Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Castleplunkett NS
Castleplunkett, Castlerea
County Roscommon
Uimhir rolla:15545D

Date of inspection: 11 November 2009
WHOLE-SCHOOL EVALUATION

A whole-school evaluation of Castleplunkett National School was undertaken in October 2009. 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 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

Castleplunkett NS is one of four schools in the parish of Tulsk in county Roscommon. The school enjoys a good reputation in the locality and there is evidence of particularly good work in aspects of Social, Environmental and Scientific Education (SESE). While SESE is beyond the scope of this report, the school’s ongoing work in local studies, designing and making, and environmental awareness and care is to be commended. The school has been awarded a green flag by An Taisce for its successful participation in the Green Schools environmental education programme. The school was judged ‘best new entry’ in Roscommon County Council’s most recent Tidy Schools programme. The school receives a small amount of funding from Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) a programme of the Department of Education and Science aimed at alleviating educational disadvantage.

There were several changes to the teaching staff in the two months prior to this evaluation. One of the former class teachers was reassigned to the post of learning-support teacher, which had become vacant through retirement. A new teacher was then appointed to the vacant mainstream position. Another mainstream class teacher had just returned to work after an absence of several years.

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pupils enrolled in the school</th>
<th>55</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mainstream classes in the school</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers on the school staff</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainstream class teachers</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers working in support roles</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Special needs assistants</td>
<td>1</td>
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</tbody>
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1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT

1.1 Characteristic spirit, mission or vision

This school operates under the patronage of the Catholic Bishop of Elphin and this is reflected in the school’s ethos statement. In its mission statement, the school states a commitment to fostering tolerance and respect for others, including those with different abilities. It also emphasises the promotion of self-esteem and a commitment to high achievement. These principles are evident in the daily life of the school as observed during the evaluation.
1.2 Board of management
The board of management is constituted properly and operates in accordance with the Department’s *Constitution of Boards of Management and Rules of Procedure*. The board meets at least once each term and minutes of meetings held for the past two decades were available for inspection. It is evident that the school’s finances are managed prudently and the accounts are certified annually. The current board and previous boards are to be commended for the way in which the school building and grounds have been developed and maintained. The schoolhouse and recreation area were extended in 1996. The board has made several further improvements to the recreation area in the intervening period, including the erection of a perimeter fence. Much of this work was done with the assistance of funding from the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs through the CLÁR programme.

1.3 In-school management
The current school principal oversees the daily operation of the school in an efficient manner as well as teaching the senior classes. She has a clear personal vision for the school and there is ample evidence of her ability to bring this vision to reality. The principal expresses a commitment to ensuring that pupils, on leaving Castleplunkett NS, will have high standards of literacy and numeracy and a love of learning. She places great value on the school’s relationship with past and present pupils and their parents, and the wider community. The principal has a particular interest in local studies and this is reflected in the school’s participation in a range of related activities. School records are maintained in an exemplary manner.

The principal’s leadership style motivates and enables other staff members to lead the work of the school in particular areas. The deputy principal and special-duties teacher contribute significantly to the work and development of the school. The duties attached to these two posts have been reviewed recently. Each post involves an appropriate balance of curricular, organisational and pastoral duties, in accordance with Department guidelines. The duties are recorded in the form of a written contract. It is recommended that these contracts be signed by the chairperson of the board of management. There is evidence that the staff as a whole is committed to professional development in areas that will be beneficial to the school. The school has engaged with the Department’s support services with a view to improving the quality of school planning and curriculum implementation.

1.4 Management of relationships and communication with the school community
The school makes good use of the local community as a resource for teaching and learning. The locality’s strong musical tradition is reflected in the work that is done by visiting members of the community in the areas of music and dance. Coaches from local GAA and soccer clubs assist with the games strand of the Physical Education (PE) curriculum.

