WHOLE-SCHOOL EVALUATION

A whole-school evaluation of Killurney 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 English, Irish, Mathematics and Music. The board of management was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the evaluation, and the response of the board will be found in the appendix to this report.

INTRODUCTION – SCHOOL CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

Killurney NS is situated in a picturesque rural environment in the parish of Kilsheelan in South Tipperary. Pupil enrolment has grown considerably in the past two years from thirty pupils in September 2007 to a current enrolment of forty pupils. The school, consisting of two classrooms, was built in 1966 to replace the original school, built in 1889. The school presents most attractively with gardens and grounds maintained to a very high standard. The school’s environs have been developed over time as a resource to enhance pupils’ learning.

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pupils enrolled in the school</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainstream classes in the school</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers on the school staff</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainstream class teachers</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers working in support roles</td>
<td>1 part-time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special needs assistants</td>
<td>1 part-time</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT

1.1 Characteristic spirit, mission or vision

As outlined in the admissions policy, the school aims to promote the full and harmonious growth of all pupils. It adopts a holistic approach to pupil’s development, focusing on many areas of their education including cognitive, intellectual, physical, cultural and moral development. This small school promotes the motto “Small School-Big Agenda.” The local community is actively supportive of the broad educational experiences afforded to the pupils in Killurney NS.

1.2 Board of management

The school is managed by a committed and enthusiastic board of management. The board is constituted correctly and meets at least once a term and more frequently if the need arises. Detailed minutes of board meetings are recorded and regular financial statements are furnished by the treasurer. Parents are issued with a financial report at the beginning of each school year. In order to ensure the ongoing efficiency of financial management it is advised that school accounts be certified annually. Members of the board have been allocated various tasks. They show commitment to their roles and carry out their duties very capably. The board is well informed
about all school issues and is actively involved in the management of the school through its decisions on appointments, policy development, acquisition of resources and support of continuing professional development for staff. The chairperson maintains close communication with the principal and staff through his regular visits to the school. The board has close links with the parents’ association and with the general parent body. It welcomes the contribution of parents and those of the wider community. The board ensures that maintenance of the school is carried out as the need arises. The health and safety of pupils and staff is prioritised. The building and school grounds are in very good order. However, there is a need to improve the accommodation as the existing school building no longer provides adequate room for its growing population. All available space is productively used and the storage of resources is managed as efficiently as space permits. Accommodation arrangements for the provision of learning support are not satisfactory as pupils are currently taught in a section of the corridor. This corridor has been further modified to provide limited office space. There is no staffroom nor facility for convening meetings in the school. It is recommended that the board now address the overall school accommodation in order to significantly improve facilities.

1.3 In-school management

The in-school management team consists of the principal and the special-duties teacher. The principal is highly commended for her commitment to curriculum leadership and to the management of the school. Due to her endeavours, the school is characterised by a constructive learning atmosphere, in which each pupil’s individual talents are recognised and developed through a wide range of learning methodologies. The school, through her approach, is characterised by open communication with the wider school community. She is assisted in her role by the special-duties teacher who has been appointed since the start of this school year. Her assigned duties are clearly defined and encompass a judicious mix of administrative, pastoral and curricular leadership roles. In-school communication is well managed. Staff meetings are convened frequently. The outcomes of these meetings are transferred into specific tasks for implementation within defined timeframes.

1.4 Management of relationships and communication with the school community

There is very good communication between parents and teachers. Home-school links are promoted through the active involvement of parents and the wider community in the life of the school. Individual parents contribute to the teaching of dance and gymnastics and the school benefits from active family support for events such as Maidin Caife, Seachtain na Gaeilge, science open day, music recitals, art exhibitions and grandparents’ day. All parents are encouraged to become involved in the life of the school, as was evidenced in the junior-classroom where parents support the pupils’ work in Mathematics and English. Parent-teacher meetings are held annually. In advance of this meeting, parents of junior infant pupils are issued with a comprehensive information document on the junior infants’ curriculum. This document recommends specific home-support strategies to complement classroom activities. Parents of older pupils are issued, in advance of the parent-teacher meeting with a detailed report on their child’s progress. The report-card template is unique to the school and details pupil’s academic achievement, engagement and application. This practice is most commendable, as it facilitates meaningful and informed discussion between parents and teachers. The principal prepares a detailed statement on school activities for parents on an annual basis. This comprehensive report describes the key achievements in the previous school year, outlines plans for projects and programmes to be undertaken in the current school year, gives an account of the work of the board of management and notifies changes to the teaching staff, when relevant.
The parents’ association is long established and is affiliated to the National Parents’ Council (NPC) since 1996. The principal maintains regular contact with the representatives of the association and channels of communication operate in a most effective manner. The inspector met with representatives of the parents’ association as part of the whole-school evaluation process. The officers commented on the welcome and encouragement afforded to parents by staff. They detailed the active involvement of parents in curriculum support within the school. They reported that parents are very pleased with the overall education provision offered to the pupils and commented most favourably on the manner in which the school nurtures and develops each child’s talents. Parents see the school as the focal point in the community, wherein it is held in very high esteem.

