An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

SN Na Naomh Uile
Cloigean, Co.na Gaillimhe
Uimhir rolla:13821O

Date of inspection: 25 February 2010
WHOLE-SCHOOL EVALUATION

A whole-school evaluation of SN Na Naomh Uile 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 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

This school is situated on a small picturesque site overlooking Cleggan Harbour some thirteen kilometres north-west of Clifden. There are six teachers providing professional services in this school. Two of them are classroom teachers, another three of the team provide support services in learning support and resource teaching. There is also a recently appointed part-time rural co-ordinator under the DEIS scheme for home-school liaison and developing second-chance education opportunities. The school also benefits from a part-time caretaker and secretary and they both make a valuable contribution to the running and upkeep of the premises. The first school recorded in this area was in 1854 under the management of Rev. William Flannelly. It was relocated to the present site in 1861. The original school structure is still part of the current school building which was extensively refurbished, extended and renamed Scoil Náisiúnta na Naomh Uile in 2005.

The current school structure consists of two large classrooms, an administrative suite, a well-resourced information and communication centre upstairs in the newly built extension, ancillary accommodation with cooking facilities which doubles as a library and resource room for the additional support services currently available in the school. The school structure is now in excellent condition. It is bright and colourful, decorated with pictures of past pupils and parents as well as local historical photographs and examples of pupils’ projects and educational materials. It provides a warm and comfortable place of learning for the thirty-two pupils currently enrolled in the school. The school site although restricted, is attractively decorated with a memorial garden dedicated to a past principal, lined play areas to the front and rear of the building, an activities centre and a small playing pitch for field sports to the rear of the school.

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>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainstream classes in the school</td>
<td>8</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>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special needs assistants</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT

1.1 Characteristic spirit, mission or vision
The mission statement for the school underlines the primacy of providing an education for each child using a holistic approach to learning. The programme endeavours to promote the pupils’ physical, intellectual, aesthetic, moral, spiritual, social, emotional and cultural well being. The school is a denominational school under the patronage of the Catholic Archbishop of Tuam. It endeavours in its mission statement to promote the spiritual development of the child in the Catholic faith by providing a religious education as an integral part of its curriculum. The school motto is to show love, to show respect, to care for the pupils, parents and staff and to trust in God and in others in the school community. To foster this mission statement, the school encourages inclusivity and equality in the school curriculum and in extra-curricular activities. The mission statement seeks to place children’s needs as the foundation for planning and learning in the school, and commits the school to providing resources and accessing strategies for additionally required services. The school acknowledges individual differences in the implementation of the school programme.

1.2 Board of management
The board of management is duly constituted according to article 14 of the Education Act, 1998 and the Rules and Procedures of Boards of Management. Board members express their commitment and dedication to the pupils in their diligence in performing their designated roles. The renovation of the school building has been a priority over recent years and all that remains of that project at the moment is connecting the school to the village sewage system once it becomes available. Relevant correspondence, policies and agenda are prepared and distributed in advance of each meeting, records of decisions taken are maintained and financial accounts are certified at the end of the school year. The school plan is arranged in three parts: general details about the school and organisational policies; curriculum plans; and a development section. The plan includes a health and safety statement, a code of behaviour and policies on anti-bullying, special education, child protection, school ethos, relationship and sexuality education, equality of opportunity, school safety statement, as well as a wide range of curriculum plans. The school plan needs revising and updating to include a plan on implementing a differentiated curriculum, a plan on the development and use of the information and communication technology (ICT) resources recently added to the school, a plan on the up-skilling of both board and school personnel members and a pupil assessment and analysis plan in preparation for the next round of the numeracy and literacy development plan envisaged under the DEIS initiative. Further issues also require attention such as prioritising an investment plan in ICT, mathematics and science equipment and library books, particularly books in Irish.

It is recommended that the process of review be inclusive of parents and that an agreed framework be identified to ensure that parents can access all of the school plans on an ongoing basis. Use of a school website and the local newsletter should be considered in this process. It was confirmed that the chairperson of the board meets with the principal on a regular basis. Regular reports from the principal and from the treasurer are presented at board meetings. An annual report on school progress is orally submitted to the board of management and is recorded in the proceedings.

1.3 In-school management
The principal is a hard-working committed leader who promotes open communication and strong community and in-school links with all the partners. She has a clear vision for the school and is currently focussing on preparing a publication for the celebration of a century and a half service by the school to this community. She is highly regarded and supported by her colleagues and
board of management and displays consideration and professionalism in the running of the school. There is a strong sense of collegiality among the staff members. All of the team display enthusiasm and openness to meeting the diverse needs of the pupils. The duties attached to the posts of responsibility are of an organisational and pastoral nature and need to be reviewed to manage the current pedagogical and curricular change. It is recommended that the review of the specific duties post reflect the context of pedagogy, curriculum innovation and implementation of the school plan to develop standards in literacy and numeracy as outlined in the first three years of the DEIS plan. Formal staff meetings are held once a term and members are encouraged to contribute to the agenda. A new template is currently being developed to record decisions and definite implementation strategies are generally agreed. It is recommended that the current three year development strategy under the DEIS scheme be guided by this structure and that it be inclusive of all staff members.

