An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

SN Phádraig Naofa, Patrician Brothers,
Tullow, Co. Carlow
Uimhir rolla: 16080N

Date of inspection: 13 April 2010
WHOLE-SCHOOL EVALUATION

A whole-school evaluation of SN Phádraig Naofa, Patrician Brothers was undertaken in April 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 Irish, English, Mathematics and Visual Arts. The board of management was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the evaluation, and the response of the board will be found in the appendix to this report.

INTRODUCTION – SCHOOL CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

SN Phádraig Naofa, Patrician Brothers, is an all-boys school catering for pupils from junior infants to sixth class in Tullow, Co. Carlow. The following table provides an overview of the enrolment and staffing in the school at the time of the evaluation:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pupils enrolled in the school</td>
<td>229</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainstream classes in the school</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers on the school staff</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainstream class teachers</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers working in support roles</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special needs assistants</td>
<td>5</td>
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1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT

1.1 Characteristic spirit, mission or vision

The school was established in 1808 by the Patrician Brothers and celebrates its Centenary on the present site this year. The Catholic Bishop of Kildare and Leighlin is its Patron. The school’s mission is to provide a well-ordered, caring, happy and secure atmosphere where the intellectual, spiritual, physical, moral and cultural needs of pupils are identified and addressed.

1.2 Board of management

The board of management is constituted properly. It meets regularly and records appropriate minutes of these meetings. Board members demonstrate a satisfactory knowledge of their statutory obligations and are consistent in the performance of their duties. The management of financial procedures is undertaken in line with Section 18(1) of the Education Act 1998 and, as of recently, includes an annual audit of accounts. The board has published admissions and enrolment policies and enrolment trends remain stable. A review of the enrolment policy is recommended in relation to the enrolment of pupils with special educational needs. The board expresses concern over absenteeism among some pupils. Further refinement of the attendance policy is advised to support the school in addressing this issue. The board has formulated a range of curricular and organisational policies. It is recommended that each policy be signed, dated and ratified in a timely fashion. To this end it is advised that a strategic plan be devised to support a cyclical approach to planning. Department of Education and Skills regulations regarding the length of the school year, the retention of pupils and the integrity of the school day are observed. The board is advised to be mindful of the need for the equitable distribution of pupils as classes are organised each year.
1.3 In-school management

The school principal manages the day-to-day running of the school effectively. He demonstrates a transparent leadership style and maintains a visible presence in the school. He places a very good emphasis on staff relations and communication and he displays a concern for the safety and welfare of staff, pupils and the wider school community. He has a vision for the further integration of information and communication technology (ICT) facilities throughout the school. He demonstrates a very good understanding of the school context and has fruitfully pursued a model of inclusive education where pupils of all nationalities are seamlessly integrated into school life. The principal is supported in the execution of his duties by an in-school management team comprising the deputy principal and four special duties teachers. Post-holder duties comply with Circular 07/03 and are reviewed regularly to reflect the changing needs of the school. Information of relevance to each post is disseminated at staff meetings. It is recommended that the in-school management team prioritises the curricular elements of each post in order to support the principal in the ongoing development, implementation and review of whole-school planning.

1.4 Management of relationships and communication with the school community

The parents’ association is organised to support this school and the local girls’ school. It is not currently affiliated to the National Parents’ Council (NPC), as in the past, and efforts are underway to re-affiliate in the next school year. Parents are actively involved in paired reading activities, fundraising and sacramental activities. The views of the parent body were sought in the development of the school’s code of discipline. Consideration should be given as to how best to involve parents consistently in the whole-school planning process. Annual parent-teacher meetings and end-of-year reports inform them of their child’s progress. Regular newsletters keep them abreast of school events and achievements. Parents appreciate the professional approach taken by the school in dealing with issues of concern.