The school’s parents’ association was formed initially in 1998 and has been in existence intermittently since then. The association organises fund-raising activities for the school and this has assisted in recent improvements to the school grounds. Parents also assist with transport for extra-curricular activities. The officers of the association meet regularly and have frequent communication with the school principal. It is recommended that the board of management consult with the parents’ association prior to ratification of new or amended school policies in accordance with Section 21(3) of the Education Act 1998.

The school holds parent-teacher meetings annually. A written report is sent to parents of pupils in some classes. It is recommended that the school issue an annual written report on the educational progress of each pupil in the school and that this include relevant information regarding each
pupil’s performance in standardised attainment tests, in accordance with Department circular 138/2006. It is recommended also that the school develop and implement a policy on the format to be used for these reports. The school is reminded of the report-card templates that are available from the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) at www.ncca.ie. It is recommended that the school prepare a parents’ handbook that would provide parents who are new to the school with information about the school, including key school policies.

1.5 Management of pupils
The school provides an orderly, well-structured learning environment and the management of pupils’ behaviour is generally very good. The school plan includes a code of behaviour and an anti-bullying policy.

2. QUALITY OF SCHOOL PLANNING

2.1 Whole-school and classroom planning
The school planning process involves the principal and other teachers collaborating on the drafting of policies that are subsequently discussed and ratified by the board of management. It is recommended that parents be included in the process in accordance with Section 21(3) of the Education Act 1998. It is recommended that all policies be signed by the chairperson of the board of management as soon as they are ratified by the board.

The school plan is divided into two sections. The first section contains policies on organisational issues, including those that are required by legislation or Department regulations. These policies are generally very practical and specific to the particular needs of this school. It is noted that the school’s opening and closing times and the time at which the school’s responsibility for supervision commences are stated inaccurately in some of the policies. It is recommended that this be corrected in the interests of health and safety. The need to revise the school’s stated policy regarding deferral of enrolment of pupils with special educational needs was discussed at the post-evaluation meeting.

The second section of the school plan contains policies and programmes for teaching and learning. The principal and teachers have done good work on this section of the plan also. Whole-school planning for English, Irish and Mathematics is very specific to the needs of this school and is therefore likely to lead to improved pupil outcomes. The plan for Music is not as well developed and the need for further work was discussed at the post-evaluation meeting.

The quality of classroom planning and record keeping was good overall.

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
Tá dea-chleachtas le sonrú sa scoil i dteagasc na Gaeilge labhartha. Moltar don scoil féachaint chuige go gcúirfeadh an dea-chleachtas seo i bhfeidhm i ngach rang ar mhaithte le leanúnachas agus dul chun cinn i bhfoghlaim na ndaltaí. Cuirtear prionsabal an tumaideachais i bhfeidhm le linn an cheachta Ghaeilge i bhformhór na ranganna. Baineann na múinteoirí feidhm thairbhreach as raon d’acmhainní, lena n-áiritear ábhair léirithe, chun an fhoghlaim a áirítear do na ndaltaí. I gcásanna bhíonn struchtúr agus luas an cheacht Ghaeilge an-mhaith. I gcásanna bhíonn deiseanna ag na ndaltaí chun an spriocfhoilróir a chleachtadh ina mbeirteanna.


Irish
There is evidence of good practice in the school in the teaching of spoken Irish. It is recommended that the school ensure that this good practice is implemented in every class, with a view to ensuring continuity and progression in pupils’ learning. The principle of immersion is put into practice for the duration of the Irish lesson in the majority of classes. The teachers make effective use of a range of resources, including illustrative materials, to make it easier for pupils to learn. In some classes, the structure and pace of the Irish lesson is very good. In some cases pupils were given opportunities to practise the target vocabulary in pairs.

It is evident from questioning pupils that pupils in some classes do not have sufficient experience of speaking Irish as a language of communication. It is recommended that pupils in all classes be immersed in Irish for the duration of the Irish lesson. It is recommended that charts, labels and other illustrative materials be used in all classrooms to make it easier for pupils to learn and speak Irish. It is recommended, in particular, that pupils be given greater support in learning and using verbs, with a view to promoting independent use of the language.

