

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

St Oliver Plunkett National School
The Quay, Ballina, Co. Mayo
Uimhir rolla : 15257V

Date of inspection: 07 December 2012



AN ROINN | DEPARTMENT OF
OIDEACHAIS | EDUCATION
AGUS SCILEANNA | AND SKILLS

1. Introduction

St Oliver Plunkett National School, situated at the Quay in Ballina, County Mayo has played a central role in serving the local community since its establishment in 1895. The school is coeducational, with ten mainstream class teachers, and caters for pupils from infants to sixth class. The current enrolment figure of 269 pupils reflects growth in recent years. The school is under the patronage of the Catholic Bishop of Killala.

This whole-school evaluation focused on the quality of teaching and learning in Irish, English, Mathematics and Geography. 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.

2. Summary of Findings and Recommendations for Further Development

The following are the **main strengths** of the work of the school:

- The members of the board of management are dedicated and very supportive of all school initiatives.
- The principal demonstrates very effective leadership.
- The staff team displays enthusiasm for and diligence to teaching and to learning in the school.
- Parents, through the parents' association and the wide parent body, demonstrate strong commitment and work in partnership with the school.
- The pupils engage enthusiastically with their work and are very well managed.
- School facilities and resources are excellent.
- The school has a commendable record of involvement and achievement in sport and other extracurricular areas
- The quality of teaching and learning in all subjects evaluated is of a very high standard.

The following **main recommendations** are made:

- Teachers should consider the introduction of station teaching to provide differentiated literacy and numeracy programmes for pupils.

3. Quality of School Management

- The board of management functions very effectively with individual members fulfilling supportive and advisory roles. All are very well informed, share their skills and talents and work seamlessly as a committed team. Specific tasks are delegated, meetings are held regularly and school accounts are audited. The board is very proud of the school and very supportive of the work of the principal and staff. In the past five years many projects

have been undertaken which have enhanced the school and have provided a workplace of the highest calibre.

- The board of management and parents' association consider the contribution, commitment and leadership of the principal to be a significant strength. He creates a positive atmosphere throughout the school and together with the deputy principal and the other members of the in-school management team, skilfully manages in an open, sensitive, human manner. Specific attention is provided for the welfare of individual pupils. All parents consulted agreed in questionnaires that the school is well run. The senior management team is currently restructuring curriculum, administrative and pastoral care leadership roles to ensure equitable and distributed responsibility. Appropriate tasks are allocated to meet agreed priorities and these are enhanced by the voluntary involvement of other teachers in various interest groups as they pilot and evaluate new modes of educational provision.
- Relationships are respectful and affirming. Pupil questionnaire responses indicate that they feel safe and happy in school. High expectations are communicated to pupils and consistent, positive and affirming strategies are employed.
- The school climate is warm and contributes to nurturing and developing a strong sense of self-esteem in the pupils. Their participation in a broad range of co-curricular and extracurricular activities is extensive and they have many opportunities to develop and display their talents. Much of the participation is subsidised by the parents' association. Pupils have achieved consistently at county, regional and national levels in sporting and musical activities. They have received the Discover Primary Science "*Award of Excellence*" every year since 2005. Their application for the fifth Green Flag of the Green Schools programme indicates strong commitment and perseverance.
- The quality and level of interaction with parents is very good and the parent body is very involved in school events, fundraising initiatives and school maintenance. Representatives from the parents' association commended the commitment of school staff and the open, welcoming atmosphere of the school. This long-established association continues a successful tradition of support for the school through policy development and review, junior infant information nights and transition process discussions and a variety of social and support occasions.
- The school's resources are managed very successfully. The extensive site with a new Astro turf pitch and ample play areas includes a school garden and raised beds. The school building and grounds are maintained to a high standard. A very broad range of curricular resources is used effectively in teaching and learning. The pupils' work in various curriculum areas is displayed attractively in classrooms and in corridors.
- The secretary, both special needs assistants and the cleaner contribute significantly to the overall smooth running of the school.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- The quality of the school planning and school self-evaluation process is very commendable and is enhanced through genuine consultation with stakeholders. Responsibilities in this regard are discharged effectively by members of the board of management. A cyclical schedule for the review, amendment and ratification of all policies is implemented. The plans meet the specific needs of the school and are reflected in classroom practice and school procedures.

- All teachers provided very comprehensive planning documentation. The best featured short-term planning included curriculum objectives, specific references to differentiation and to reflective practice. Monthly reports provide evidence of continuity and progression across the curriculum. It is suggested that whole school approaches be refined to include concise short-term planning and an agreed template for progress reporting.
- Confirmation was provided that the board of management has formally adopted the *Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools* without modification and that the school is compliant with the requirements of the *Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools*.