1.5 Management of pupils

Pupils are self-confident and respectful at all times. The school’s commitment to prioritising positive behaviour is evident in the manner in which pupils respond to teaching and learning opportunities. It is recommended that the school’s behaviour policy be reviewed to reflect the positive ethos currently underpinning the management of pupils. The dedication of staff to the promotion of sport and traditional Irish music outside of school hours is recognised and praised.

2. Quality of School Planning

2.1 Whole-school and classroom planning

Staff are commended for the considerable effort invested in preparing whole-school policies for key curriculum and organisational areas, many of which have been recently reviewed. Organisational plans are clearly presented, are readily accessible and support the school in its day-to-day functioning. A review of curriculum policies is recommended to ensure adherence to the principles of the Primary School Curriculum (1999) in all instances and to reflect the specific needs, context and ethos of this school. Further development of these policies should include whole-school decisions on assessment, differentiation and teaching methodologies that will provide clearer guidelines for teaching and learning. Consideration should be given within this process to identifying strategies to support teachers in successfully linking the whole-school plan and their individual classroom planning.
All teachers prepare long-term and short-term plans and they maintain monthly progress records. The quality of this planning varies. Overall, there is insufficient emphasis on active-learning methods and there is need for more child-centred learning and consolidation opportunities in many instances. In some classes there is undue emphasis on content-based planning which does not take sufficient cognisance of curriculum guidelines with regard to strand and strand units, methodologies, and differentiated approaches. A review of the classroom-planning process is recommended so that pupils’ skills and concepts can be developed appropriately at each class level. It is also recommended that teachers outline suitably differentiated approaches to support pupils with special educational needs. In this regards, the benefits of using a common planning template may be explored. There is also need to reconsider the grouping of pupils in many classes to facilitate enhanced pupil-participation. More modern furniture, which the school plans to acquire, will assist in this regard.

2.2 Child protection policy and procedures

Confirmation was provided that, in compliance with Department of Education and Skills Primary Circular 0061/2006, the board of management has formally adopted the *Child Protection Guidelines for Primary Schools* (Department of Education and Skills, 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 eiseamláirí den dea-chleachtadh le feiceáil i múineadh na Gaeilge tríd an scoil. I ranganna ar leith, baintear leas as raon de mhodhanna múinte le cur ar chumas na ndaltaí an teanga nua a shealbhú agus a chleachtadh ar bhonn taitneamhach. Díritear i móraí ranganna ar chumas na ndaltaí chun rannta agus filíocht a aithris. I ranganna áirithe baintear úsáid mhaithe as cur uige cumarsáideach agus bionn ócásíóidí ar fáil do dhaltái an Ghaeilge a labhart go neamhfhoirmiúil. Éirionn le cuid de na daltaí ardchaighdeán a bhaint amach i labhart na teanga. B’fhéidir go mór anois inniúlacht na ndaltaí i labhart na Gaeilge a fhorbairt agus a thabhairt chun críochnamh i ngach léibhéal sa scoil. Moltar go mbeadh deiseanna ag an bhfoireann dea-chleachtas ranga a roinnt ar a chéile, chomh mhaith leis agus cur chun cuige cumarsáideach comhshasamhach fhéin. Ba chóir deiseanna breise a chur ar fáil do na daltaí Gaeilge a úsáidh le linn an lae scoile. Moltar go gcuirtear straitéisí ar fáil ionsa go mbeadh ar chumas na noidí a n-inniúlacht féin sa Ghaeilge a mhéadú.