It is evident that the teaching of Irish reading and writing is effective overall.

English
The school plan outlines how the pupils’ oral-language competence will be developed through dedicated oral-language lessons, cross-curricular strategies and as part of activities in literacy. It is evident from classroom observation that there is very good use of cross-curricular strategies to develop the pupils’ vocabulary and fluency. This includes the use of structured play as a vehicle for language development in infant classes, regular opportunities for pupil-pupil interaction in the middle classes and very good language development through poetry and creative writing in the senior classes. It is recommended that there be a focused oral-language lesson each week in every class, in accordance with the Primary School Curriculum and the school plan, and that this be indicated clearly on the class timetables.
The school’s provision for English reading is good overall. A whole-school programme for the development of the pupils’ phonological awareness is set out clearly in the school plan. The teachers use appropriate approaches and resources effectively in the implementation of this programme. The school also does much good work to cultivate an interest in books and reading among the pupils. This includes the provision of accessible, attractive classroom libraries and the completion by pupils of various activities based on books that they have read. The school holds a book fair every two years, with a view to promoting a positive attitude towards books and as a means of increasing the school’s stock of books. It is recommended that the school implement a shared-reading programme.

The performance of pupils in the most recent standardised attainment tests in English reading was discussed at the post-evaluation meeting. It is recommended that the data on pupil performance in these tests be collated and used as a basis for monitoring and improving whole-school achievement in reading.

The overall quality of the school’s provision for English writing is very good. Pupils are provided with opportunities to write in a wide range of forms and genres. Various charts and other displays are used effectively to support pupils in the writing process. Pupils’ writing is displayed and celebrated in all classrooms. There is very good use of fiction and poetry from the class libraries as a model and stimulus for pupils’ creative writing. The quality of the writing produced by pupils in terms of form and content is very good. Teachers are to be commended also for developing a positive attitude towards writing among the pupils. The school participates in various local projects and festivals that bring the pupils into contact with authors and enable them to learn about the writing process. It is recommended that the school’s handwriting policy be implemented more consistently throughout the school.

3.2 Mathematics
The overall quality of teaching and learning in Mathematics is good. There is effective use of practical activities and of suitable equipment in the development of concepts and skills. There is very good differentiation for the different class levels in each classroom. Teachers place an appropriate emphasis on mental arithmetic. Pupils have developed good habits regarding their written work in Mathematics and their copybooks are monitored carefully by the teachers. There is appropriate use of calculators in the senior classes. There is evidence, also, of good attention to mathematical language in most classes. The achievement of pupils in standardised attainment tests in Mathematics compares favourably to national norms.

There is evidence that pupils in some classes would benefit from more regular revision and reinforcement of certain mathematical topics and the related vocabulary. It is recommended that charts and other illustrative materials be used in all classrooms to make it easier for pupils to remember and apply mathematical concepts, language and procedures.

3.3 Music
There is evidence of good practice in certain strands of the Music curriculum in some classes. Overall, however, of the four subjects evaluated, this is the one in which there is most room for improvement. The breadth of the music programme, the quality of singing, the pupils’ understanding in the area of musical literacy and the pupils’ experience of listening and responding to music all vary considerably from one classroom to another. It is recommended that there be a review of school planning and practice in Music, with a view to ensuring breadth, balance, continuity and progression in the school’s provision for this subject. It is recommended that all pupils be taught how to play a melodic instrument.
3.4 Assessment
Teacher-designed tests are used regularly in most curricular areas. Each teacher keeps a detailed monthly account of work completed. These are generally clear and detailed and provide a useful assessment tool for individual teachers and the school. There is particularly good support and monitoring of pupils’ written work and pupils have developed very good habits in this area. Standardised attainment tests are administered annually in Mathematics and English reading. A range of further diagnostic tests is administered to pupils in receipt of supplementary teaching.

