An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

St. Columba’s NS
Tullow, County Carlow
Uimhir rolla: 13607M

Date of inspection: 08 February 2010
WHOLE-SCHOOL EVALUATION

A whole-school evaluation of St. Columba’s NS was undertaken in February 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 Irish, English, Mathematics and Music. The board of management was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the report; a response was not received from the board.

INTRODUCTION – SCHOOL CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

St. Columba’s NS is a co-educational school catering for pupils from infants to sixth class in Tullow, Co. Carlow. The following table provides an overview of the enrolment and staffing in the school at the time of the evaluation:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pupils enrolled in the school</td>
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<tr>
<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 is under the patronage of the Church of Ireland Bishop of the United Dioceses of Cashel and Ossory. Attendance records are very good and enrolment trends are increasing. The school, through adherence to its vision statement, strives to enable each child to develop as a social being by living and co-operating with others so that they will contribute to the good of society. Pupils’ spiritual, moral, religious, intellectual, and academic development is nurtured and protected. The school’s aim to adopt a positive, co-operative working relationship between staff, pupils, parents and the wider community is verified in its commitment to this vision.

1.2 Board of management

The board of management is constituted properly. Meetings are held at least four times per year and more often if necessary. Detailed minutes of these meetings are maintained. Accounts are audited annually in accordance with Section 18(1) of the Education Act 1998. Department of Education and Skills regulations relating to class size, the retention of pupils, the integrity of the school day and the length of the school year are observed. The board complies with legislative requirements in relation to policy formulation and ensures all policies are signed, dated and ratified. A comprehensive three-year action plan outlines the board’s adherence to policy review and implementation on a cyclical basis.

Board members are highly committed to the effective management of the school and they carry out their assigned duties very capably. They have availed of training opportunities organised by
the patron body. The new extension to the school building is a justifiable source of pride to all board members.

1.3 In-school management

The principal enjoys the respect and support of the board of management, staff members and the parents. He is diligent in his administrative duties, ensuring the accurate and consistent maintenance of all official records. He has created a caring, inclusive environment for all members of the school community and he fosters close links with other schools in the locality. The in-school management team of principal, deputy principal and special duties post holder carry out their designated duties in a professional and collaborative manner. The main needs of the school are discussed and prioritised during regular in-school management meetings. It is recommended that the in-school team identifies and prioritises curriculum development and implementation at a whole-school level.

1.4 Management of resources

Teaching staff, who are deployed in line with the Department of Education and Skills guidelines, undertake their assigned roles professionally. Two special-needs assistants work consistently under the direction of the class teachers. The part-time secretary and part-time caretaker are reported to carry out their duties competently and are greatly valued by staff and board of management. There is a variety of resources available to support teaching and learning, including a well-appointed computer room and well-stocked class libraries. It is necessary to ensure that these resources are maintained carefully and are used optimally in all classrooms. The school is involved in the Green School initiative and is presently applying for its fourth green flag.

1.5 Management of relationships and communication with the school community

Parents’ representatives on the board of management report that they are happy with the work of the school. They are notified formally of their child’s progress through annual parent-teacher meetings and reports. Parents are welcomed into the school and may meet the teaching staff by appointment. They have access to all school policies and are asked for feedback on a number of legislative policies of particular relevance to them. Consideration should be given to extending parental involvement in the school-planning process. While parents consistently support the school through many fundraising and extra-curricular activities, the board of management is now reflecting on how best to facilitate and support the establishment of a parents’ association in the school.

1.6 Management of pupils

The respectful attitude manifested in all interactions among the school community is evidence of the school’s adherence to its comprehensive mission statement. Pupils are pleasant and mannerly in all instances. They are enthusiastic learners. They are supportive of each other’s achievements and are proud of their school. Teachers recognise and praise pupils’ efforts constantly.
2. QUALITY OF SCHOOL PLANNING

2.1 Whole-school and classroom planning

The quality of whole-school planning is good. Organisational plans fulfil legislative requirements and readily support the day-to-day running of the school. Curriculum plans are developed by the teaching staff and are mindful of the requirements of the Primary School Curriculum (1999). Whole-school plans for Irish, English, Mathematics and Music are detailed and specific. These plans provide teachers with a pertinent resource to support their individual classroom planning. A review of the whole-school planning process is recommended so that the divergence between the school plan and individual teacher planning can be addressed in all instances. This will facilitate a more consistent approach to teaching and learning throughout the school.

Satisfactory special education policies are in place. These include learning-support and resource policies and English as an Additional Language policy. A review of the school’s enrolment policy is recommended to highlight its commitment to the enrolment of pupils with special educational needs, as required in Section 21(2) of the Education Act 1998.