Go ginearálta úsáidtear leabhraí oibre don scribhneoireacht. Éiríonn le roinnt daltaí na téacsanna ranga a léamh go measarth cruinn. B’fhéidir anois cur go mór ar an raon na dtéacsanna atá ar fáil do na daltaí agus a gcuíid scileanna léitheoireachta agus saorscribhneoireachta a fhorbairt ar bhonn níos céimiúla ó rang go rang. Meastar gá chomh maith bím níos mó a leagan ar dhífreálú a chleachtadh sna gníomháfochtait foighlanna.
Irish
Some areas of good practice are evident in the teaching of Irish. A range of methodologies is used effectively in a number of classes to enable pupils acquire and practice new language in an enjoyable manner. Suitable emphasis is placed in all classes on enabling pupils to recite a wide variety of poetry and rhymes. In some classes good use is made of a communicative approach and pupils are provided with some opportunities to speak Irish on an informal basis. Some pupils attain good standards in spoken Irish. Considerable focus should now be placed on developing pupils’ communicative competence in a consistent manner at all class levels. It is recommended that staff have opportunities for the sharing of existing good classroom practice, along with opportunities for discussing and implementing the school’s comprehensive Irish plan, to support the more consistent implementation of a communicative approach at all class levels. Providing further opportunities for pupils to use Irish during the school day is advised. Strategies to enhance teachers’ own competence in Irish are also advised.

Written work is generally workbook based. Some pupils succeed in reading the class texts with a reasonable degree of accuracy. It is recommended that the range of reading material available to pupils be greatly extended and that their reading and independent writing skills be developed in a more graded manner from one class level to the next. Also, it is advised that more attention be focused on differentiating class programmes to cater further for pupils of varying abilities.

English
The teaching of English is satisfactory. Whole-class teaching, complemented by collaborative group and pair work, is undertaken in the majority of classes. A comprehensive oral language programme is undertaken throughout the school. Pupils are encouraged to debate and to express opinions using a wide vocabulary. Topical issues are discussed in a structured manner and higher-order thinking skills are developed consistently. Oral language skills are suitably integrated with other curriculum areas. Pupils’ interest in poetry and rhyme is fostered commendably in all classes. Suitable emphasis is placed on the writing process and impressive samples of writing in different genres are displayed in all classrooms. A good balance is achieved between functional and creative writing. Brainstorming strategies are used to enhance pupils’ existing vocabulary and to extend their competence in the writing process. A print-rich environment has been successfully established in the majority of classes and class libraries are well stocked.

A suitable foundation of basic reading skills is taught in the junior classes. There is scope for improvement in standards attained in relation to the teaching of reading in the middle and senior classes and a whole-school focus on improved attainment in reading is recommended as an immediate priority. In the middle and senior classes, opportunities for pupils to explore, to analyse and to enjoy a wide selection of reading materials should be provided so that their ability to read and to discuss is enhanced optimally. It is recommended that the large numbers of pupils who are withdrawn for the teaching of reading are instead provided with a differentiated programme within their mainstream classes, with additional in-class support from the learning support team where relevant. Mainstream and support teachers should liaise closely in the implementation of this programme.

3.2 Mathematics
Varying approaches are used in the teaching of Mathematics. Teacher-directed methodologies predominate in some classrooms. More active, discovery-learning methodologies are embraced in other classrooms. A mathematics-rich environment is established in most classes. Pupils’ mathematical language is developed consistently at each class level. Mathematical resources are
plentiful and are used well to reinforce concepts taught. Further development of pupils’ problem-solving skills at each class level is advised.

A large number of pupils from middle and senior classes are withdrawn for the teaching of Mathematics. It is recommended that class teachers take responsibility for the mathematical development of all pupils in their class. Work assigned to pupils attending learning support for Mathematics should be undertaken collaboratively between class teacher and learning-support teacher. It is important that class teachers ensure there is adequate differentiation of methods and approaches in order to meet individual pupil’s needs in all instances.

3.3 Visual Arts

In the Visual Arts, due regard is paid to all the strands and lessons are well structured and well paced. Suitable attention is given to the language of art and to the development of pupils’ creative skills. Talk and discussion are central features of lessons. Throughout the school, the Visual Arts programme is integrated creatively with many curriculum areas. Many examples of pupils’ art are attractively displayed in classroom and corridor areas. Portfolios of pupils’ work are maintained in some classrooms. The maintenance of art portfolios in every classroom as outlined in the school plan is advised. Looking at and responding to art is an integral aspect of the Visual Arts curriculum in many classes. Good use is made of ICT to support this strand.