It is recommended that pupil achievement in standardised attainment tests be recorded and communicated to parents in accordance with Department circular 138/2006. It is recommended also that the school examine the data on whole-school achievement in English reading over a number of years with a view to evaluating overall school achievement in this area and making improvements as necessary.

4. QUALITY OF SUPPORT FOR PUPILS

4.1 Pupils with special educational needs
Mainstream class teachers differentiate programme and lesson content effectively for the class groups within each classroom. There is also a good effort made to include pupils with special educational needs in class activities. There is scope, however, for more effective planning and adaptation of content, resources and activities for some of these pupils in their mainstream classes.

This is the base school for a learning-support teacher who also serves other schools in the locality. A resource teacher who is based in a nearby school works in this school for seven hours each week. Each of these teachers provides supplementary teaching to pupils with identified learning needs. There is commendable variety in the programme of support provided. Supplementary teaching is sometimes provided in the mainstream class setting, with the support teacher working one-to-one with the target pupil or with a group that includes the target pupil. The quality of teaching in both in-class and withdrawal settings is very good. Both teachers provide welcoming, stimulating learning environments in the learning-support and resource rooms. The teaching observed was purposeful and well-prepared. There was very good use of appropriate resources. Each teacher also shows a good ability to manage and motivate pupils.

It is recommended that the scope of individual learning programmes for pupils in receipt of resource teaching be broadened in some cases so that they address the areas of need identified in the assessments conducted by relevant education and health professionals. The structure of short-term plans and progress records would also need to be modified accordingly.

4.2 Other supports for pupils: disadvantaged, minority and other groups
At present there is no pupil in the school who is identified as a member of any minority group. The funding that the school receives from DEIS is used to subsidise participation of pupils in various co-curricular activities. These include a programme of education in information and communication technology (ICT) provided by CÁIT, a community-managed training organisation.
5. **CONCLUSION**

The school has strengths in the following areas.

- The principal and other teachers are to be commended on their dedication to the welfare of the pupils. Their constructive engagement with this evaluation provided further evidence of their professionalism and their commitment to ongoing school improvement.
- The school provides an orderly, well-structured learning environment.
- The quality of teaching and learning in English writing and aspects of Mathematics is very good.
- The quality of the school building and recreation area is very good. The board of management and the staff are to be commended for continuing to develop these in a planned manner.

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 issue an annual written report on the educational progress of each pupil and that this include relevant information regarding each pupil’s performance in standardised attainment tests, in accordance with Department circular 138/2006.
- It is recommended that the board of management consult with the parents’ association prior to ratification of new or amended school policies in accordance with Section 21(3) of the Education Act 1998.
- It is recommended that pupils in all classes be immersed in Irish for the duration of the Irish lesson. It is recommended that charts, labels and other illustrative materials be used in all classrooms to make it easier for pupils to learn and speak Irish. It is recommended, in particular, that pupils be given greater support in learning and using verbs, with a view to promoting independent use of the language.
- It is recommended that there be a review of school planning and practice in Music, with a view to ensuring breadth, balance, continuity and progression in the school’s provision for this subject. It is recommended that all pupils be taught how to play a melodic instrument.

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, November 2010*
Appendix

SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

Submitted by the Board of Management
Area 1  Observations on the content of the inspection report

- The school has decided to use the NCCA Report Card format to replace the existing annual report.
  Results of the standardised tests will be recorded on each as well as continuing the current practice of communicating these results at parent/teacher meetings.
- To enhance our Music Programme the whole school has engaged in a series of music workshops developing appreciation and competency in traditional songs and instruments.
  The tin whistle instrument is being introduced to first and middle classes.
- Staff will prioritise the spoken aspect of Irish in their daily lessons. More visual resources will be displayed. Current practices of holding whole school events and activities such as table-quizzes/ceili, concerts using Irish songs and drama will be continued.