Whole School Evaluation REPORT

Crimlin National School
Castlebar, County Mayo
Uimhir rolla: 15967G

Date of inspection: 19 November 2009
WHOLE-SCHOOL EVALUATION

A whole-school evaluation of Crimlin National School was undertaken in November 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, 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.

INTRODUCTION – SCHOOL CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

Crimlin National School is situated in Crimlin, a rural area around ten kilometres north of Castlebar, county Mayo. The present school building dates from 1967, with an extension added in 1987. There has been a school in Crimlin since 1859. The 150th anniversary was celebrated by the school and the local community in 2009. This celebration has been a useful occasion to reflect on past achievements and future opportunities and challenges. An impressive school website has recently been set up. The school is well maintained inside and outside.

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pupils enrolled in the school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainstream classes in the school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers on the school staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainstream class teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers working in support roles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special needs assistants</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT

1.1 Characteristic spirit, mission or vision
The school is under the patronage of the Catholic Archbishop of Tuam. A positive, inclusive and homely atmosphere is fostered in the school. The school’s mission statement refers to its desire to ensure “the full and harmonious development of each child”. The school is characterised by a strong sense of family and community. Close contact is maintained with parents across a broad range of school activities.

1.2 Board of management
The board of management is constituted in accordance with Department of Education and Skills regulations. The board meets at least once a term. Occasionally, sub-groups of the board of management are set up to deal with specific areas of responsibility. One such group was established to organise and oversee events surrounding the 150th anniversary of the school. This group met very frequently over the past year.

Minutes are kept of the proceedings of each board of management meeting. Policy development, review and ratification, as part of the implementation of the school’s three-year development plan, form part of each board meeting.
The chairperson of the board of management maintains regular contact with the school principal. The board has appointed a secretary, treasurer and a safety officer to contribute to the smooth running of the school. The treasurer gives a financial report at each board meeting. It is recommended that the board of management have school accounts certified or audited annually in accordance with section 18 (1) of the Education Act, 1998.

Board members have attended training provided by the Catholic Primary School Managers’ Association (CPSMA). The board’s recent achievements include the publication of a book to celebrate the school’s 150th anniversary and the purchase of interactive whiteboards for the school. The board of management expressed its satisfaction with the education provided in the school.

The board’s current priorities include issues regarding school-bus routes and bus timetabling, and further work on the school plan. The draining of the playing field near the school and the construction of a footpath between the school and the community centre are also among the board’s priorities.

1.3 In-school management
The in-school management team consists of the principal and one special-duties teacher. The principal was appointed in 2007. Her vision for the school is to maintain what has been established and to build on that work to ensure that pupils enjoy and benefit from their time in the school. The principal is committed to the implementation of the active learning approaches and child-centred teaching methods of the Primary School Curriculum. The principal is competent, committed and diligent in her work. Leadership skills have been demonstrated in the principal’s emphasis on staff co-operation and on a collaborative approach to school development. The principal acknowledges the support that she receives from the board of management, parents and the local community in carrying out her duties.

The work of the special-duties teacher makes a worthwhile contribution to the day-to-day management of the school. The work done in school planning across a range of administrative and curricular areas is commendable. The responsibilities attached to this post have been clearly set out in writing, although it is recommended that this contract be signed and dated.

Informal staff meetings are held regularly. It was confirmed that the teachers plan to hold scheduled staff meetings once a term during the current school year. These meetings should provide a useful forum to discuss organisational and curricular matters.

The school secretary makes a very effective contribution to the smooth running of the school.

1.4 Management of resources
This school is well equipped with a wide variety of educational resources. Each classroom has a good selection of books available for pupils’ use. Although limitations of space in some classrooms make it a challenging task, it is recommended that class libraries be reorganised. Providing a more stimulating display of the books available should ensure that libraries play a more effective role in maintaining and enhancing reading standards by encouraging pupils to read.

Teaching aids and concrete resources are available in each classroom for the teaching and learning of Mathematics. These resources are regularly used to enhance lessons and activities. A
A good range of atlases, globes and maps has been purchased to enhance the teaching and learning of Geography. It is recommended, however, that further resources, for example age-appropriate globes, be made available to foster the development of pupils’ geography skills. It is also recommended that more maps be displayed in classrooms and public areas of the school.

