An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Lisaniska National School
Foxyford, Co. Mayo
Uimhir rolla: 16021U

Date of inspection: 4 May 2010
WHOLE-SCHOOL EVALUATION

A whole-school evaluation of Lisaniska NS was undertaken in May 2010. 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 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

Lisaniska NS is located six kilometres from Foxford. The school, originally set up in 1824, was rebuilt in 1910 and again in 1992. It has recently been extended and refurbished. Enrolment trends are steady. The school grounds are attractively presented with a newly developed school garden. The school caters for boys and girls from infants to sixth class. It is under the patronage of the Catholic Bishop of Killala.

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>
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<tr>
<td>Pupils enrolled in the school</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mainstream classes in the school</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teachers on the school staff</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mainstream class teachers</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teachers working in support roles</td>
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<td>Special needs assistants</td>
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1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT

1.1 Characteristic spirit, mission or vision

The school has a mission statement published in the school plan. It aims at promoting “happy and stimulating learning experiences in a safe, secure and supportive environment” which is achieved through a close partnership with parents.

1.2 Board of management

The school’s board of management is very effective. It meets regularly and maintains minutes of these meetings. Roles and responsibilities are clearly established. Financial affairs are dealt with prudently and accounts are audited. The chairperson is a regular visitor to the school and is known by the pupils and parent body. The board is commended for its efficacy in developing the school building and grounds in recent months.

1.3 In-school management

The principal is an effective and efficient manager who is dedicated to the needs of the school. She is conscientious in the discharge of her duties. She supports teachers in their curricular
initiatives. She organises staff meetings on a regular basis. The principal is supported by a deputy principal and a special-duties teacher who undertake a range of organisational, curricular and pastoral duties.

1.4 Management of relationships and communication with the school community

The school fosters very good relationships and open communication with the school community. There is a very active parents’ association in operation in the school. It supports school events such as the sacraments of communion and confirmation, the end-of-year graduation mass, and school concerts which are held every second year. It also organises an annual sports day. It has established praiseworthy links with the parents’ association of the other school in the parish. Parents are confident that any concerns are dealt with fairly and expediently. Parent-teacher meetings are organised on an annual basis and parents are issued with a written report on their child’s progress at the end of the school year. On enrolment parents are issued with the school’s main policies and procedures, a practice which is highly commended. The school has also developed an attractive and informative website which promotes further communication with parents and the community.

1.5 Management of pupils

The quality of pupil management shows some scope for development. Pupils are, on the whole, well behaved and mannerly. There are a number of pupils who display emotional and behavioural difficulties. It is recommended that the staff avails of professional development to support such pupils. It is further recommended that the staff devises a whole-school approach to dealing with challenging behaviour which can be included in its code of behaviour.

2. QUALITY OF SCHOOL PLANNING

2.1 Whole-school and classroom planning

The quality of whole-school planning is good. A very extensive number of organisational policies has been developed to fulfil legislative requirements and to meet the needs of the school. These policies are very clear, context based, and are of a very good quality. Curricular plans show a clear understanding of the aims and principles of the Primary School Curriculum. However, these plans are generic in nature. It is recommended that the staff reviews all curricular plans with a view to documenting some of the very effective current practices observed during the evaluation. Teachers should work to establish a number of whole-school procedures in key areas of the curriculum.

Teachers have recently reviewed their practice on classroom planning and have established the use of a common template for this purpose. The quality of classroom planning, through the use of this template, is of a good quality. Teachers use content objectives from the curriculum in their planning and provide clear evidence that broad educational experiences are provided to pupils in all subjects. It is recommended that teachers plan for differentiated learning outcomes for individual pupils with different learning needs in line with the school’s learning support/resource policy.

