Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Lakyle National School
Lakyle Whitegate County Clare
Uimhir rolla:15981A

Date of inspection: 23 November 2009
WHOLE-SCHOOL EVALUATION

A whole-school evaluation of Lakyle 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, Irish, Mathematics and Physical Education. 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

Lakyle National School is one of two schools in the parish of Mountshannon and Whitegate, which is on the shores of Lough Derg in East Clare. This school has undergone a major programme of refurbishment and has just celebrated the centenary of its foundation. The centenary celebrations fittingly involved parents and the local community in a host of exciting events. The celebrations included an open day, an art exhibition, a birthday party, games, drama, the making of a CD and DVD and the launch of an especially composed school song in Irish. The CD, which was made in association with Cuimhneamh An Chláir, involved pupils in recording the memories of people in the locality of their own school days. The production of the DVD involved pupils in the making of a documentary-style compilation of school activities, community events and interviews with people who are central to the life of the school and the community. A special art project, funded by the Arts Council, culminated in the completion of a school mosaic and a local historian published a comprehensive history of the school to add to the sense of occasion.

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

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<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Number</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pupils enrolled in the school</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainstream classes in the school</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers on the school staff</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainstream class teachers</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers working in support roles</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special needs assistants</td>
<td>1</td>
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1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT

1.1 Characteristic spirit, mission or vision

Lakyle National School is under the patronage of the Catholic Bishop of Killaloe. The school involved parents in a consultative process in an effort to agree and formalise a vision statement. The agreed statement emphasises holistic development, mutual respect, the inculcation of a sense of responsibility and the growth of self-esteem among pupils. The statement attests to the high value placed on partnership with parents and community as well as a respect for tradition and great hope for the future. The creation of a happy, safe and supportive learning environment is paramount and diversity is welcomed and valued. Good attendance is actively promoted and attendance levels are very good.
1.2 Board of management
The board of management is properly constituted and manages and supports the school in a commendable fashion. The board meets regularly and accurate records of agreed decisions are maintained. Financial matters are carefully and prudently managed with the assistance of the school secretary and under the guidance of the treasurer and principal. It is recommended that the board follows through with its plans to have the school accounts certified at the earliest opportunity. Individual board members take responsibility for particular aspects of management. The board values highly the commitment and dedication of the school staff and sees its role as one of enabling teachers to provide the best possible education for the pupils.

1.3 In-school management
The principal was appointed in September 2006 and in the intervening period has provided personal, transformational, organisational and instructional leadership of a high order. She maintains a prudent focus on teaching and learning across the school and strives accordingly for high standards in all areas of the curriculum. She successfully promotes a collegial atmosphere within the school and has effectively built relationships with all stakeholders, which enhance considerably the capacity of the school to provide quality education. The principal acknowledges the support of hard-working ancillary staff in carrying out her role. The deputy principal takes responsibility for a range of agreed duties and supports the principal in a conscientious and wholehearted manner. The deputy provides an annual report of her stewardship to the board and this practice ensures transparency and accountability.

1.4 Management of relationships and communication with the school community
Efforts made to build real partnership among school, parents and community are particularly praiseworthy. The parents’ association has significant involvement in school life and provides invaluable support across a range of areas. This support is highly valued by the board and by the teachers. In addition to fundraising for field development and information and communications technology (ICT) equipment, the association organises various events throughout the year and subsidises swimming and other activities. It is also noted that the association has meaningful involvement in the planning process. Individual parents have been invited to visit classrooms to talk about various issues. Parent-teacher meetings are normally held in November each year and written reports are issued to parents at the end of the school year.

1.5 Management of pupils
During the evaluation pupils’ behaviour was exemplary. They presented as caring and respectful towards the staff and each other and exhibited commendable levels of confidence and self-esteem. Pupil management strategies have been agreed with parents and the board, thus ensuring a broad acceptance and commensurate effectiveness of these strategies.

