Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Murhur National School
Moyvane, Listowel, Co.Kerry
Uimhir rolla: 13540G

Date of inspection: 13 October 2009
WHOLE-SCHOOL EVALUATION

A whole-school evaluation of Murhur National School was undertaken in October 2009. 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, 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
Murhur National School, a three-teacher, co-educational, Catholic school, is situated approximately nine kilometres north of Listowel. The building was constructed in 1975 as a five classroom school. A part-time secretary and cleaner, whose endeavours contribute significantly to the overall functioning of the school, are employed. An examination of roll books indicates that attendance levels are very good.

The following table provides an overview of the enrolment and staffing in the school at the time of the evaluation:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pupils enrolled in the school</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainstream classes in the school</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers on the school staff</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainstream class teachers</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers working in support roles</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special needs assistants</td>
<td>1.5</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT

1.1 Characteristic spirit, mission or vision
The school strives to provide adequate facilities and a relevant curriculum to cater for the full and harmonious development of each child. An inclusive ethos, which is promoted and implemented in all areas of school life, was evident during the evaluation.

1.2 Board of management
The board of management is properly constituted and usually meets once a term, but more frequently when need arises. Individual board members have availed of training and some have been assigned particular responsibilities. It is advised that additional duties be allocated to board members in order to assist in the effective operation of the school. Minutes of meetings are recorded carefully and indicate that a variety of topics are discussed including maintenance issues, extra-curricular activities and various policies. Some management issues are being progressed appropriately. On reviewing minutes of board meetings, it is apparent that decisions are postponed on some matters at particular meetings. However discussion on these matters are not recorded in minutes of subsequent meeting. It is recommended that all issues be drawn to a satisfactory conclusion within an appropriate timeframe. Finances are prudently managed and are
certified annually. It is recommended that the board establish an annual budget for the provision of resources in line with the school’s priorities.

1.3 In-school management
The in-school management team consists of the principal and deputy principal. The principal has class teaching and administrative responsibilities. She carries out administrative duties in a competent manner that facilitates the smooth running of the school. Roll books, registers and all school records are carefully maintained. The principal’s commitment to the development of the school plan is acknowledged, however, it is recommended that a more strategic and focussed approach to the implementation of the school plan be adopted. The principal’s curriculum leadership role is particularly important in that regard. The creation of a happy learning environment in the school is achieved through the cultivation of good rapport among the staff. The duties of the deputy principal are clearly defined and are carried out with dedication and commitment. Her duties encompass a judicious mix of administrative, curricular and pastoral roles. Regular staff meetings are convened and minutes are maintained carefully.

1.4 Management of relationships and communication with the school community
The parents’ association is affiliated to the National Parents’ Council Primary. The school endeavours to promote good communication and to build trust between parents and teachers. Parents stated that school staff are available at all times to discuss their children’s progress and respond caringly to any concerns raised. Satisfaction with the education provision and standard of achievement of pupils was expressed.

1.5 Management of pupils
Relationships between school staff and pupils are very positive and it was noted that interactions between them show high levels of mutual respect and appreciation. Pupils are very well behaved and display pride and interest in their work, co-operate willingly and engage enthusiastically in class activities. A code of behaviour has been formulated and is being implemented consistently.

2. QUALITY OF SCHOOL PLANNING

2.1 Whole-school and classroom planning
A whole-school plan has been devised consisting of both curricular and organisational policies. It was evident from a review of the plan that organisational policies were drafted recently and with little input from the various partners. A significant number of policies are incomplete. Curricular plans are generic and have not been reviewed in many years. It is recommended that a strategic and focused approach be devised to revise the school plan as a review of policies would inform classroom planning and greatly enhance teaching and learning throughout the school. It is also advised that the board of management takes a central role in the review process. Parents have not been involved in the drafting of school policies. It is therefore recommended that parents be more actively involved in the formulation of plans in line with the school’s mission statement, ethos statement and policy on parental involvement. All plans and policies should be ratified by the board, signed, dated and review dates noted.

In general the quality of classroom planning is of an appropriate standard and all teachers provide both long-term and short-term plans. Short-term planning is appropriately objective-based and this good practice is acknowledged. It is recommended, however, that long-term planning makes provision for assessment, differentiation, methodologies and resources. An agreed short-term
planning template is in use throughout the school which is also used consistently to record monthly progress.

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 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, a copy of the procedures has been provided to all staff (including all new staff). However all board members and all staff are not fully familiar with the procedures to be followed. It is strongly advised that all board members and all staff familiarise themselves with the procedures. 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 English

The provision for English in this school is of a high standard. Commendable attention is given to the development of pupils’ receptive and expressive language skills. Discrete provision for oral language, the judicious use of talk and discussion and a variety of questioning styles are features of observed good practice. Pupils in all classes recite a broad range of rhymes and poetry with enthusiasm.

The approach taken to reading throughout the school is progressive. Learning outcomes at whole-school level are reflective of an appropriate emphasis placed on phonics in the junior class. A solid foundation is being established in reading through the effective use of big books, teacher-made resources and illustrative material. The implementation of collaborative reading activities in the junior classes is benefiting pupils’ confidence and competence in literacy. Reading skills are systematically developed in the senior classes where reading for different purposes is steadily developed. This good practice should be extended to all classrooms. The use of a graded reading programme in a number of classes supports progress in the development of pupils’ competence in reading. Comprehension skills are appropriately advanced through the use of a blend of higher and lower order questions, the use of prediction and cloze procedure exercises.

