It is recommended that more team-teaching and in-class support be provided to ensure the dissemination of specialist teaching skills to the whole staff.

4.2 Other supports for pupils: disadvantaged, minority and other groups
This is an inclusive school with a diverse pupil population. Teachers welcome pupils from minority groups and a culture of respect is fostered.

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

- The board of management is very supportive of the work of the school and has been effective in providing good facilities.
The teachers show a high level of commitment to the school.
The pupils have a high level of engagement with the local community.
Commendable practices in the promotion of reading for pleasure were observed.
Parents are very supportive of the work of the school.
Teachers provide very attractive and stimulating learning environments for their pupils.

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

- It is recommended that the special duties post holders work as a team to provide curricular leadership.
- It is recommended that assessment data be used to group pupils according to ability and to provide more differentiated approaches in numeracy and literacy.
- It is recommended that there is an equitable distribution of pupils in the nine mainstream classes in the school and that the differential between the largest and smallest class size is kept to a minimum.
- It is recommended that the curricular plans be redrafted to document whole school approaches.

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.

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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 board of management of St. Colmcille’s National School welcome this very positive report, particularly its affirmation of the high quality of teaching and learning in the school, the collaborative commitment of the staff and the support of parents and pupils in achieving the stated goals of the school. We also welcome the recognition of the very high standards achieved by pupils in English, Mathematics and Gaeilge. The staff are also delighted to see mention of the strong emphasis that the school placed in promoting citizenship and community involvement.

Area 2  Follow-up actions planned or undertaken since the completion of the inspection activity to implement the findings and recommendations of the inspection.

Regular meetings between postholders now take place outside of staff meetings. These meetings focus on curriculum development and implementation.

The staff are working towards implementing the recommendations relating to pupil assessment.

The recommendation regarding class/pupil allocation has been implemented.

Curricular plans are currently being reviewed.