

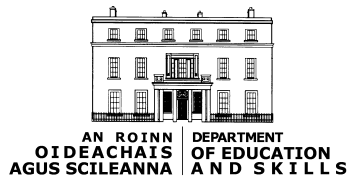
An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

**Whole School Evaluation
REPORT**

**Drumcondra National School
Drumcondra, Dublin 9
Uimhir rolla:15895H**

Date of inspection: 9 March 2010



WHOLE-SCHOOL EVALUATION

A whole-school evaluation of Drumcondra NS was undertaken in March, 2010. The evaluation focused on the quality of teaching and learning in English, Irish, Mathematics and Drama. This report presents the findings of the evaluation and makes recommendations for improvement. The board of management was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the report; a response was not received from the board.

INTRODUCTION – SCHOOL CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

Drumcondra NS is a two-teacher school which operates under the patronage of the Church of Ireland Archbishop of Dublin. Enrolment levels in the school have been growing for a number of years and are expected to rise further in September, 2010. In light of the demand for places in the school, the board of management has decided to allow higher than usual enrolments in junior infants for the coming year. This trend may eventually lead to the employment of a third mainstream class teacher.

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

	Number
Pupils enrolled in the school	43
Mainstream classes in the school	2
Teachers on the school staff	2
Mainstream class teachers	2
Teachers working in support roles	1 (shared)
Special needs assistants	0

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT

1.1 Characteristic spirit, mission or vision

Drumcondra NS aims to 'provide a well-ordered, caring, happy and secure atmosphere, where the intellectual, spiritual, physical, moral and cultural needs of the pupils are identified and addressed.' It aims to promote the professional development of teachers, to foster the involvement of parents in the school and to enhance the self-esteem of all members of the school community.

1.2 Board of management

The board of management is constituted in accordance with Department of Education and Skills guidelines and it meets regularly. The board takes an active part in the life of the school and is involved in the development of organisational policy. The school's financial affairs are managed prudently. Accounts are certified annually and financial reports are presented to the board at each meeting. Board members have availed of opportunities to participate in training to assist them in managing the school. The board promotes close links between the school and the parish. It is proud of the manner in which the school provides a wide range of educational experiences for pupils and how it celebrates their talents and achievements.

The board is fully aware that the need for additional accommodation will become more acute if a third mainstream teacher is appointed. Its priorities in this regard include the building of a room for the provision of learning support and an office for the principal and secretary.

1.3 In-school management

Both mainstream teachers have management responsibilities. The principal has served in the school for a number of years and she leads the development of school policy. She has a vision for the future development of the school and her enthusiasm is shared by other members of the school community. She attends assiduously to administrative tasks and leads the daily assemblies of pupils. Her commitment to continuing professional development for staff ensures that teachers engage in courses that are identified as helpful to the school. Her current priorities for future staff development include Mathematics for multi-grade classes, Music, Drama and the further use of information and communication technologies (ICT) for teaching and learning.

The second teacher in the school has a special duties post. She shares responsibility with the principal for specified curricular, organisational and pastoral duties. She carries out her duties diligently and deputises for the principal as the need arises.

1.4 Management of relationships and communication with the school community

The quality of relationships and communication with the school community is very good. The school uses several means of communicating with parents. Regular newsletters are issued to inform them of upcoming school events. The school website is updated regularly and includes an archive of previous newsletters and copies of school policies. A strong sense of identity is evident among all members of the school community. Levels of collaboration between management, parents, teachers and local agencies in the provision of activities for pupils are high. Parents support the work of the school in a variety of ways, including funding lessons in drama, basketball, gardening, Irish dancing, art and swimming. Parents also assist with school outings and on occasion visit the school to give talks to pupils.

1.5 Management of pupils

The management of pupils is very effective in this school. Each morning all pupils assemble for prayers, to celebrate personal achievements and to share news. They participate fully in the life of the school and are encouraged to do so with an attitude of tolerance and respect towards each other. The school is committed to encouraging among them a sense of responsibility as citizens.