2. QUALITY OF SCHOOL PLANNING

2.1 Whole-school and classroom planning
The quality of whole-school planning is very good. Records of achievements in school improvement in recent years are a source of encouragement and inspiration to all concerned. The school has a clear view of what needs to be done over the next three years so that agreed and shared aims and objectives of the school community will be realised. Strategic planning is organised in terms of curriculum, school building and grounds, staff development, extra curricular activities and involvement of the community. The extensive range of organisational policies ratified by the board includes those required by legislation. The staff, board and parents have been
careful to ensure that policies address the particular circumstances and needs of the school. The
assistance of the department’s support services has been availed of in drawing up curricular
policies to guide curriculum implementation in all areas. It is now recommended that the school
pursues its stated objectives in terms of a review of Social Personal and Health Education, ICT
and oral work in Irish. It is also advised that clear criteria would be set down for evaluating the
effectiveness of key policies.

All teachers are conscientious in their approach to classroom planning. Common templates and
approaches have been agreed and the breadth and detail provided in plans is indicative of a
genuine commitment to ensure that the curriculum is implemented in a comprehensive manner.
Existing good work in planning would now be enhanced by more rigorous evaluation of the
outcomes of the implementation of policy decisions.

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

Is léir ón bpleánáil sa Ghaeilge go bhfuil dianmhachnamh déanta ag na hoidí ar chur chun cinn na
teanga sa scoil agus go bhfuil meon dearfach acu ina leith. Pléitear ceist na teanga le tuismitheoirí
ó am go chéile agus tá iarrachtá inmholta déanta ag na hoidí chun ranganna Gaeilge a chur ar fáil
do thuiscithíocht. Feictear an bhfoirtear Gaeilge níos seomraí range agus spreagtar na daltaí chun
frásaí agus nathanna cainte Gaeilge a úsáid i rith an lae. Glactar páirt i gcomórtais Fhéile na hInse
chomh maith.

Feictear dea-chleachtais i dteagasc na Gaeilge sna ranganna éagsúla. Sa bhunroinn cuirtear bheim
fhíonte atá ar mhodhanna gníomhacha, agus ar rainn agus amhráin tharraingteacha. Baintear leas
fónta as póstaeir chun spéis a mhúscailt sa teanga agus tuiscint na teanga a chothú. Tá nuacht
phearsanta na ndaltaí mar chuid lárnach den obair agus úsáidtear an nuacht go cuí i gcéil uillmhúcháin don litearthacht, i dteagasc tús na léitheoireachta agus sa scriobh. Sna meánranganna agus
sna hardranganna is léir go mbaineann na daltaí taitneamh agus tarbhche as na drámai beaga a
chuireann siad le chéile i ngnúpaí. Léirionn siad tuiscint mhaith ar an dteanga agus tá dul chun
cinn cónasach á dhéanamh acu i scileanna agus fosciú na látireachta. Forbraitear cumas
scribhneoireachta na ndaltaí go hídeachtaí trí chleachtaí éagsúla faoi thairiscigh agus
saor-scribhneoireachta a dhéanamh. Tá an phheannaireacht go néata slachtmhar agus déantar
monatóireacht rialtaí a.'
It is evident from planning in Irish that the teachers have given serious thought to the promotion of Irish in the school and that they are well disposed towards the language. The language question is discussed with parents from time to time and praiseworthy efforts have been made by the teachers to make Irish classes available to parents. A richness of print in Irish is evident in the classrooms and pupils are encouraged to use Irish phrases and expressions during the day. The school also participates in Féile na hInse competitions.

Good practice in the teaching of Irish is evident in the various classes. In the junior section worthwhile emphasis is placed on activity methods and on engaging rhymes and poems. Good use is made of posters to generate interest in the language and to develop understanding. Pupils’ personal news is a central component of the work, and the news is used appropriately in a pre literacy programme, in teaching preliminary reading skills and in writing. In the middle and senior classes it is evident that pupils enjoy and benefit from the short dramas they compose in groups. Pupils’ writing ability is effectively developed through scaffolded writing activities and free writing. Penmanship is neat and tidy and regularly monitored.

To further enhance the good work in Irish it is recommended that the staff would now direct greater attention to facilitating real communication among pupils and between teachers and pupils. It is also recommended that the staff pursue its aim to evaluate the pupils’ progress in the use of language functions.