The quality of classroom planning varies. At its best, detailed long-term and short-term plans as well as concise monthly progress records are maintained and work is suitably differentiated for the multi-class setting. The extension of this good practice to all classes is recommended to ensure appropriate planning and preparation in all instances. Differentiation for pupils with special educational needs must also be addressed in all class settings. Specific emphasis should be placed on learning objectives and teaching methodologies with less emphasis on textbooks when organising classroom plans. Consideration should be given to using common planning and monthly progress report templates to support this process.

2.2 Child protection policy and procedures

Confirmation was provided that, in compliance with 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 English

The quality of learning and teaching in English is good. The print environment is carefully selected in most classes to consolidate learning. Libraries are well stocked and include a wide variety of reading materials incorporating fiction and non-fiction books. Due attention is paid to the development of pupils’ oral language skills, and pupils speak with confidence in all classes. Pupils’ skills and abilities in functional writing are addressed competently at all levels. Very good work is undertaken in the development of pupils’ creative writing abilities in some classes. In these classes, pupils display a clear understanding of the writing process and their work in a variety of genres is carefully displayed. The extension of this good practice to all classrooms is
advised. There is a high standard in relation to the teaching of English reading in all classes. Emergent readers benefit from well-selected large-format books. Lessons in phonological awareness enhance their ability to read for meaning. Higher-order reading skills are suitably developed in the middle and senior classes. This process ensures pupils’ are able to read at a progressively challenging level. To further extend the good work in English, it is recommended that differentiated approaches be used in some classes to support more able pupils reach their full potential during English reading lessons. Story, poetry and rhyme are used consistently in all classes to extend pupils’ ability in English.

3.2 Gaeilge

Tá caighdeán an teagaisc agus na foghlama sa Ghaeilge go measartha. Cruthaitear timpeallacht shaibhí phriointa i roint Ranganna. Ó am go chéile, sonraitear an iomarca béime ar úsáid an Bhéarla le linn na gceachtanna. I roint Ranganna, baintear úsáid as grúpobair go rialta chun an fhoghlaim a dhaingniú. I ranganna eile, forbraitear scileanna labhartha na ndaltaí trí rangtheagasc agus trí gníomhainchtaí faoi threoír an oide. Sna ranganna seo, cé go freagraíonn na daltaí ceisteanna saoite gur muineach, ní tugtar ach roint bhheag désiréanna díobh a chúntas labhartha a fhorleathnú. Ba chóir go bhfuil an chomhún cruthú ar iomhánta eile, meitheoirí i ngach rang a scileanna teanga a leathnú. Ar an iomlán, éirithear caighdeán nó sóisialta i ndátaí sa litéoireacht agus forbraitear scileanna na ndaltaí de réir mar gheall ar an oide. I roint ranganna, baintear úsáid as filíocht agus aonrant chun an fhoghlaim a dhaingniú. Moltar cur chuige níos struchtúrtha a chur i bhfeidhm mar dhaingniú i ndaltaí sa litéoireacht, agus forbraitear scileanna teanga a thabhairt do na daltaí, gheall ar an iomlán. Forbraitear teagasc agus fhoghlaim i ndaltaí sa litéoireacht agus forbraitear scileanna sa litéoireacht. Bhunaítear an scríbhneoireacht, ar an iomlán, ar na leabhair shaothair, níor tháinig aon mhíchriú ar dhaltaí sa litéoireacht, agus forbraitear scileanna sa litéoireacht. Bhunaítear an scríbhneoireacht, ar an iomlán, ar na leabhair shaothair, níor tháinig aon mhíchriú ar dhaltaí sa litéoireacht, agus forbraitear scileanna sa litéoireacht. Bhunaítear an scríbhneoireacht, ar an iomlán, ar na leabhair shaothair, níor tháinig aon mhíchriú ar dhaltaí sa litéoireacht, agus forbraitear scileanna sa litéoireacht. Bhunaítear an scríbhneoireacht, ar an iomlán, ar na leabhair shaothair, níor tháinig aon mhíchriú ar dhaltaí sa litéoireacht, agus forbraitear scileanna sa litéoireacht. Bhunaítear an scríbhneoireacht, ar an iomlán, ar na leabhair shaothair, níor tháinig aon mhíchriú ar dhaltaí sa litéoireacht, agus forbraitear scileanna sa litéoireacht.

Irish

The quality of learning and teaching in Irish is fair. A print-rich environment has been established in some classes. There are instances of an over-reliance on English phrases during Irish lessons. In some classes, group work is used consistently to consolidate learning. In many instances pupils’ communication skills are developed through whole-class, teacher-directed activities. Pupils in those classes answer specific questions with competence but are afforded little opportunity to extend their capacity to communicate in the language. It is recommended that occasions be provided to extend pupils’ language skills at each class level. In general, reading standards in Irish are satisfactory, with pupils growing in competence as they progress through the school. Poetry and rhyme are used in some classes to consolidate learning. Using a structured approach to poetry and rhyme in all class settings is advised. Written work is primarily based on the selected workbook. Attention should now be given to the organisation of functional and creative writing opportunities particularly for pupils in the senior classes. It is recommended that a review of whole-school provision for Irish takes place to ensure a consistent, cohesive approach throughout the school that is in line with curriculum guidelines.