1.4 Management of relationships and communication with the school community
At the pre-evaluation meetings both the representatives of the parents association and the board of management members confirmed that they were very satisfied with the way in which the school was operating. They indicated that the school had an open-door policy for parents and they were involved constructively in the education of their children. The parents’ association is affiliated to the National Parents’ Council and supports school activities primarily through fundraising for curricular resources and funding extra-curricular activities. It is noticeable that all the partners work pro-actively together in this school and priority is placed on the development of pupils’ experiences and education opportunities. This role could now be extended to include the development of parenting skills in the school community, participating and contributing to the DEIS initiative in the school and becoming active contributors to pupils’ education.

1.5 Management of pupils
There is a specific reference in the school’s mission statement to developing a welcoming atmosphere to all the partners and visitors who engage with the school. It emphasises the important role that the school staff have in ensuring courtesy, respect and politeness are extended to the whole school community. This approach is exemplified in relationships with all the partners and most particularly with the pupils. A mutually respectful and co-operative relationship is evident: a range of opportunities and resources is available for pupils to ensure that the work programme is interesting and challenging. A broad and balanced programme of work is presented to ensure that the pupils develop at a level commensurate with their abilities and interests and that they are well prepared for the next level of education. Pupils are divided into two classrooms with the senior classes being the responsibility of the principal teacher and the junior classes under the care of the other mainstream class teacher. There is a high level of attendance by the pupils and a broad range of extra-curricular activities is available. Participation in local competitions and in other events such as team games, field sports, dancing, baking, drama, swimming, concerts and school tours, is practised. Further use could be made of ICT in the school to enable more communication between the pupils and other similar schools nationally and internationally.

2. Quality of School Planning

2.1 Whole-school and classroom planning
The quality of whole-school planning is good with considerable emphasis placed on conforming to the principles of the revised Primary School Curriculum and using the curricular framework and terminology outlined to guide both process and content. Further emphasis should now be placed on its implementation strategies, particularly in light of the current three-year programme under DEIS to increase attainment levels in literacy and numeracy. It was agreed during this
school evaluation that aspects of the school plan would be revised and amended and that parents would be included in this process. It was also agreed that individual education plans would be submitted to parents and that case conferences would be inclusive of all the parties, including the pupils, when appropriate.

The quality of classroom planning is good. It reflects the overall pedagogic principles incorporated into the curricular policies and a continuous review and assessment procedure is implemented, particularly for pupils attending the support services. This process should now be extended to ensure that the needs of more able pupils are also reflected in the delivery of the curriculum programme. Suitable human and educational resources are frequently used in classroom practice. Use is made of a variety of approaches including whole-class teaching, group work and individual learning programmes. The classrooms are attractive and stimulating, reflecting current work themes and illustrative materials.

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, 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

Sroichoann na daltaí caighdeán réasúnta i labhairt agus i bhfoghlaim na Gaeilge sa scoil seo. Baintear úsáid as an nGaeilge mar sprioctheanga agus mar theanga teagaisc sna bunranganna agus úsáidtear í chun cumarsáide a chleachtadh i measc na bpáirtíthe ar uairibh. Cuirtear béim ar theagasc na Gaeilge sna hardranganna mar úirlis fhoghlama agus déantar saibhríth agus forleithniú ar chumas na ndaltaí dá réir. Is fiú áfach breis béim a chur ar chleachtaithe úsáide teanga agus ar dhramaíocht agus ócáidí súgraithe agus idirbheartacha a fhí isteach i ngnás feidhmiú na scoile. B’fhiú freisin úsáid a bhaint as Séidean Sí agus as raon téacsleabhar chun scileanna léitheoireachta a chothú agus moltar béim a chur ar thairtí leabharlainne scoile chun léitheoireacht thaithí a chothú. Moltar infheistíocht shuntasach a dhéanamh go háirithe sa chnuasach de leabhair Ghaeilge atá intí foir láthair. Faigheann na daltaí cleachtaithe rialta i scribhneoireacht na Gaeilge agus déantar monatóireacht leanúnach orthu. Is fiú na cineálacha cleachtaithe sa scribhneoireacht a leathnú agus breis bhéime a chur ar nheicnicí agus phlean comhaontaithe peannaireachta don dá theanga.

Irish

Pupils achieve a fair standard in speaking and learning Irish in this school. Irish is used as a target language as well as an instructional language in the junior section and it is occasionally used as a communicative language amongst the parties. Emphasis is placed on the teaching of Irish as a learning vehicle in the senior classes and a definite programme of language enrichment and extension is practised accordingly. It would be worthwhile to extend the use of Irish through drama and play occasions as well as in engaging in functional interactive activities during school
time. The Séideán Si school programme as well as a range of textbooks could be used to develop literacy skills and it is recommended that emphasis be placed on experiencing the school library to augment parallel reading opportunities. Significant investment in library books is recommended, particularly in the collection of Irish books currently in stock. Pupils regularly practise writing in Irish and their pieces are continuously monitored. It would be worthwhile to extend the writing genres being practised and to implement an agreed school plan on penmanship and on the mechanics of writing in both languages.