2. QUALITY OF SCHOOL PLANNING

2.1 Whole-school and classroom planning

The quality of whole-school planning is satisfactory with scope for development. Curricular planning is generally undertaken by the teachers while the board of management and parents have been involved in the development of some organisational policies. All policies should be ratified by the board and signed by the chairperson. Curricular policies are reviewed on a cyclical basis, and it is clear that these are becoming more detailed with each revision. This process is commended. It is recommended that further guidance for teachers be included in each of the curricular policies in order to ensure continuity of provision through the school. The need for this will become increasingly evident as the school expands in size.

The quality of classroom planning is varied. Some plans list content to be covered in lessons, while others give more detail of learning objectives, teaching methodologies and learning activities. The staff is urged to develop a common approach to short-term planning and to consult

the website of the Primary Professional Development Service (PPDS) to explore the suggested approaches to planning. Consideration should also be given to separating the monthly progress record from short-term planning documents in order to provide a more succinct outline of learning activities completed by pupils.

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

Cothaíonn foireann na scoile dea-thoil don Ghaeilge i measc na ndaltaí. Baintear feidhm as raon modhanna múinte chun gníomhaíochtaí foghlama a sholáthar thar na snáitheanna curaclaim uile. Úsáidtear drámaí beaga, cluichí teanga, agus comhrá beirte go héifeachtach chun deiseanna a thabhairt do na daltaí an teanga a labhairt. Eagraítear gníomhaíochtaí spéisiúla do gach snáth agus baintear úsáid oiriúnach as raon leathan áiseanna, téacsleabhair, amhráin, dánta, dlúthdhioscaí, ríomhairí agus as an gclár bán idirghníomhach san áireamh. Tá leibhéal rannpháirtíochta na bpáistí go maith agus glacann siad páirt go toilteanach sna ceachtanna. Leathnaítear foclóir na ndaltaí go córasach tríd an scoil agus déantar monatóireacht rialta ar a gcóipleabhair. Chun tógáil ar an dea-saothar a chonacthas sa Ghaeilge agus maidir le húsáid ríomhairí, moltar sleachta léitheoireachta a chumadh a mbeadh níos mó bainte acu le heispéireas na bpáistí agus a ngarthimpeallacht féin. B'fhiú bealaí a iniúchadh chun forbairt a dhéanamh ar scríbhneoireacht phearsanta na ndaltaí sna hardranganna.

Irish

The school staff promotes a positive regard for Irish among the pupils. Use is made of a range of teaching methods to provide learning activities for all curriculum strands. Small dramas, language games and pair work are used effectively to provide pupils with opportunities to speak the language. Interesting activities are provided for each strand and suitable use is made of a wide range of resources, including textbooks, songs, poems, compact disks, computers and the interactive whiteboard. Pupils' participation levels are good and they take part enthusiastically in lessons. Their vocabulary is extended systematically through the school and their copybooks are monitored regularly. To build on the good work observed in Irish and in relation to the use of computers, it is recommended that passages be composed based on the pupils' experience and their own environment. It would be worthwhile exploring ways of developing pupils' personal writing in the senior classes.

English

A co-ordinated English programme is in use throughout the school. Teachers plan for each curriculum strand in a systematic way. Structured oral language programmes are used in each class. An extensive range of appropriate resources for the teaching of English is available in the

school. The resources include a good range of fiction and non-fiction library books, poetry anthologies, flipcharts, and phonics programmes. Very good use of the internet as a resource for the teaching of English was also observed. Teachers differentiate the tasks set for the pupils in order to ensure that tasks are set at appropriate levels for each class group.

The classrooms are print-rich environments, with many colourful charts and posters on display. Children's written work, including projects, is included in the displays. The standard of pupils' reading is good. Guided reading strategies are used effectively to facilitate good levels of participation by pupils in reading lessons. A range of pre-reading and early reading activities is provided in the junior room. These activities include the use of big books to familiarise the children with the conventions of print and a range of activities to develop children's phonological awareness. Reading corners and class libraries provide children with opportunities to engage with a variety of texts through the school. Poetry is used effectively in the senior room: children recite poems and they also compose their own. Attention to the development of the writing process is evident in the school. Teachers correct pupils' written work regularly and give helpful feedback.