1.5 Management of pupils

The school’s participation in a variety of Department of Education and Skills programmes and in local initiatives contributes greatly to enabling pupils reach their full potential in a caring and inclusive environment. The national programmes undertaken span the breadth of the curriculum and include the Green Schools initiative, the Cross Border Orchestra of Ireland and the Discover Science Awards. Local projects wherein pupils experience considerable success include environmental art competitions, Tidy Schools’ competitions and events organised by the County Museum. Pupils’ energy and enthusiasm is directed towards these projects. Pupils’ behaviour is very good. They demonstrate genuine care and respect for one another and display an informed appreciation of their school environment. Pupils’ attendance level is consistently high.

2. Quality of School Planning

2.1 Whole-school and classroom planning

A comprehensive school plan, addressing curriculum and organisational areas, has been devised by the staff. The plans formulated clearly reflect the school context, ethos and aims. Staff have embraced the developmental nature of whole-school planning. Planning diaries and review questionnaires are used in a most appropriate manner to ensure that planning documentation is both useful and meaningful. Draft documents and revised plans are presented to the board for consideration and, ultimately, for ratification. Curricular plans outline the activities which the pupils will experience in each subject area over the course of a school year. The result is a clear guide for the reader regarding the entire learning experience the pupils will have during their time in Killurney NS.

The teachers plan to a high standard. They prepare comprehensive long-term and short-term schemes which are linked to the agreed school plan. Objectives selected are specific and achievable. Opportunities for integration and differentiation are identified and the link to classroom practice is clear. Detailed monthly progress records are consistently maintained.

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 Language

**Gaeilge**

Tá caighdeán na múinteoireachta agus na foghlama sa Ghaeilge go maith. Déantar iarracht chreidiúnaí an Ghaeilge labhartha a chur chun cinn sa scoil trí úsáid na teanga i ngnaithchúrsaí an lae. Úsáidtear raon áirithe straitéisí teagaisc agus modhanna éifeachtacha ar a n-áirítear comhrá beirte, cluichí teanga, úsáid plútipéad agus drámaíochta chun rannpháirtíocht na ndaltaí a chothú, go háirithe sna bunranganna. Eagraítear gníomhaochtaí go rialta chun scileanna éisteachta agus labhartha a chur chun cinn. Bíonn an mhaidín chaifé a cuirtear ar siul go blianta in rith shéimeacht na Gaeilge an-údáideal chun an teanga a cheiliúradh. I gcloiteáin, muinteoirí stóir foclóra ò bhéal atá in oiriúint do chumas agus d’aois na ndaltaí. Ní go tráthraíta a thugtar faoi a scileanna cumarsáide a thhorbaíte, áfach. Moltar go háirithe, an tábhacht a tháinig leis an gceacht comhrá sna hard ranganna a roinnt ina thrí thöimhse faoi mar atá leagtha amach i gcáipéisí pleanála na scóil.

Bíonn rainn, dánta agus amhráin Ghaeilge á n-aithri s go hanamúil ag na daltaí sna bunranganna. Bíonn an mhaidín chaifé a cuirtear ar siul go bliantúil i rith shéimeacht na Gaeilge an-údáideal chun an teanga a cheiliúradh. Eagraítear cleachtáidh foirmiúla léiththeoireachta agus réamhscrébhneoireachta a thhorbaíte go háirithe. Moltar cleachtáidh foirmiúla léiththeoireachta go rialta sna bunranganna agus na hardranganna. Bunaítear na cleachtáidh seo ar tháirgeas leiththeoireachta agus réamhscrébhneoireachta a thhorbaíte a chur i mbrónadh. D'fhéadfadh an tábhacht a bhaint as an gceacht comhrá i n-oiriúint níos mó d’aois agus do chumas na ndaltaí chun réimse níos leithne fós léiththeoireachta a chur ar fáil do thoir. Saothraithe an scríbhneoireacht fheidhmiúil go forthúil tríd an scoil.

