

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**

**Department of Education and Skills**

**Whole School Evaluation  
REPORT**

**Clare Island National School  
Westport, Co. Mayo  
Uimhir rolla: 133110**

**Date of inspection: 12 June 2013**



## 1. Introduction

Clare Island NS is a small co-educational school situated on the island which is eight kilometres west of the Mayo coast. Enrolment has been stable in the school in recent years and currently there are seventeen pupils enrolled. The school has two classroom teachers and a learning-support teacher who is shared with a school on another island. A classroom assistant is employed under the JobBridge scheme. The school is under the patronage of the Catholic Archbishop of Tuam. The school faces a number of challenges including the physical isolation of the small community it serves, limited broadband connectivity and a lack of continuity in its staffing over recent years. The building, which is currently being extended, is attractively presented and well maintained. 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.

## 2. Summary of Findings and Recommendations for Further Development

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

- The pupils are courteous, confident and very well behaved.
- The school building and grounds are attractive and classrooms are well resourced.
- The board has demonstrated significant management competence in advancing the current school extension project.
- Some very good practice is evident in the teaching of English in the junior classes, in particular in writing and in emergent literacy.
- Chonacthas ard-chaighdeán i múineadh na Gaeilge sna ranganna soisireacha. (*A high standard of teaching of Irish was observed in the junior classes*).
- The quality of pupils' work in Visual Arts is very good.

The following **main recommendations** are made:

- The board should take active steps to ensure that the day-to-day management of the school is to the required standard and that it is maintained at that level.
- The principal should ensure that essential school records are fully and properly maintained in accordance with Department requirements.
- Structures should be put in place to assure the quality of individual teacher planning, teaching and learning in all settings and to address the deficiencies that currently exist.
- A special educational needs policy which addresses its specific needs should be provided by the school as a matter of urgency.
- A full review of the school plan should be conducted collaboratively by the board and school staff to ensure that it caters appropriately for both the organisational and the curricular needs of the school.

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The board and in-school management should explore, and make use of, the external supports available to assist them in addressing the recommendations of this report.</li></ul> |
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### **3. Quality of School Management**

- The board of management's commitment to the school is commendable. The board has been effective in managing the building project which is nearing completion and will provide a much needed learning support room. Finances are well managed and accounts are certified annually.
- It is evident that the board's effectiveness to date in terms of its school governance functions has been limited. This needs to be addressed on a step-by-step basis over a period of time.
- The administrative role of the principal is poorly executed. School records are maintained in an unsatisfactory manner. Some essential school records were not available for inspection at the time of the evaluation. The board should address these shortcomings as a matter of urgency.
- The board should ensure that it keeps itself regularly informed about the effectiveness of the day-to-day management of the school.
- There is an urgent need to review the in-school management structures. Currently, the duties attached to posts of responsibility are ill-defined, not reviewed and not linked to school needs. The school should address these matters and should put accountability mechanisms and effective communication systems in place
- The quality of the management of physical resources is good. Classrooms are bright, orderly and attractive. They are well-resourced and a good range of educational aids has been provided.
- The management of pupils is very good. Pupils are confident and enthusiastic about their learning and, during the evaluation, were courteous and polite in their interactions with each other and with adults. Their responses in the pupil questionnaires administered as part of the evaluation indicate that pupils think it is a good school.
- Some useful structures have been put in place to facilitate home-school communication. Two parent-teacher meetings take place annually and an annual report is issued to parents. The responses to the parent questionnaires indicate that all parents view the school as being welcoming of them. However, parents express a lack of confidence in how the school seeks their views and how it deals with bullying. A third of the parents who responded to the questionnaire indicate that they are not happy with the school. It is recommended that the board put effective systems in place to identify and to address the concerns of parents.

### **4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation**

- The quality of the school planning and school self-evaluation process is poor. There are a number of significant gaps in the school plan. Some of the plans which are available are not specific to the needs of this island school. Many plans provided have not been signed or dated by the chairperson of the board. While a start has been made on a school self-evaluation process it does not appear to have had any meaningful impact in bringing

about school improvement. The school needs to engage in a systematic review of the effectiveness of current practice and to plan for change where necessary.

