An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Primrose Hill National School
Celbridge, Co. Kildare
Uimhir rolla:13819E

Date of inspection: 9 February 2010
WHOLE-SCHOOL EVALUATION
A whole-school evaluation of Primrose Hill 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 Drama. The board of management of the school was given an opportunity to comment on the findings and recommendations of the report; the board chose to accept the report without response.

INTRODUCTION – SCHOOL CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND
Primrose Hill NS is situated in the town of Celbridge in county Kildare. The current two-storey building was extended and refurbished in 1999. The classrooms are bright, clean and spacious and the accommodation is comfortable and in good repair. The grounds to the front and side are landscaped and well kept and there is a large playground to the rear. The board of management, teachers, pupils and caretaker are commended for their efforts in maintaining the school to its present high standards.

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>124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainstream classes in the school</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers on the school staff</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainstream class teachers</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers working in support roles</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special needs assistants</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT

1.1 Characteristic spirit, mission or vision
The school is a co-educational, Church of Ireland school under the patronage of the Archbishop of Dublin and Glendalough. It welcomes pupils of all faiths and none and all pupils are equally valued and respected and experience a sense of caring and belonging. The school aims to provide a quality education which will enable all pupils to achieve their fullest potential.

1.2 Board of management
The board of management is properly constituted and meets monthly. Minutes of meetings are maintained. Roles and responsibilities are clearly defined and board members undertake these responsibilities carefully and conscientiously. Members of the board have attended training on a variety of issues.

Available finances are used effectively in order to meet the needs of the school. Accounts are audited annually and the treasurer presents a financial report at each board meeting. Decision-making procedures are transparent and are always made in the best interests of the school. During the recent inclement weather there was considerable damage to the interior of the school. The rapid response of the board to the destruction is indicative of its efficiency and effectiveness.

The school is well-equipped with a wide range of resources to support learning and teaching. The current priorities of the board include the provision of appropriate accommodation for the
principal and secretary and the on-going concerns about road safety outside the school in the mornings and afternoons.

The board is actively involved in the whole-school planning process. School policies required by legislation have been formulated, approved and ratified as have a range of organisational and curricular policies. The section of the school’s enrolment policy on the enrolment of pupils with special educational needs requires review to ensure compliance with recent equality legislation.

1.3 In-school management
The in-school management team consists of the principal, deputy principal and one special duties post holder. The principal was appointed in September 2009 following a period during which the school had no formal management structures. She is participating in the Misneach programme which is offered by Leadership Development for Schools to support newly-appointed principals. She is hard-working and is undertaking her new role with commendable enthusiasm and dedication. Administrative and organisational tasks are completed with care. The lack of an office makes it difficult for the principal to take administrative days at the moment. The principal is supported admirably by the newly-appointed deputy principal, the board, the school staff, and parents and by a professional and efficient school secretary. A spirit of collaboration and cooperation characterises the relationship that exists between all members of staff and a broad range of issues relating to the school is discussed on a daily basis. In addition, formal staff meetings are convened once a term. Once established, the principal has the potential to play an instrumental role in the future development of the school as instructional leader, supported by the in-school management team and the teaching staff. This will ensure that the school’s curriculum plans are developed and mediated for the school context and impact positively on individual teacher planning and pupil attainment. It is recommended that duties attaching to the in-school management team’s posts be subject to regular review in the context of Circular 07/03 of the Department of Education and Science as the needs of the school evolve.

1.4 Management of relationships and communication with the school community
Effective structures are in place to promote positive relationships between all partners in the school community. Parents are actively involved in the parents’ association and they play a positive role in supporting the work of the school. They participate fully in school events, meetings and extra-curricular activities. They meet every six weeks and have formal structures in place for communicating with the board of management, with teachers and with the general parent body. They play a vital role in fundraising, allowing for the provision of additional resources, including interactive whiteboards, and extra-curricular activities in the school.