**English**

The key principles of the English curriculum are presented in a structured sequential basis in the school plan and it identifies the curricular framework and methodologies to be used as well as listing various resources that are available. A new three-year plan to develop reading standards as part of the DEIS programme is being developed in order to continue the improvements in reading standards recorded over the last three years. A structured English programme is taught in the school and emphasis is placed on developing oral-language skills, phonological awareness, structured reading and writing. Drama, circle time and discussion are used to develop the communicative approach and an excellent anthology of story, poetry and rhyme is presented in the junior section. Continuous use of library books is a central feature of classroom practice and personal reading through a ‘drop everything and read’ approach is practised. It is recommended that a whole-school approach to developing writing skills be implemented and that further use is made of the ICT resources in the school to practise different writing genres and to broaden the readership base. The community newsletter could provide a useful platform for the pupils to practise writing on school and other events for a local readership.

**3.2 Mathematics**

The teaching of Mathematics has been clearly influenced by the approach recommended in the curriculum: a specific programme has been outlined in the school plan and textbooks are used as a guide for exercises on problem solving. The use of work stations and concrete materials in the junior section to develop an understanding of the basic concepts is commendable. Mental work is regularly practised as part of the programme and attention is given on an ongoing basis to the terminology of Mathematics. Group work supporting the range of abilities of pupils in the various classes is organised effectively and pupil activities are guided to achieve the teaching and learning objectives. It is recommended that priority be given to implementing the standards-development programme in mathematics under the DEIS programme, in order to continue the increase in standards recorded over the last three years.

**3.3 Drama**

The recently revised school plan in Drama reflects the *Primary School Curriculum*. The school plan signifies the central role ascribed to this aspect of the curriculum as a vehicle for personal development and as a curricular tool to explore themes on a cross-curricular basis. Many opportunities are provided to create improvised responses to fictional scenarios and real-life situations based on local history. ‘The night of the big wind’ was being explored through Drama during this inspection. Pupils present their insights and interpretations enthusiastically. Various resources such as picture sequencing and impromptu contexts are used to elicit responses, exploring emotive and rational consequences to staged stimuli.

**3.4 Assessment**

The teachers use both formal and informal assessment approaches and teachers glean a fair perspective on pupils’ achievement during the year. All teachers are keenly aware of the learning strengths and learning needs of the pupils, particularly in relation to literacy and numeracy. The quality of record keeping is good and guidelines are followed in keeping parents informed of
pupils’ progress. It is recommended that assessment data becomes a separate item on the agenda of staff meetings regularly and that a whole-school response be instituted in mediating differentiated teaching and learning techniques for in-class and support services.

4. QUALITY OF SUPPORT FOR PUPILS

4.1 Pupils with special educational needs
A well-structured policy on special education and learning support is included in the school plan. A part-time learning-support teacher provides five hours supplemental teaching in literacy and numeracy for ten pupils in this school. All of the pupils are above the tenth percentile and the quality of the service is good both in the group work and withdrawal modules. The service is directed to the needs of the pupils and is effective in increasing the pupils standards and interest in school. Two part-time teachers offer resource hours for pupils with low-incidence needs in the school. These pupils benefit greatly from these interventions and are making significant progress in their learning. All the support services should include modules on personal development as a core feature of their interventions.

4.2 Other supports for pupils: disadvantaged, minority and other groups
The DEIS coordinator has been recently appointed and operates on a shared basis with other primary schools in the area. The service provides support of a sensitive and developmental nature to specific pupils and parents in this school. Budgetary arrangements for these activities should be agreed at the beginning of each school year and an annual plan of activities should be presented to the board by the co-ordinator during the first academic term. A balanced programme of second-chance education is also provided in conjunction with other agencies operating in this geographical area. A member of this school community is on the steering committee to reflect local interests.

5. Conclusion
The school has strengths in the following areas:

- The good behaviour and work ethic of the pupils is evident.
- The conscientiousness, support and dedication of the teachers are commendable.
- The effectiveness of the board of management is evident.
- The strong parental and community support for the school is commendable.

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

- It is recommended that the school plan be revised and updated in conjunction with all the partners.
- It is recommended that structured implementation strategies be devised for using the existing level of information and communication technology (ICT) in the school.
- It is recommended that the three year plan for standards improvement in English and Mathematics be prioritised under the DEIS programme.
- It is recommended that the support service programmes be augmented to include modules on personal development.
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.
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 SN na Naomh Uile welcomes the Whole School Evaluation Report. It is pleased with the affirmation it gives to the staff for the teaching and learning in 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.

1. The Plean Scoile will be reviewed on an ongoing basis involving our partners in education.
2. A timetable to improve English & Mathematics under the DEIS programme is in place.
3. The teachers are reviewing the ICT policy to make better use of our current facilities.