- The quality of classroom planning varied widely. Some good quality classroom plans were observed in the junior classes but significant gaps in the plans for the senior classes were noted. The school is reminded that it is obliged to maintain monthly progress records on file and to use them as a tool to ensure there is continuity and progression in the delivery of the curriculum.
- At the time of the evaluation the school did not have a special educational needs policy. This matter needs to be addressed urgently. Individual education plans (IEPs) are provided for all pupils in receipt of support and these plans are shared with parents. This good practice is commended. However, IEPs need to reflect the advice provided in the reports provided by various specialists.
- 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 overall teaching and learning varied from very good in some classes to poor in others. In the junior classes the teaching style employed communicated high expectations to the pupils with regard to positive behaviour and active participation. Pupils' achievements in literacy and numeracy are of a good standard overall, as evidenced, for example, by their written work and by the most recent standardised test results. However, some of the practice observed was poor; for example lesson structure and pace was unsatisfactory with insufficient differentiation to meet pupils' needs. Structures should be put in place to ensure that the high standards noted in some settings regarding planning, teaching and learning are extended to all class settings.
- Tá Gaeilge chruinn, líofa ag na hoidí agus múineann siad ceachtanna le fuinneamh. Ins na ranganna soisireacha, baintear úsáid an-éifeachtach as obair beirte, amhráin agus cluichí. Moltar anois an dea-chleachtas seo a scaipeadh tríd an scoil. Léiríonn na daltaí caighdeán maith i dtuiscint na teanga ach tá easpa dul chun cinn le feiceáil i labhairt na Gaeilge sna hardranganna. Ba chóir go mbeadh deiseanna leanúnacha ag na daltaí labhairt i bpéirí agus i ngrúpaí mar chuid lárnach de cheachtanna, sna ranganna sinsearachacha go háirithe.

*Teachers speak Irish accurately and fluently and they teach lessons enthusiastically. In the junior classes very effective use was made of pair work, songs and games. This good practice should now be extended across the school. The pupils demonstrate a good standard in understanding the language, but there is a lack of progression evident in speaking Irish in the senior classes. It is advised that sustained opportunities for the pupils to converse in pairs and groups be a central feature of lessons, particularly in the senior classes.*

- The quality of teaching, learning and pupils' achievement in English is good overall. Most pupils demonstrate a high standard of competence in oral communication. Very effective

systems are in place in the school to support emergent readers. Almost all pupils from first class onwards have mastered cursive script. Some very good quality work in written English was observed in the junior classes. There is a need for better differentiation of the programme of work provided in the senior classes, to ensure that the particular needs of individual learners are met.

- The quality of teaching and learning in Mathematics is fair overall. In the junior classes, teaching in Mathematics was characterised by clear explanations, good questioning and appropriate activities in line with curriculum objectives. However, in other classes there was insufficient use of differentiation and of concrete materials to facilitate the acquisition of concepts. Through questioning the pupils it was evident that where mathematical concepts had been taught through the use of manipulatives, pupils had achieved a good understanding of the material. Further use of these good practices is advised.
- Good lessons in Visual Arts were observed during the evaluation. These involved a suitable emphasis on talk and discussion as part of the lesson and an integrated approach was taken to the subject. An appropriate emphasis is placed on fostering pupils' creativity as evidenced by, for example, the samples of pupils' work on display.
- At the time of the evaluation the school did not have a policy on assessment. Some very effective practice was observed where pupils were encouraged to self-assess their work and edit and improve same. It is recommended that the school devise a written policy on assessment to ensure that such good practice is extended across the school and to ensure continuity of practice in times of staffing changes. It is further recommended that data garnered through assessment be tracked year-on-year to inform school self-evaluation processes.

## **6. Quality of Support for Pupils**

- The quality of teaching approaches and interventions for pupils with special educational needs is generally good and some significant improvements have been made recently. A good range of materials and teacher-made resources is used to facilitate learning. The effectiveness of the work in support settings is negatively affected by the lack of whole-school policy. The regular use of diagnostic testing is recommended to ensure that accurate monitoring of pupils' progress takes place
- The quality of outcomes and progression of pupils with special educational needs is fair. The school is reminded that the primary responsibility for pupils with special needs rests with the class teacher. There is a need for greater co-ordination of provision between mainstream classes and the support setting. It is advised that the use of in-class support now be developed.
- The provision of learning support for pupils takes place in a cramped office which also acts as the staff room and principal's office. The school is currently in the process of providing a dedicated support room which will enhance provision.

# **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 of St Patrick's N.S. welcomes the report of the Inspectorate into the running of 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**

- We have taken steps to ensure that the board is now compliant with Department requirements in relation to the keeping of school records.
- A number of school policies are now in place that were not at the time of the inspection.
- We as a board will endeavour to carry out the recommendations of the report in full.