The standard of teaching and learning in English is very good. A comprehensive whole-school plan for English indicates that policy in this area has been arrived at after lengthy and focused consideration. The plan has also been developed with a view to ensure a coherent approach to addressing the needs of pupils with literacy deficits.

An integrated approach to oral language, which includes discussion across all curricular areas, as well as a programme of specific oral language activities within the English programme, ensures that pupils can discuss confidently a wide range of topics. Role play and improvisation are used extensively. Pupils in senior classes were observed to role play interviewing famous writers as part of a radio show. Writing poetry and responding to poetry are accorded due prominence. Activities, such as selecting favourite poems and reading them to the class, promote interest in and a love of poetry. Parents are encouraged to be conscious of the importance of oral language in their interactions with their children.

The successful creation of a rich print environment forms a helpful backdrop to the promotion of reading skills at all levels. Pupils’ own writing and well-stocked libraries contribute to the richness of reading material available. The foundation for success in reading is laid in the junior classes where a highly structured approach to the teaching of phonological and phonemic awareness is implemented. Nursery rhymes, blending of phonemes and work on onset and rime are integral to this work. A multi-sensory phonics programme, which is implemented throughout the school, provides pupils with the facility to blend sounds and acquire a good knowledge of syllabication. Reading schemes and class novels are used to good effect and pupils respond to text using a variety of comprehension strategies. Parents are introduced to the methods of paired/shared reading and visiting writers and storytellers further enhance pupils’ love of language and literature.
There is commendable emphasis on the writing process at all levels and various strategies are used to encourage pupils to write successfully and to enjoy writing. Pupils write for themselves and for a variety of audiences. Second class pupils keep diaries as part of a free-writing exercise. An attractive writing corner is used as an incentive to encourage writing in middle classes. Senior pupils make good use of ICT in drafting and editing their writing and have pieces published in the community newsletter. Pupils in all classes have opportunities to participate in the Write a Book project. A multi-dimensional approach to spelling, together with careful monitoring of pupils’ writing, is another important aspect of work in this area.

3.2 Mathematics
Overall, the standard of teaching and learning in Mathematics is good. Lessons observed were well structured and paced and worthwhile efforts are made to relate learning to pupils’ experiences and environment. Much energy has been expended by staff in designing a Mathematics Trail and this work is commended. The language of Mathematics and appropriate use of concrete materials are given particular prominence in junior and middle classes. All teachers are commended for their efforts to provide maths-rich environments and for carefully monitoring the neatly-recorded work of pupils. At this stage it is recommended that greater emphasis be placed on mental Mathematics and problem-solving strategies and that the outcomes of standardised tests would be more carefully analysed with a view to addressing numeracy deficits.

3.3 Physical Education
The school is commended for its efforts in giving pupils access to a broad and balanced curriculum in Physical Education (PE). A good stock of suitable equipment is stored in a manner in which pupils can have ready access to it for PE classes and during breaks. An adjacent field was recently levelled using Clár funding. The local GAA club provided permanent goal posts and the parents’ association provided funding for netting behind the goals. In the school yard there is a basketball court and various markings to encourage a variety of games and athletic activities.

Very good practice was observed in teachers’ work during this evaluation. A highly effective lesson which combined elements of dance, music and movement and gymnastics was observed. The lesson was well organised, clear instructions were given, and there was a worthwhile emphasis on creative and imaginative work. In another lesson pupils engaged in well-organised drills in the school yard. The involvement of senior pupils in organising and directing various drills was particularly noteworthy. Pupils at all levels demonstrate impressive levels of skill and agility and clearly enjoy the various activities.

Teachers are assisted in the delivery of the PE programme by external coaches. Pupils are taken to a swimming pool in Castleconnell every second year for lessons in aquatics. The local GAA club provides coaching in hurling and camogie. A visiting teacher with expertise in PE works with the pupils for approximately ten weeks each year.