This parental input and contribution is greatly appreciated by the board of management and the school staff. In the past, parents have been consulted on the development of the healthy eating policy. As the school plan is revised and developed, further consideration should be given to involving them more in school policy formulation. The newly-created school website and the informative school newsletters keep parents well informed regarding school activities. Formal parent-teacher meetings are held annually. At other times, parents are encouraged to meet teachers by appointment if required and regular opportunities arise for informal communication. At the end of each school year, a written report is issued to parents summarising pupils’ progress and attainment.

1.5 Management of pupils
The standards of pupil behaviour and discipline are high. Pupils work conscientiously and co-operatively with staff and with one another and are very well behaved, polite and courteous. They are valued members of the school community and are treated with equality, fairness and respect.
They participate actively in the Green Schools committee and help in maintaining the school garden. The quality of pastoral care in the school is very good. The whole school staff has a good working relationship with pupils and is sensitive to all aspects of their physical, social and emotional needs.

2. **Quality of School Planning**

2.1 **Whole-school and classroom planning**

The quality of whole-school organisational and administrative planning is good. The school has created a wide range of good-quality plans. These plans are commendably specific and concise in terms of providing guidance and insights into the operation and organisation of the school.

Curricular plans have been devised for all aspects of the curriculum. However, it is recommended that the curricular plans be reviewed as a matter of priority and that each plan should address the delineation of content for the multi-class situation and the particular context of the school in addition to examining specific methodologies, approaches to assessment, differentiation, curriculum leadership and strategies for integration and linkage. All school plans and policies should contain a date of review and ratification. The development of a school action plan should serve as a useful tool in guiding and directing the review and development of curricular plans and policies. It is further recommended that a policy on teaching English as an additional language be developed in conjunction with a policy on interculturalism.

The quality of classroom planning is good. All teachers provide detailed long and short-term plans. These plans reflect the strand and strand units of the *Primary School Curriculum* (1999). Some very good examples of short-term planning, which provide clear directions through the use of specific objectives and the identification of learning experiences, were observed. The development of the school’s own template, based on the structure of strand, strand unit and curriculum objective would facilitate consistency in quality and practice throughout the school regarding short-term and long-term planning, and this possibility was discussed with the teachers. Copies of individual education plans are available, where appropriate.

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 and school staff and that management has ensured that all staff are familiar with the procedures to be followed. Confirmation was not provided that child protection procedures have been brought to the attention of parents nor that a copy of the procedures has been provided to all staff (including all new staff). The board is advised to record the names of the designated liaison person (DLP) and a deputy DLP in line with the requirements of the guidelines and to ensure that procedures are brought to the attention of all parents and staff.
3. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

3.1 Language

**Gaeilge**

Tugann na hoidí faoi mhúineadh na Gaeilge go fonnmh, diograiseach agus gabhann taitneamh agus briomhaireacht bhreá i gcoitinne leis na modhanna múinte. De réir fianaise le linn na cigireachta tá tuiscint bhreá ag an gcuid is mó de na daltaí ar an Gaeilge labhartha. D’fhreagair siad le muinín agus cumas le linn ceistithe. Léirigh siad dearcadh dearfach i leith na teanga. Úsáideann na hoidí an Ghaeilge go neamhfhoirmiúil go tráthrialta i rith an lae. Roghnaíonn agus úsáideann siad acmhainn mhaithe go rialta le linn na gceachtanna mar thacaíocht chun foclóir nua a mhíniú do dhaltaí agus chun a gcuid fgohlama a thacú. Tá sár-obair déanta ag na hard-ranganna ar logainmneacha na háite agus tá an taighde seo co mhtháite leis an Stair agus an Tíreolas.

Déantar cúram den scríbhneoireacht Ghaeilge. Tá dul chun cinn súntasach á dhéanamh i dtaca le féin-iarracht na ndaltaí ina gcuid scríbhneoireacht agus oilithe iad chun abairtí, altanna agus aistí a scríobh. Cláráltaear an obair go néata sna cóiplea bhair.

Déantar freastal sásúil ar fhorbairt tuisceana agus ar leathnú foclóra le linn na ngníomhaíochta léitheoireachta. Léann formhór na ndaltaí sna meán-ranganna agus sna hard-ranganna le cruinneas agus déantar plé oiriúnach ar ábhar na gceachtanna.