3.2 Mathematics

The mathematics programme is well structured, covering all curriculum strands, and has due regard for progression. Mathematics lessons in both classrooms feature very good use of resources and high levels of hands-on activity by pupils. Appropriate textbooks and additional teacher-designed materials are used to support the delivery of the mathematics curriculum. Classrooms include specific mathematics areas where appropriate charts and mathematics posters, along with samples of the pupils' work in Mathematics, are displayed. Suitable emphasis is placed on the development of estimation and problem-solving skills. Pupils engage purposefully in the learning activities set for them and their work is carefully monitored.

3.3 Drama

The school's mission statement for Drama emphasises process over product. In the lessons observed, pupils were fully engaged in the planned activities. A text which provides guidance for teachers in the selection of drama activities for different age groups is used as the basis for lessons in both rooms. It is recommended that classroom planning for Drama be more closely aligned with the *Primary School Curriculum (1999)*. Advice on how this may be done is available on the PPDS website, along with other suggestions, including practical ideas on the use of drama scenarios and improvisations. A school concert is planned every second year and all pupils are afforded opportunities to participate. Pupils in the senior room are sometimes involved in writing the plays.

3.4 Assessment

The school policy on assessment was formulated in 2007 and provides concise information on the purposes of assessment in the school, on the forms of assessment used and on procedures for reporting assessment information to parents. Standardised tests are administered annually in English and Mathematics. Teacher observation, pupils' copybooks, tests and portfolios of pupils' work are used to assess pupils' progress. Results of standardised tests are used to select pupils for learning support. The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment publication, *Assessment in the Primary School Curriculum: Guidelines for Schools*, gives valuable guidance on the use of a broad range of assessment strategies. This document should be consulted when the assessment policy is being reviewed in order to facilitate the development of a broader range of assessment modes across the curriculum.

4. QUALITY OF SUPPORT FOR PUPILS

4.1 Pupils with special educational needs

The school shares a learning-support teacher with a neighbouring school. This arrangement is in its second year of operation. The teacher visits the school three days each week for a total of seven and a half hours and provides focused support in literacy and numeracy to pupils who are selected on the basis of standardised test results and referral by the class teachers. Suitable planning is done for learning support sessions and records of work completed by each pupil are maintained. Appropriate resources are provided and a good range of activities is used in well structured lessons.

The school policy on learning support emphasises the importance of early intervention, and pupils from the junior room are prioritised for support. When the learning support policy is next reviewed, the staged approach as outlined in Circular Letter 24/03 should be incorporated into the policy. It is intended that the room in which learning support is currently provided will become a mainstream classroom in the near future. While this may affect the manner in which support through withdrawal of pupils is provided in the short term, it will also provide the opportunity to explore in-class models of support teaching.

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

The school is an inclusive learning environment in which the participation of all pupils in all school activities is facilitated. At present no pupils from minority groups are enrolled.

5. CONCLUSION

The school has strengths in the following areas:

- The school is managed effectively by a board of management which is supportive of the work of the school.
- Teachers collaborate well to provide pupils with a safe and stimulating learning environment.
- The quality of relationships among all members of the school community is very high.
- The support of the parent-teacher association for the work of the school has a positive impact on the pupils' experience of school.
- Innovative use of resources, including ICT, enhances the quality of learning activities provided for pupils.

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

- All school policies, including curricular policies, should be reviewed, ratified by the board of management and signed by the chairperson.
- A common agreed approach to short-term planning should be developed and a more concise format for monthly progress records should be considered.
- Classroom planning for Drama should be more closely aligned with the *Primary School Curriculum (1999)*.
- The school's assessment policy should be reviewed in order to ensure a broader range of assessment modes is used across the curriculum.

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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