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 caighdeán na Gaeilge go maith i gcoitinne agus an-mhaith i ranganna áirithe. Baïneann struchtúr cinnte leis na ceachtanna. Úsáidear amhráin, dánta, póstaí agus cluichí teanga go héifeachtach chun na daltaí a spreagadh. Baintear feidhm chuig as rudái níthiúla agus as ábhair léirithe chun tuiscint a threisiú. Bíonn daltaí na struchtúr na dána, an chéadoinn a dhéanann mar gheall ar an n-áit fein na ceachtanna a bhaineann leis na daltaí. Úsáidear struchtúr agus cluichí teanga go háirithe chun na daltaí a spreagadh. Tá trí fhoirmeolaíochtaí fós agus tri fhoirmeolaíochtaí a léirigh na Gaeilge.


Irish

The standard of Irish is generally good and very good in some classes. Lessons are well structured. Songs, poems, posters and language games are used effectively to motivate the pupils. An appropriate use is made of concrete materials and visual aids to strengthen pupils’ understanding. Pupils in the senior classes can speak at length about different themes. Some teachers use pair work in a praiseworthy fashion to get pupils speaking. These pupils can speak fluently, and can ask and answer questions effectively giving full-sentence answers. It is recommended that this practice is shared and that a whole-school approach to the communication phase of Irish lessons is implemented.

Irish reading is taught informally through flashcards and posters in the environment. Formal reading begins in second class. The standard of Irish reading is very good. Pupils read with confidence and display good phonological awareness. A range of reading materials is available to pupils including textbooks, library books, magazines and newspapers. In certain classes pupils are given books according to their ability level. This exemplary practice is highly commended.
The standard of Irish writing is good. Each teacher places a very good emphasis on pupils’ personal news. Pupils are able to express themselves. It is now recommended that the range of written tasks is extended to include letters, e-mails, diary entries, postcards and stories on a regular basis. Some teachers promote the writing process fruitfully and arrange pupils’ work in class booklets or on display areas in the classroom.

**English**

The quality of teaching and learning in English is good. Oral-language development is appropriately emphasised. The majority of pupils can speak articulately. Pupils’ oral language skills were highest in classrooms where extensive use is made of pair-work to stimulate discussion and to ensure new vocabulary is used in a variety of contexts. An appropriate emphasis is placed on nursery rhymes in the infant classroom and on poetry across the school. Pupils recite poems with great expression. Teachers promote pupils’ higher-order skills through activities which focus on responding to characters, situations and story details. Pupils are enabled to retell stories, analyse and interpret events and sequences.

Overall, the quality of pupils’ ability in reading is very good. There is a print-rich environment in all of the classrooms. The teachers have developed effective strategies to promote reading for pleasure which includes use of class novels, big books and initiatives such as *Uninterrupted Sustained Silent Reading* (USSR). An appropriate emphasis is placed on the development of phonological awareness in the junior classes as part of the foundation of basic reading skills which yields very good outcomes. Considering the wide variance in pupil ability it is recommended that pupils are grouped by ability to ensure individual learning is maximised.

The quality of writing is good. Pupils gain valuable experience of the process of writing. Regular use is made of information and communication technology (ICT) for this purpose. Pupils’ work is attractively displayed in each classroom. It is recommended that a wider range of genres be developed with less emphasis on textbook activities. It is further recommended that the school devise a whole-school approach to handwriting to ensure that, by the end of sixth class, pupils have achieved a legible cursive script.

**3.2 Mathematics**

The quality of teaching and learning in Mathematics is generally good. Opportunities to engage in activity-based learning are afforded to all pupils. Concrete materials are used effectively to support the learning of new concepts. While a good emphasis is placed on mathematical language, it is recommended that all pupils engage very regularly in pair work to effectively use and assimilate this language. Skills are developed sequentially from class to class. The school plan for Mathematics does not emphasise whole-school approaches. It is recommended that the staff agree on approaches to teaching mental Mathematics, number facts and problem-solving. It is further recommended that, due to the wide variance in pupil ability, pupils are grouped by ability for mathematical activities to ensure they work at an appropriate individual pace.