3.3 Mathematics

There is satisfactory teaching and learning in Mathematics. Pupils’ mathematical language is suitably developed at all class levels. Resources are plentiful and are used consistently to reinforce particular concepts. Group and paired work are used constructively in many instances to consolidate learning. This good practice should extend to all classes and differentiated approaches should be used consistently to meet the needs of pupils with special educational needs. The
development of a mathematics-rich environment, as evident in some classrooms, is advised for all classrooms. There is an over-emphasis on the selected class workbooks in deciding lesson content in some classes. It is recommended that a specific focus be placed on curriculum guidelines when determining lesson content at all class levels. Pupils respond well to questioning and clearly enjoy lessons in Mathematics. They display a satisfactory standard in relation to mental mathematics and are confident and eager to solve mathematical problems.

3.4 Music

The teaching of Music is satisfactory. There is a designated music area in some classrooms. Pupils sing a range of songs sweetly. They are afforded opportunities to listen to a variety of music and are enabled to explore the structure of compositions in simple form. Percussion work is facilitated through body percussion and the use of a wide variety of commercial instruments. Pupils play the recorder in the senior classes competently. In general, lessons are based on the music workbook in use with an over-emphasis on the performing strand in some classes. It is recommended that the school reviews its approach to teaching and learning in Music with a view to ensuring that all pupils receive a broad and balanced music education that reflects all strands of the curriculum.

3.5 Assessment

Levels of attainment in English and Mathematics are assessed annually by means of standardised tests. The Middle Infant Screening Test (MIST) is used to identify infant pupils with learning difficulties. Modes of informal assessment include weekly spelling and table tests and teacher observation. Written work is carefully monitored in most classrooms. The results of these assessment modes inform future planning in some instances. It is recommended that the strategies outlined in the school’s comprehensive assessment policy be implemented so that regular assessment across the curriculum is undertaken in a consistent manner. It is also recommended that teachers analyse assessment outcomes to inform future planning and practice at each class level.

4. Quality of Support for Pupils

4.1 Pupils with special educational needs

Pupils are selected for supplementary teaching in line with Department of Education and Skills guidelines. The participation of their parents in the selection process and, where appropriate, in the managed withdrawal of pupils from learning support is promoted and encouraged. While much of the supplementary teaching takes place on a withdrawal basis, either individually or in small groups, in-class support is also facilitated. It is necessary to ensure that in-class support is organised in a way that meets the needs of those pupils specifically identified for supplementary teaching. There is evidence of very good practice in some special education settings. Where this good practice takes place, detailed individual education plans (IEPs) are devised for each pupil, learning targets are clear and are based on the pupils’ strengths and priority needs. Pupil-attendance records are maintained, and commendable teaching and learning approaches are employed. It is advised that formal time be identified for special education teachers and class teachers to meet and discuss pupils’ progress. Consideration could usefully be given to devising an agreed approach to the development of IEPs, to weekly planning and to maintaining progress records during these meetings.
4.2 Other supports for pupils: disadvantaged, minority and other groups

The school’s commitment to the purposeful and effective integration of all pupils is evident in the manner in which the small number of pupils with English as an additional language are thoughtfully assimilated into all aspects of school life. Focussed interventions in the area of language support are provided for these international pupils.

5. CONCLUSION

The school has strengths in the following areas:

- The board of management is actively involved in the running of the school and is diligent in the execution of its duties.
- The principal and staff work collaboratively and consistently to ensure a caring, inclusive, holistic environment for all pupils.
- The English curriculum is taught effectively in all classes.
- There is an ethos of mutual respect throughout the school.
- Pupils are well-mannered, conscientious and enthusiastic learners.
- Parents are supportive of the work of the school.

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

- A review of the whole-school planning process is recommended to ensure appropriate planning and preparation in all classes, including differentiation for pupils with special educational needs.
- The in-school team should identify and prioritise curriculum development and implementation at a whole-school level.
- It is recommended that provision for Irish, Mathematics and Music be reviewed to ensure a consistent, cohesive approach and adherence to curriculum guidelines for the provision of a broad and balanced curriculum throughout the school.
- Assessment across the curriculum should be undertaken consistently and teachers should analyse assessment outcomes to inform their future planning and practice at each class level.
- A general review of teaching methodologies is recommended to ensure that practice consistently reflects the principles of the *Primary School Curriculum (1999)* so that active learning opportunities are provided for all pupils in all classes.

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.

*Published December 2010*