5. Quality of Teaching, Learning and Pupil Achievement

- The overall quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in the school is very good. Competent teaching and classroom management skills were displayed during the evaluation. This was acknowledged by all parents in questionnaires distributed to the parent body who indicated that their children were doing well in the school. All pupils affirmed this in responses to questionnaires. Lessons were well-structured, developed and sequenced and learning activities were appropriately challenging. Very effective examples of well coordinated in-class support teaching were observed. A structured play programme was facilitated most diligently and effectively in infant classes. Formal incorporation of the *Aistear* programme should further support these activities. The greater use of pair and small group work and differentiated approaches would further enhance pupil learning in some classes. It is recommended that station teaching and be introduced to maximise outcomes for individual pupils in the areas of literacy and numeracy.
- Moltar na cleachtais mhaithe a chuirtear i bhfeidhm sa teagaisc, sa foghlaim agus i ghnóthachtáil na ndaltaí sa Ghaeilge. Baintear úsáid as modhanna an-chruthaitheacha chun líofacht teanga a mhealladh ó na daltaí sna bunranganna. Baintear úsáid éifeachtach as cur chuige cumarsáide, rannta agus amhráin i ranganna éagsúla. Tá foclóir leathan ag na daltaí sa mheán agus sna hardranganna agus is féidir leo abairtí a struchtúró go cruinn i suíomhanna áirithe. Chun tógáil ar an obair seo moltar an dea-chleachtais maidir le cur chuige cumarsáide struchtúra, a breathnaíodh, a chur i bhfeidhm ar bhonn uile-scoile. B'fhiú deiseanna ar leith a thabhairt do na daltaí cleachtadh ar réimse sceitsí beaga, rólimirt agus drámaíocht chun scileanna teanga a fhorbairt a thuilleadh. Léann na daltaí go caighdeán sásúil agus tugtar deiseanna dóibh scríobh i réimse seánraí.

The good practices implemented in teaching, learning and pupil achievement in Irish are praiseworthy. Very creative methods are used in the junior classes to develop the pupils' fluency in the language. Very effective use is made of the communicative approach, rhymes and songs in some classes. Pupils have a wide vocabulary and can structure sentences correctly in many class settings. To build on this work it is recommended that the good practice, observed in relation to a structured communicative approach be implemented on a whole-school basis. The pupils should be given further opportunities to practise a broad range of short sketches, role play and drama to further develop language skills. The pupils read to a satisfactory standard and opportunities to write in various genres are provided for them.

- The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in English is very good. Word identification skills and key vocabulary are enhanced through well-developed, incremental, structured, integrated processes. Classroom environments encourage a whole-language approach. Language experience charts, large format books, parallel readers, shared reading, silent reading, stories, poetry, library books and class novels are

used effectively throughout the school. Writing skills are developed systematically from the pre-writing stage to independent activities in a wide variety of genres.

- Very commendable efforts have been made in the overall teaching, learning and pupil achievements in Mathematics. Effective practice was observed in the creation of mathematics-rich environments through class displays, mathematics corners, use of mathematical language and estimation and problem-solving strategies. Appropriate concrete resources are utilised. Pupils demonstrated very good understanding of work completed previously and almost all report that they are doing well at Mathematics.
- Teaching, learning and pupil achievement in Geography are of a very high quality and pupils engage in lessons with enthusiasm and curiosity. There is a commendable focus on skills development and on the local environment while the school grounds facilitate local and natural environmental exploration. Documentary evidence, maps, globes, pictures and photographs all add richness to the programme. Their participation in the Green Schools programme enhances pupils' understanding of environmental awareness and care.
- Very successful assessment practices were evident. All teachers consistently monitor and date their pupils' work and they maintain a range of observational and performance data on each pupil. Learning priorities and actions are identified by the principal and in-school management team. Assessment data are thoroughly analysed to establish improvement targets and to guide implementation strategies. These are implemented systematically and progress is monitored regularly. The results of standardised, screening and diagnostic tests are analysed thoroughly to determine pupils' learning needs. Assessment outcomes directly inform all programme planning and the very good teaching practices in place are shared and used throughout the school.

6. Quality of Support for Pupils

- The school's special education team comprising three full-time learning-support/resource teachers has undergone significant change in the past year. Despite this, the quality of teaching and learning in all support settings is very good. All teachers have established very positive, open relationships with their pupils. Lessons are structured and paced to maximise pupil outcomes and are characterised by active learning with a strong emphasis on language development.
- Individual education plans are prepared for each pupil in receipt of support, in consultation with the pupil and his/her parents. The number of targets selected should be in line with pupils' priority learning needs and should be specific, measurable, attainable, realistic and time-bound. Programmes of work for pupils in receipt of support display continuity and progression. The special education team has identified a number of areas for development including a review of assessments and the provision of in-class support.
- There are very effective channels of communication between class teachers, support teachers and principal regarding the needs of pupils. This ensures the early identification of learning difficulties and an expedient programme of support.

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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 members are extremely pleased that the inspectorate acknowledged and affirmed the dedication and commitment of the staff, the invaluable support of the parents and the Board of Management and the co-operation of the pupils. They welcome the very positive comments on teaching and learning in the school. They wish to acknowledge the professional and courteous manner in which the inspectorate conducted the evaluation.

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

- Station teaching is in place in second class for the teaching of numeracy.
- Teachers are currently attending professional development courses on Team Teaching with a view to implementing this practice in 2013/2014.