Writing skills are suitably developed in most classes and pupils are encouraged to write in a variety of genres and for different purposes and audiences. It is recommended that this good practice be extended to all classes. Written work is presented to a very high standard, reflective of systematic monitoring by teachers.

3.2 Mathematics

The quality of teaching in Mathematics is very good. Lessons are presented creatively and in a structured manner. Pupils engage enthusiastically in mathematic exercises which are generally differentiated to accommodate varying levels of ability. Structured learning activities successfully encourage collaborative learning within class groupings, facilitate maximum participation and support consolidation of previously taught concepts across strands. A creditable emphasis is placed throughout the school on mental calculations. Most pupils are competent in use of number and display a good understanding of concepts across the curriculum. Considerable emphasis is placed on commercially produced textbooks. Concrete materials are used in most classes and
provide valuable support in the acquisition of new mathematical concepts and skills. This good practice should be extended to all classes. Calculators are utilised purposefully and pupils’ work is monitored effectively by teachers.

3.3 History
Whole-class teaching predominates in the teaching of History and, for the most part, the content of the programme is determined by the textbook in use. Some good class discussion was observed. Teacher planning and aspects of the classroom and school environment indicate that some very good use is being made of artefacts and the interview approach. Commendable focus is placed on the development of the skill of working as a historian. This good practice is acknowledged. The structure and pace of lessons are good and pupils’ contributions are welcomed. Timelines are evident in almost all classrooms and most pupils display an ability to recall historical facts and empathise with victims of prejudice and persecution.

In the infant and junior classes pupils explore continuity and change in their own lives, in their homes and immediate environment. Story is used very effectively to introduce pupils to the lives of a range of people from the past. Pupils in the middle and senior classes display an appropriate understanding of a variety of national and international events of historical significance. Senior classes engage enthusiastically in discussion and display a good understanding of historical concepts. Effective group learning activities and project work focus on the development of specific historical investigation skills in some classes. Further development of the project approach to include specific targets and roles for individuals while engaged in group work is recommended. The integration of Information Communication Technology (ICT) would also serve to further enhance this process. A history museum and exhibition of old photographs has been creatively established in the school. These resources are effectively used to develop pupils’ understanding of life in the past.

3.4 Assessment
A wide range of assessment instruments is used appropriately in the school. The school makes effective use of both screening and diagnostic tests that include MIST, Burt Reading Test and Schonnel Reading Test. The school also uses standardised tests including the Micra-T reading attainment test and the Sigma-T mathematics test. Regular use is made of observation notes and teacher-designed tasks and checklists. Test results are recorded and stored centrally in the school.

However, an analysis of assessment data merits further attention. It is recommended that assessment results be analysed and used to inform future teaching and support for learning.

4. Quality of Support for Pupils

4.1 Pupils with special educational needs
Three experienced and skilled teachers are involved in additional provision for pupils with special educational needs. These teachers, who are based in other schools, attend the school at various times during the week for a total of 37 hours. It is recommended that the board of management give consideration to the rationalisation of this service within the school to ensure a more integrated approach.

The quality of provision for pupils with special educational needs is very good. Supplementary support is provided primarily in literacy. Support is provided mainly on a withdrawal basis, either individually or in small groups. It is advised that consideration be given to developing in-class
support structures. A positive feature of support is early intervention in literacy which is provided for first class four times weekly by the infant teacher. However, consideration should be given to assigning this responsibility to the support team. The learning-support settings are equipped with appropriate resources to effectively scaffold individualised, purposeful teaching strategies. Praise and positive reinforcement are used constructively to motivate pupils to successfully complete tasks and achieve learning goals. Pupils engage enthusiastically in prepared activities. The rapport established between the learning support/resource teachers and pupils is praiseworthy. The support teachers work effectively in collaboration with mainstream class teachers and external professionals in compiling and reviewing comprehensive individual education plans (IEPs). Parents meet regularly with the special education teachers to discuss pupils’ IEPs. Some parents are issued with copies of the IEP to facilitate home support in the achievement of learning targets. It is recommended that all parents of pupils receiving support be provided with a copy of their child’s IEP. The special education team liaises regularly with and receives support from external agencies in assessing individual learning needs and addressing them in an appropriate manner.

The school’s special needs assistants (SNAs) ably assist teachers in facilitating pupils’ access to the curriculum in the mainstream setting.

4.2 Other supports for pupils: disadvantaged, minority and other groups
Dedicated provision for pupils from disadvantaged, minority or other groups was not required in the school at the time of the evaluation.

5. CONCLUSION

The school has strengths in the following areas:

- The staff is dedicated and hard-working.
- The school building and grounds are maintained to a high standard.
- The pupils are friendly and courteous.
- The standard of teaching is high throughout the school.

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

- It is recommended that the board of management takes a more active role in policy formulation and ensures that all education partners are included in the process.
- It is recommended that a strategic and focussed approach to reviewing and implementing the school plan be developed.
- A greater variety of methodologies should be employed in the teaching of History throughout the school.
- It is recommended that consideration be given to the rationalisation of the special education provision to ensure a more integrated approach within the school.
- It is strongly advised that all board members and all staff familiarise themselves with the school’s child protection procedures.

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

Since completion of Inspection Activity a permanent Resource/Learning Support teacher based in Murhur N.S. has been appointed.