**Irish**

The quality of teaching and learning in Irish is good. A creditable effort is made to promote spoken Irish through its regular and frequent use throughout the school day. A range of strategies such as paired activity, word games, puppetry, and Drama are adopted to develop the participation of pupils in the learning process especially in the junior classes. Activities are organised frequently to develop their skills in listening and speaking. The Maidin Chaifé in the annual Seachtain na Gaeilge is very useful in providing opportunities for a shared celebration of the language. In general, vocabulary appropriate to ability levels in each class is taught orally. It is apparent however, that pupils’ communicative competence is not always extended in a consistent manner. In particular it is advised that extra attention be given to the three phases of the language lesson in the senior room, as outlined in school planning documentation.

Poetry, verse and song are recited with fervour in the junior class. In order to further develop richness of language for pupils in the senior room, the memorisation of poetry and revision of poems previously taught are advised. A print-rich environment is discernible throughout the school, a practice that serves as an effective basis for the development of pre-reading and pre-writing skills. Formal reading lessons are organised in the middle and senior classes. This
activity is based on coverage of textbooks. Although some pupils read with appropriate fluency, it is recommended that focus be directed to correct pronunciation and that language sounds be taught more formally during lessons. It is recommended that increased emphasis be placed upon reading material which is more appropriate to both age and ability levels of pupils and to the provision of a greater range of reading material for them. Functional writing tasks are fruitfully developed in each class.

**English**

The teaching of English is carried out in an efficient manner. Most pupils attain high standards. The development of oral language is appropriately prioritised. Pupils can speak about themselves and about a variety of other topics, at an age-appropriate level. Work done on the recitation and exploration of poetry is particularly impressive in the junior class. Here, the poetry tree suspended from the ceiling serves not only as a prompt for frequent engagement with poetry but also as a record of the repertoire of poems learned. There is a print-rich environment in both mainstream classrooms. Appropriate emphasis is placed on the development of phonological awareness in the junior classes. The importance placed on developing reading skills and on cultivating a love of reading contributes significantly to the very high standard of reading achieved by most pupils.

Drama is used effectively and frequently to complement the writing tasks. Pupil’s skills in writing in a variety of genres, encompassing different styles, purposes and audiences is carefully nurtured through a structured programme in the senior classroom. Free writing is actively promoted and anthologies of pupils’ work are valued and displayed. Innovative approaches are used to foster the impulse to write. These include the provision of digital cameras to junior pupils to capture images at home, as a stimulus for writing. The quality of handwriting and standard of presentation is very high in junior classes. It is recommended that this high standard of presentation be continually promoted as pupils move through the school.

**3.2 Mathematics**

Effective delivery of the Mathematics programme is supported by purposeful planning and by the availability of an abundant supply of visual and concrete resources. The whole-school plan for Mathematics was reviewed in 2007 in order to facilitate comprehensive implementation of the curriculum. Very specific guidance is provided on the use differentiated approaches to teach pupils with special educational needs. These methodologies include peer assistance, specific guidance on instructions for some pupils and extension activities to challenge more able pupils. Resources available from agencies such as the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) have been suitably employed to influence rationale and methodologies in Mathematics. Early mathematical skills, such as matching, comparing, classifying, ordering and sequencing are firmly established in junior infant classes. Pupils’ immediate context and real life experiences are used to gradually introduce activities such as counting, analysis of number, recognition and exploration of shapes and measures, and understanding of time and money.

Discussion and activity-based learning are central elements of all lessons. Hands-on discovery learning, through good and creative use of concrete materials, enables pupils to develop basic computation skills, at an appropriate pace. The environment is appropriately utilised to consolidate learning in Mathematics with trails used frequently to connect learning in a meaningful manner to the pupils’ own environment. In the senior room pupils are provided with opportunities to engage in well-structured oral work and problem-solving activities. Pupils participate enthusiastically and a review of work previously completed confirms appropriate achievement levels across the mathematics programme. Pupils are keen to demonstrate their mastery of concepts in measurement, in decimal number and in shape and space. Effective use is
made of differentiated approaches in response to pupils’ differing ability levels and learning needs. The extension of the mathematics environment to include a specific area for mathematics, further visual aids to prompt memory of number facts and the display of pupils’ work in the senior room is recommended.

3.3 Music

The quality of teaching and learning in Music is very good. An exceptionally broad and balanced music programme is in place and lessons are creatively linked and integrated with other curricular areas, specifically Drama. Pupils in the junior room enjoy frequent engagement in this form of arts education. A variety of appropriate resources is used in an effective manner to support the teaching and learning in music, including percussion instruments, textbooks, compact discs and audio-visual equipment. The pupils in both classes display a keen interest in music and there is evidence of high levels of achievement across the strands. Pupils are exposed to music of different styles, periods and cultures, and their understanding of musical elements is developed through the implementation of a range of interrelated activities.