1.5 Management of relationships and communication with the school community
There is an active parents’ association in the school, although the association has not affiliated to the National Parents’ Council in the current school year. Meetings of the parents’ association are held when the need arises, for example to select parents’ representatives on the board of management and to organise fund-raising activities.

It was reported during the whole-school evaluation that parents play a very active and supportive role in the school. Effective communication is maintained between the school principal and parents. Informative and clearly laid out newsletters are sent to parents regularly.

Parents provide valuable assistance in implementing the school’s shared-reading programme. Parents also provide tuition in a range of other pursuits, such as needlework, musical theory and the bagpipes. Parents assist with religious ceremonies and sporting activities such as badminton, football and the school sports day. Recently, parents made a significant contribution to the school’s 150th anniversary celebrations.

Draft policies for the school plan are drawn up between the teachers and the board of management. Each draft policy is circulated to parents for their comments, observations and suggestions.

Parent-teacher meetings are held annually in accordance with Department guidelines. Report cards on the progress of each pupil are sent to parents at the end of the school year.

1.6 Management of pupils
The pupils in Crimlin National School are well behaved. They work willingly with their teachers in the various lessons and activities organised. Pupils are used to working together in groups and in pairs. Most pupils are competent in working independently and they are keen to demonstrate their knowledge and skills across a range of curricular areas. Pupils are confident in answering questions and they are respectful to and welcoming of visitors to the school. The samples of the pupils’ work on display around the school indicate the care and attention given to this work. Teachers supervise pupils appropriately during activities in class and in the schoolyard.

2. Quality of School Planning

2.1 Whole-school and classroom planning
The quality of whole-school planning is good in many respects. Credit is due to the teachers, parents and board of management for their collaborative approach to whole-school planning. A three-year school development plan has been put together, which clearly sets out the school’s intentions for whole-school planning. Policies are formally ratified by the board of management and a plan is in place to review policies on a systematic basis.
Much good work has been done in the development of policies for almost all curricular areas. Some of these policies are in outline form only, however, and require further development to ensure that they are sufficiently specific. A whole-school policy for Drama has yet to be formulated. It is recommended that an outline plan for this curricular area be developed as a first step towards the implementation of a comprehensive Drama policy.

The whole-school plan for Geography consists of a good general overview of the school’s approach to Geography. The plan addresses many key areas such as general aims, priorities, time allocation, assessment, and dates for implementation and review. The plan contains a commendable section outlining the school’s approach to differentiating Geography lessons to cater for a range of pupil abilities. There is also useful guidance for thematic and integrated teaching within Social Environmental and Scientific Education (SESE) and across the curriculum. Worthwhile information on teaching methods and approaches for Geography are included in the plan. There is no information, however, on the role of textbooks in the teaching and learning of Geography. It is recommended that information on how textbooks are to be used in the school be included in the school plan, with a view to ensuring that they are used judiciously.

There is scope for development in school planning for Geography. It is recommended that guidance on the selection of content from local, national and international contexts be included in the plan. Areas for local study at each class level should be clearly identified. Decisions should be made on which topics are to be studied in the strand People living and working in a contrasting part of Ireland. The content to be covered in the study of People and other lands should also be included in the plan. Alternatively, guidance notes or a menu of topics should be included to allow teachers to make choices from time to time in selecting topics to be covered. Local people who could enhance the teaching and learning of Geography should be identified in the plan.

The quality of classroom planning is good overall. All teachers prepare regularly for their work. Each teacher provides long-term and short-term schemes and they maintain a monthly record of the work covered. Some classroom planning for Geography is very good. Class timetables are provided by each teacher in accordance with the Department’s recommended minimum weekly time framework.

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 English
The whole-school plan for English emphasises the importance of developing pupils’ oral, reading and writing skills. The quality of learning and teaching of oral language in the school is impressive. Pupils’ vocabulary is extended in a structured way and almost all pupils are articulate and confident in expressing themselves. Teachers employ good questioning skills and talk and discussion is practised effectively in all classrooms. Pupils in the junior classes can perform a
commendable range of rhymes, songs and poems. Poetry is also studied carefully in the senior classes, where poems are recited with clarity and feeling.

There are many positive aspects to the teaching of English reading in the school. There is a good phonological basis to the teaching of pre-reading skills in the junior classes. Formal reading lessons in the middle and senior classes are particularly well structured. Effective group-teaching methods are employed at most class levels. Some good practice is evident in these classrooms in the differentiation of reading lessons for each class group. A shared-reading programme has been implemented to enhance pupils’ reading opportunities. Most pupils demonstrate good comprehension of what they have read. Information and communication technology (ICT) are regularly used to enhance English reading lessons.