**3.3 Geography**

The quality of teaching and learning in Geography is good. A broad programme is taught to the pupils based on the curricular objectives and pupils display an understanding of the taught curriculum. Lessons are advantageously related to pupils’ lives and experiences. Pupils’ knowledge of the local area is good. They are taken on field-trips to ensure this knowledge is
consistently developed. Senior pupils have developed a school garden which promotes environmental awareness and care. Pupils’ ability to discuss geographical concepts was highest in classrooms where teachers write key words on the board, where they get pupils to engage in pair work, and where higher-order thinking skills such as predicting, comparing and contrasting are promoted in each lesson. It is recommended that these high quality practices are extended to all classrooms.

3.4 Assessment

The quality of assessment is very good. Early-intervention strategies include the implementation of the Belfield Infant Assessment Profile (BIAP) and the Middle Infants Screening Test (MIST). Teachers carry out routine tests and tasks across the curriculum. Records of progress are shared with parents and stored centrally to facilitate their accessibility and use. Standardised tests are administered annually to assess individual pupils’ performance in literacy and numeracy. These results are very effectively analysed and graphed to inform future teaching.

4. QUALITY OF SUPPORT FOR PUPILS

4.1 Pupils with special educational needs

The school avails of the services of two shared learning support/resource teachers and one part-time resource teacher. All teachers prepare conscientiously and diligently for their pupils. Individual plans are in place for each pupil in receipt of support and parents sign these documents. It is recommended that a whole-school approach to planning in the support setting is devised as some very high quality planning was observed.

The quality of teaching in the support setting is very good. All teachers use a broad range of teaching methodologies and resources to maximise pupil participation, motivation and achievement. Very strong relationships between pupils and teachers were observed during the course of the evaluation. Pupils are generally withdrawn individually or in small groups. Very effective in-class support is provided in the infant room as part of the school’s early intervention programme. Teachers in support settings show a clear understanding of diagnostic testing and use it very effectively.

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

There are currently no other supports required for pupils in the school. However, the school’s policies and practice promote inclusive principles and ensure that a supportive school environment is created.

5. CONCLUSION

The school has strengths in the following areas.

- The teaching staff of the school, both mainstream and support, is very professional and dedicated to the needs of the pupils. Their openness to school improvement is commendable.
- The board of management has been very effective in developing the school building and grounds in recent months.
• The quality of home-school communication and of support from the parents’ association is very good.
• The quality of whole-school organisational plans is very good and the practice of issuing parents with the school’s main policies and procedures on enrolment is highly commended.
• The quality of teaching and learning in all curricular areas is good and the quality of assessment across the school is very good.
• The quality of pupil attainment in reading is very good.
• The quality of teaching in the support settings is very good. The in-class support which is implemented as part of the school’s early-intervention programme is very effective.

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

• It is recommended that the staff devises a whole-school approach to dealing with challenging behaviour.
• It is recommended that pupils are grouped by ability for instruction in literacy and Mathematics.
• It is recommended that more extensive use is made of pair work across the school.
• It is recommended that each curricular plan is reviewed with a view to devising whole-school approaches to maximise pupil learning.

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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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 and Staff wish to acknowledge the courtesy and professionalism of the Inspectorate in their work in Lisaniska N.S. during the WSE process. It was a very positive and affirmative experience for the school community. They are particularly pleased with the strengths identified and are happy that they reflect strongly the commitment to provide a good primary education for each individual pupil in the school.

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

The Board of Management and staff note the key recommendations from the Inspectorate. It is intended to incorporate all WSE recommendations in the school’s strategic plans over the next few years.

1. Work has already commenced in seeking the help of the SESS to devise a whole school approach to dealing with challenging behaviour.
2. Every effort is being made to group pupils by ability for instruction in Literacy and Maths.
3. The use of pair work is being extended as was recommended across the school.
4. We propose reviewing each curricular plan with a view to devising whole school approaches to maximise pupil learning.