The school has been recently involved with The Cross-Border Orchestra initiative and senior pupils participated in The National Children’s Choir and in Scór na bPáistí. Pupils who play instrumental music are encouraged to perform for their peers. Pupils from second class to sixth class benefit from tuition in violin or viola while all pupils are taught the tin whistle. Pupils respond to music in a variety of ways, including through dance during classes taught by a parent. High quality displays in music and dance feature consistently in the school calendar. The lessons observed in Music were characterised by: skilled teaching; reinforcement of the musical elements taught; and the obvious thorough enjoyment of content by the pupils. Senior pupils were afforded opportunities to use percussion instruments to compose a musical interpretation of the sounds of the mountain while junior pupils derived great pleasure from performance of a rap.

3.4 Assessment

Assessment practices within the school emphasise the importance of assessment for learning. Teacher observation, teacher-devised tests, checklists and the regular monitoring of pupils’ written work are some of the assessment modes used to track pupil attainment. These are complemented by the judicious use of formal tests and the Micra-T and Sigma-T standardised tests. Results are recorded and analysed to provide clear information on both the attainment of individual pupils and the overall attainment at whole-school level. Summative assessments records are also maintained and careful consideration is given to monitoring and recording pupils’ progress across the curriculum. Many aspects of the pupils’ learning are assessed including the cognitive, the creative and the social dimensions. Screening and diagnostic assessments are employed at the earliest opportunity in order to identify the learning needs and strengths of individual pupils and to identify those who may benefit from additional support. Information is shared consistently with parents.

4. QUALITY OF SUPPORT FOR PUPILS

4.1 Pupils with special educational needs

The school benefits from a part-time learning-support/resource teacher for eight hours per week, three hours of which are allocated to pupils in receipt of resource teaching. Seven pupils from senior infants to fifth class receive supplementary support. The part-time learning-support teacher
left the school immediately prior to the evaluation to take up employment in another school. During the evaluation, support teaching was provided by a substitute teacher.

A deep sense of care and sensitivity underpins the approach to teaching pupils with special educational needs. Pupils’ specific needs are supported in a variety of teaching settings including individual, pair and small group settings. Support is provided both on a withdrawal basis and through in-class support facilitated through team teaching. These settings are used effectively to pursue specific goals for these pupils. Planning is appropriate, learning targets are outlined and a suitable range of resources is made available to support this work. Through supplementary intervention pupils are enabled to become more independent as learners, to become aware of their own strengths and to evaluate their own progress. Withdrawn support is currently provided on a section of the corridor due to restrictions on space. This arrangement is unsatisfactory as the learning environment is neither stimulating nor comfortable for pupils and their teacher. It is recommended that the school continue to emphasise in-class support for pupils with special educational needs.

4.2 Other supports for pupils: disadvantaged, minority and other groups

A caring, welcoming and homely atmosphere is created in this school. All pupils are treated equally and the school has an inclusive enrolment policy. The school is committed to ensuring that all pupils participate fully in the life of the school.

5. CONCLUSION

The school has strengths in the following areas:

- The board of management is most supportive of the work of the school and encourages staff to engage in continuous professional development activities.
- The school building and grounds are maintained to a very good standard.
- The principal capably and effectively combines her management and pedagogical roles. Her work is characterised by dedication and professionalism.
- Significant work has been undertaken in the development of very useful whole-school policy documents.
- The core principles of the curriculum are fully embedded in the school and a broad and balanced curriculum is implemented throughout.
- There is very active involvement of parents and of the wider community in the life of the school. The close collaboration of all school partners contributes significantly to a familial, caring and well-ordered educational environment for all pupils.
- The laudable emphasis placed on the use of the local environment as an effective stimulus for pupils’ learning.
- The pupils are well-behaved and confident learners who have benefited from a range of experiences whereby their individual talents have been nurtured, recognised and celebrated.

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

- The board of management should address the school building and accommodation issue as a matter of urgency.
The communicative approach to teaching Irish should be further emphasised in order to extend pupils’ competence in speaking Irish.

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
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

1. We are in the process of building a Resource Room for use with Learning Support pupils. The building plans will incorporate reorganisation of existing space within the school building to accommodate growing pupil enrolment.

2. Graded Irish Reading Scheme now in place.