Pupils’ pre-writing skills are carefully developed in the infant classes. Even more emphasis should be placed on creative and functional writing in the other junior classes, however, to further enhance pupils’ writing experiences. Pupils’ writing, as seen in their copybooks and workbooks, is clear and neatly presented. Pupils’ written work is regularly edited and redrafted, although it is recommended that samples of this work be displayed in classrooms to further enhance the print-rich environment. The school’s approach to the teaching of English grammar is commendable.

3.2 Mathematics

The quality of the teaching and learning of Mathematics in this school is good overall. Mathematics lessons successfully stimulate and motivate pupils to engage in the activities organised. Most pupils demonstrate a good knowledge of the work covered in the various strands of the Mathematics curriculum. A wide range of mathematical resources is available in the school and these are effectively used to enhance lessons at most class levels. A mathematics-rich environment has been well developed in the classrooms and in public areas of the school. To further enhance this work, however, it is recommended that mathematics displays in the classrooms reflect current mathematical topics.

Teachers at each class level provide pupils with regular opportunities to engage with each other collaboratively during mathematical activities. The use of mathematics games as part of each lesson encourages a positive attitude towards Mathematics. This work has clearly contributed to pupils’ impressive mastery of number facts (tables).

3.3 Geography

The quality of teaching and learning in Geography is good overall. While the school plan for Geography needs to be further developed to contain more detailed information, the range of work covered throughout the school is broad, and includes the study of human, physical and environmental topics. Lessons are mostly presented in a stimulating and interesting way. Very good activities are organised in some classes. Geography is successfully integrated with other areas of SESE and with English.

Pupils demonstrate good knowledge of their local area. The recent publication of the 150th anniversary commemorative book has enhanced this knowledge by stimulating pupils’ interest in their home place. This knowledge is very local, however. It is recommended, as a means of expanding this work, that pupils learn more about the geography of the wider local area, for example the towns, rivers, lakes and mountains of county Mayo. Some pupils demonstrate impressive knowledge of European countries and their physical features, and of the European Union. Overall, however, there is a need for this work to receive greater emphasis in order to broaden the pupils’ knowledge base. Pupils at each class level demonstrate good awareness of Earth’s place in the solar system.
Some very good geography projects completed by pupils from the senior classes are on display in the public areas of the school. This work has been appropriately monitored and supervised. Pupils’ geography copybooks contain much interesting material, although the correction of this work should receive more emphasis.

Commendable emphasis is placed on environmental studies at each class level in the school. Through their work as part of the Green Schools project, pupils have approached the tasks of recycling and water conservation with commitment and dedication.

### 3.4 Assessment
Teacher observation, teacher-designed tests, checklists, work samples, and project work are the main assessment modes used in the school. The quality of record keeping and reporting is good. Individual assessment records are maintained for each pupil. Standardised tests are administered to pupils from first class to sixth class once a year in English reading and Mathematics. The Belfield Infant Assessment Profile (BIAP) and the Middle Infant Screening Test (MIST) are administered to pupils in the infant classes. A computerised scoring system for Micra-T and Sigma-T has recently been set up in the school. This should assist in the analysis of results. The results and analysis of standardised tests are filed in a central location in the school. While teachers have access to these files, it is recommended that each teacher keep a copy of the relevant test results in their classroom to assist in catering for the needs of each pupil. While some effective teacher-designed tests are used to assess Geography, this has not been formalised on a whole-school basis. It is recommended that the school adopt a more co-ordinated approach to assessing pupils’ progress in Geography.

### 4. Quality of Support for Pupils

#### 4.1 Pupils with special educational needs
The quality of support for pupils with learning difficulties and special educational needs in this school is good. The learning-support service is provided for seven and a half hours each week. Learning-support and resource teaching takes place in a cordoned-off area of the staff room. A good start has been made to developing this area as a stimulating learning environment, although this work should continue with a view to providing an enhanced print-rich and mathematics-rich environment. Learning support is provided in the mainstream classroom for junior and senior infants, as part of the school’s early intervention strategy. In-class support is also provided to assist in the teaching of Mathematics in fourth and sixth classes. While this practice is praiseworthy, there is a need to provide more detailed documentation to ensure that the work covered is effectively co-ordinated. A standard school-wide approach to planning and preparation should be adopted to assist in this task.