Cuirtear rainn, amhráin agus filíocht oiriúnach i láthair na ndaltaí go tarraingteach, bríomhair. Tá rainn agus véarsaí oiriúnach i léiriú a iarrthóireacht agus aithrisíonn siad go fonnmhar.

**Irish**

*The teachers approach the teaching of Irish eagerly and fervently and their teaching methods are enjoyable and lively. From evidence gathered during the inspection it is apparent that the majority of pupils have a good understanding of Irish. They answered questions confidently and ably. They displayed positive attitudes towards the language. The teachers use informal Irish regularly throughout the day. They choose and regularly use good resources during lessons to support the explanation of new vocabulary to pupils and to support their learning. The senior classes have done excellent work on the place names of the area and this study is integrated with History and Geography.*

*Care is taken with Irish writing. Clear progress is evident in the pupils’ efforts at writing and they are taught to write sentences, paragraphs and essays. The work is presented neatly in the copies.*

*Satisfactory provision is made for the development of understanding and for the extension of vocabulary during reading activities. The majority of pupils in the middle and senior classes read accurately and there is suitable discussion on the content of the lessons.*

*Verses, songs and poems are presented to the pupils in an attractive and lively way. They know poems and verses by heart and they recite them enthusiastically.*

**English**

*The quality of teaching and learning in English is very good. Print-rich environments have been created through the display of charts, illustrative materials and samples of pupils’ work. At infant level good work is underway in expanding pupils’ oral language abilities, through the*
implementation of a broad and balanced curriculum. This includes the purposeful development of phonological awareness which forms the basis for the cultivation of emergent reading and writing skills. The vast majority of pupils across the school are developing competence and confidence in oral expression. They show a good ability to listen carefully to each other and to their teachers, and they can consider and talk about differing views and opinions. The teachers use mature language and, by careful use of probing questions, constantly challenge pupils to develop their answers and express themselves more clearly. A positive interest in poetry is fostered and appropriate focus is placed on the development of the pupils’ responses. In the middle and senior classes pupils’ response to a very broad repertoire of poetry is impressive, demonstrating deep understanding and maturity of thinking. In all classes pupils recite poetry with enthusiasm.

All classrooms have well-stocked libraries. Teachers promote a reading culture in their classes by allowing pupils to choose books of interest to them while encouraging them to experience a variety of reading genres. In the middle and senior classes, pupils engage with a selection of novels. Good discussion surrounding the use of these novels is evident. Pupils in all classes can read accurately, fluently and with a good understanding of the text. Attainment in standardised reading tests indicates progress commensurate with pupils’ age and ability. As it is not envisaged in the English curriculum that pupils in junior infants would engage with a structured reading scheme the school’s current practice should be reviewed.

Pre-writing skills and letter formation are taught well in the junior classes. Pupils engage in a variety of writing activities. Opportunities are provided in the middle and senior classes to write in a range of genres and written work is regularly monitored and displayed in the classroom. The standard of penmanship and the presentation of written work throughout the school are of a high quality.

In order to build on the good practice in English it is recommended that the reviewed school plan should include a list of suitable poetry for each class level, a systematic and progressive programme of phonological awareness, decisions on novel choice for middle and senior classes, the agreed approaches to teaching spelling and guidance on process writing.

3.2 Mathematics
Teaching and learning in Mathematics is of a high standard with some very effective practice observed during the evaluation. The teachers provide purposeful mathematical activities which are well supported with a wide variety of resources and there is a progressive development of all the curriculum strands. Good use is made of a range of collaborative tasks which pupils complete in pairs or small groups. Practical mathematical activities, which are purposeful and are closely linked to the immediate environment, provide opportunities for pupils to apply and extend their learning in new contexts and are highly commended. Hands-on experience with concrete materials ensures a high level of interest and participation. Appropriate attention is focused on the teaching of mathematical language. Problem-solving and estimation strategies are taught effectively and pupils are encouraged to analyse problems carefully and to extract relevant information. Written work in mathematics is presented in a logical, sequential style and copies are regularly monitored.