3.4 Assessment
Assessment practices are well developed. A range of strategies is used by the teachers to evaluate and improve learning and teaching on an on-going basis. These strategies include the effective monitoring of pupils’ copies, folders and project work, regular teacher-designed tests, miscue analysis, check lists and self-assessment by pupils. Pupils’ progress is also assessed using regularly administered diagnostic and standardised tests. The Middle Infant Screening Test (MIST) identifies early literacy difficulties. Analysis of the MIST results leads to intensive intervention aimed at avoiding failure in reading in later years. The Micra-T and Sigma-T
standardised tests are administered yearly in May or June. While the results of these tests are examined carefully, assessment data warrant more rigorous analysis at this point, to determine patterns of performance on a whole-school level, to track pupils’ progress individually, and to explore the potential for adapting programmes accordingly.

4. **QUALITY OF SUPPORT FOR PUPILS**

4.1 **Pupils with special educational needs**
The principal assumes overall responsibility for the implementation of policy relating to special educational needs (SEN). This policy clearly sets out roles, responsibilities and procedures established for the identification and selection of pupils for supplementary teaching and the implementation of early intervention programmes. Provision for pupils with SEN is undertaken by a teacher who supports pupils with both low incidence and high incidence needs. Additional support is provided by a visiting resource teacher who is based in Scariff NS. One special needs assistant is appropriately deployed and works diligently under the direction of class teachers. Support for pupils in literacy and numeracy is delivered through a combination of withdrawal of pupils and a collaborative model in accordance with circular 24/03. It is important to regularly review the current arrangements so that teacher skills are used to maximum effect for the benefit of pupils. It is also recommended that progress made by SEN pupils is monitored carefully to ensure that arrangements currently in place best serve their needs.

4.2 **Other supports for pupils: disadvantaged, minority and other groups**
Should educational disadvantage present among any pupils, the principal and staff deal with such matters in a caring and sensitive manner.

5. **CONCLUSION**
The school has strengths in the following areas:

- Efforts made to build effective partnership among school, parents and community are particularly praiseworthy and have resulted in significant improvements in educational provision.
- The school’s energetic and dedicated principal is committed to continuous improvement of educational provision for all pupils.
- Efforts to plan strategically on a cyclical basis are commended.
- Standards of teaching and learning in English are particularly praiseworthy.
- The teachers are conscientious and dedicated and continue to invest time and energy in their own professional development.
- The board and parents association support the educational enterprise in a highly commendable fashion.
- Pupils can be very proud of their abilities and achievements.

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 pursues its stated objectives in terms of a review of Social Personal and Health Education, ICT and oral work in Irish.
• A review of the school’s assessment policy should be undertaken and consideration should be given to more rigorous analysis of test results, individual tracking of pupils and the potential such analysis would have for adapting programmes to meet pupils’ needs.
• It is recommended that the school set clear criteria for evaluating the effectiveness of key policies.

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, September 2010*
Appendix

SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

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

We the B.O.M. have studied and discussed Draft Report on Lakyle National School; we are satisfied with its Report.

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

In relation to the SPHE Policy, we have applied for in-school support for SPHE in Lakyle N.S. in the academic year 2010/2011. All teachers have attended a child Protection Seminar in May 2010. The Principal attended an RSE workshop in March 2010 and in conjunction with the teachers in the school a RSE plan for Lakyle N.S. has been drawn up which is currently being implemented.

Oral work in Irish continues to be an integral part of each class. It is envisaged to build on the oral language skills that the children have by using Irish as part of the everyday school life.

In relation to school policy on Assessment following on attendance at course on Assessment, the school now conducts Maths screening Assessment at the end of the first term rather than the end of the year. It was felt that this would better serve the needs of pupils, being Assessment for learning as opposed to Assessment of Learning. (Teaching during the rest of the year can address areas of weakness which show up in test results). Also Sigma results and Micra T. results are now being computerised which facilitates tracking of a child’s progress during their time in Primary school.

Lakyle N.S. invested in two Interactive Whiteboards in February 2010 for the two mainstream classrooms. Each teacher in the school also has a teaching laptop, wireless keyboard and wireless mouse in accordance with DES guidelines. In the coming year we are hoping to acquire a third and final Interactive Whiteboard for the school.

In Spring 2010 Lakyle N.S. School Website was set up. This contains useful information for parents’ and students alike, school policies, community links and regular school news updates. It is a work in progress that will be continuously added to and built upon.