An individual profile and learning programme (IPLP) is provided for each pupil who receives learning support. Parents are kept well informed about their children’s progress. Teachers and parents collaborate in the formulation and review of IPLPs. Some diagnostic testing is undertaken intermittently to identify pupils’ specific learning needs. While this approach has some merit, it is recommended that diagnostic testing take place on a more systematic basis to ensure that learning support is even more focused and specific.
4.2 Other supports for pupils: disadvantaged, minority and other groups
This school has an open enrolment policy. Pupils from all backgrounds and at all levels of ability are welcome to enrol in the school. At present, there are no pupils in the school who are identified as belonging to disadvantaged, minority or other groups.

5. CONCLUSION

The school has strengths in the following areas.

- The board of management is supportive of the work of the school.
- The school is a focal point for the local community. The level of parental commitment and involvement in the school is praiseworthy.
- The principal has made a good start to implementing her vision for the school. She has received valuable support from the other teachers in this task.
- The teachers are diligent in their work and are committed to ensuring that pupils receive a broad and balanced education.
- The school building is well-maintained. Much good work has been done in developing an attractive and stimulating learning environment for pupils inside and outside.
- A good start has been made to developing the school plan. Administrative policies are particularly well laid out.
- Pupil achievement in Mathematics is good. Their knowledge of number facts (tables) is impressive. There is commendable emphasis on active learning in Mathematics.
- In Geography, pupils demonstrate good knowledge of their local area and impressive mapping skills.
- Good work is done in differentiating lessons and activities to cater for the range of pupil abilities.
- ICT is effectively used to enhance teaching and learning in some classes.
- Pupils’ vocabulary, higher-order thinking skills and problem-solving skills are carefully developed at most class levels.

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 further developed to ensure that plans are available for each curricular area.
- It is recommended that a standard approach to classroom planning and record-keeping be adopted throughout the school.
- It is recommended that classroom libraries be further developed to enhance the teaching and learning process in English reading.
- It is recommended that a greater variety of edited samples of pupils’ work in English writing be displayed in classrooms.
- It is recommended that the school plan for Geography be further developed to include more specific detail on topics to be covered at each class level. Geography resources should be replenished regularly and these should be used to enhance lessons and activities.

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

We take on board the recommendations outlined in our Whole School Evaluation Report. The school community wishes to thank our inspector for the professional, courteous and pleasant manner in which the WSE was conducted. We are very pleased with all the positive affirmations in relation to our school.

Among the strengths identified were:

Our school is well equipped with a wide variety of educational resources, which are effectively used to enhance lessons.

The quality of learning and teaching of oral language was noted to be impressive and the approach to teaching grammar is commendable. It was noted that there are many positive aspects to the teaching of reading at our school.

Commendable emphasis was placed on environmental studies.

The parents play a very active and support role in our school.

The pupils are well behaved and confident in answering questions. They are also respectful and welcoming to visitors.

There is a collaborative approach to school development amongst Teachers, Parents and Board of Management. The 3 year plan clearly sets out our schools’ intentions.

Copies of the Whole School Evaluation Report were circulated to all Board of Management members.

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

Classroom libraries have been re-organised to enhance the teaching and learning process in English reading. Maintenance work has been carried out in the junior classroom to facilitate this.

Age appropriate globes are now in place in all classrooms.

The Post of Responsibility contract has been agreed and signed by the Post Holder, Principal and Chairperson.

An outline plan for Drama has been drawn up and this is currently under development.

The Whole School Plan for Geography is being developed and will take into account the role of text books. Support in developing this plan has been requested from PDST. Geography lessons for the first term of the school take into account towns, rivers and lakes and mountains of Co. Mayo, along with many other landmarks and features in this region.

Samples of pupils’ written work are displayed on walls to enhance our print-rich environment. Further development is underway in the Learning Support are to expand of the Print-Rich appearance in both English and Maths.
A systematic approach to diagnostic testing has been put in place to ensure Learning Support is more focused and specific.

Our school now has stand-alone public transport which means we are no longer tied to other primary schools’ bus runs. This in turn means that our school opening and closing times can change to suit working parents’. We await approval on this from the Transport section at the Department of Education.

Crimlin Community Arts have been nominated for a Pride of Place Award.