3.3 Drama
The quality of Drama lessons observed was very good. Drama sessions enable the pupils to engage in a range of activities which help further their understanding of human feelings, ideas and experiences. Pupils are enabled to develop critical social skills and are encouraged to cooperate and communicate with openness and confidence. Lessons are carefully and purposefully prepared to encourage spontaneity, imagination and creativity. Stories and poems
are used as effective stimuli and pupils engage in role-play, improvisation, still images, hot-seating, mime and thought-tracking with enthusiasm. The school is particularly commended for the use of drama in the senior classes to foster an interest in local history and to increase awareness of the rich historical past of Celbridge.

3.4 Assessment
Pupils’ progress is assessed regularly using a variety of approaches. Regular monitoring of written work, the administration of teacher-designed tasks and tests and checklists from commercial schemes, and the maintenance of observation records, portfolios of work and reading logs are among the assessment techniques used in this school. Standardised tests are administered in literacy and numeracy while screening tests are used to identify pupils with particular learning needs at an early age. In addition, a range of diagnostic tests is administered to identify pupils’ specific learning needs. Considerable work has been done in collating standardised test results and staff might now consider further analysis of these results and tracking the progress of individual pupils.

4. QUALITY OF SUPPORT FOR PUPILS

4.1 Pupils with special educational needs
There is good quality provision for pupils with special educational needs. The special needs team comprises a full-time learning-support teacher and a resource-teacher based in this school and shared with Scoil Mhuire, Staplestown. Support teachers’ planning is comprehensive and detailed. The needs of individual pupils, as stated in relevant documentation, inform the development and effective implementation of individual education plans. The support specified in these programmes is delivered effectively. All support is currently organised on a withdrawal basis. Collaborative planning between the special needs team and mainstream teachers ensures that differentiated programmes of work can be planned and executed for pupils in mainstream classes. The staged approach is implemented effectively within the school and a short written plan is prepared for pupils at stage one of the additional learning support continuum. Two special needs assistants support the inclusion of pupils with special educational needs in mainstream classrooms.

Good quality teaching and learning was observed. Stimulating and well-resourced environments have been created to facilitate and consolidate learning. A range of teacher-designed and commercially-produced materials is available and is used effectively. Lessons are well-structured and teachers adopt a variety of active learning approaches and methodologies to maximise pupil learning. In order to develop the special needs provision further it is recommended that a review of the learning-support policy be undertaken which will include a renewed look at roles and responsibilities within the area as well as the introduction of in-class support where appropriate.

4.2 Other supports for pupils: disadvantaged, minority and other groups
The school has access to the services of a part-time language support teacher to meet the needs of a small number of pupils for whom English is an additional language. Effective planning and assessment records are maintained and materials from the Integrate Ireland Language and Training (IILT) and the Up and Away programme are used to guide practice. Support is provided on a withdrawal basis and the teacher employs a range of active methodologies to develop pupils’ competence and confidence in English. The teaching observed was delivered in a supportive environment and made use of appropriate learning resources. The acquisition of some multilingual reading materials would further contribute to the language-support programme.
5. CONCLUSION

The school has strengths in the following areas:

- The school is managed by a well-informed, supportive and pro-active board of management.
- The school is bright, clean, well maintained and well resourced with a wide range of educational equipment and materials which are used very effectively to support teaching and learning.
- The pupils present as respectful and friendly and display confidence in their interactions with peers and teachers. They are well motivated, have positive attitudes to learning and are able to work independently with the minimum of supervision.
- A high level of co-operation among staff members contributes significantly to the creation of a caring, positive and welcoming school atmosphere.
- The overall quality of teaching and learning in all four curricular areas observed is very good. The teachers adopt an energetic and enthusiastic approach and make use of a wide variety of teaching methodologies to engage the pupils.
- Praiseworthy efforts are made to premise lessons upon active learning through games and manipulation of materials and through effective use of the environment.

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

- The board should review the enrolment policy of the school to satisfy itself that it complies with recent legislation.
- A school action plan should be developed which will serve as a useful tool in guiding and directing the necessary review and development of curricular plans and policies.
- Policies on the teaching of English as an additional language and on interculturalism should be developed.

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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