3.4 Assessment

Standardised tests in Mathematics and English are administered annually to all pupils from first to sixth class. These results, coupled with teachers’ observations, inform the selection of pupils for learning support. Early intervention tests are used to identify senior infant pupils who may benefit from learning support. Written work is monitored and affirmed in all classes. Good practice is undertaken in a small number of classes in relation to the continuous assessment of all curriculum areas. It is recommended that a process whereby assessment becomes an integral part of every teacher’s classroom planning be implemented. This is to ensure that pupils’ achievement can be monitored and that suitable objective-based planning can take place to support pupils of all abilities. It would be advantageous, as part of this process, to collate results of standardised tests in order to track individual pupil’s progress over time.

4. QUALITY OF SUPPORT FOR PUPILS

4.1 Pupils with special educational needs

Support for pupils with special educational needs is provided in literacy, numeracy and social skills. Teachers plan appropriately and pupils’ progress is regularly recorded and reviewed. Lessons are well structured with teachers ensuring that pupils’ engage in appropriate learning activities. A significant number of pupils are withdrawn in groups from their mainstream classes to receive supplementary teaching. The withdrawal of such large groups restricts the meaningful intervention of the support teacher with individual pupils. This practice also prevents the class teacher from implementing the curriculum in its totality for all the pupils for whom she/he has responsibility. It is recommended that the policy of withdrawal of large groups of pupils be significantly changed and that the staged approach to intervention be fully implemented in line with Circular 02/05. This would involve, in the first instance, the class teacher placing greater emphasis on using a differentiated programme for individual pupils and for small groups of pupils within the classroom context. It is further recommended that approaches to in-class support be
explored to ensure that pupils derive the fullest possible benefit from classroom activities in tandem with individualised differentiated programmes in their classes.

It is acknowledged that provision for in-class support, demonstrating a commitment to adopting alternatives to withdrawal, has been initiated. It is recommended that the whole-school policy and approach to support teaching provision be reviewed to reflect best practice as outlined in the Learning Support Guidelines. The school is commended in its efforts to ensure that pupils attend one support teacher in order to minimise class disruption and allow for continuity in intervention for pupils. Such practice should support the school in the development of a single comprehensive Individual Education Plan for each pupil that will include pupils’ strengths along with appropriate learning targets. Clarity is advised relating to the role of the special needs assistant (SNA) in supporting pupils in all educational contexts. To this end, a policy on the role of the SNA is recommended.

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

Provision for pupils for whom English is an additional language is appropriately guided by a comprehensive school policy. Practice successfully promotes inclusion and the culture of newcomer pupils is supported and celebrated. Support is based on the outcomes of pupils’ assessed language learning needs. Specific support is devised following consultation with relevant class teachers. Language support is provided on a withdrawal basis. It is delivered in a structured manner for set periods of time. A combination of appropriate teaching approaches is employed and a range of stimulating resources is used consistently. Pupils from the Traveller community are fully integrated into the school. These pupils receive supplementary support in literacy and numeracy primarily on a withdrawal basis. Lessons are well structured and varied methodologies are employed effectively to maintain pupils’ focus.

5. CONCLUSION

The school has strengths in the following areas:

- The board of management is committed to the welfare of pupils and to the promotion of a climate of mutual respect.
- The principal manages the day-to-day running of the school effectively and he places a very good emphasis on staff relations and communication.
- The Visual Arts programme is successfully implemented throughout the school.
- Parents are supportive of the work of the school.
- Pupils are self-confident and respectful and eagerly engage in all classroom activities.

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

- The in-school management team, under the guidance of the school principal, should prioritise a review of curriculum policies to ensure adherence to the principles of the Primary School Curriculum (1999) and to reflect the specific needs of this school and its context.
- A review of the classroom-planning process to include suitably differentiated approaches and assessment strategies is recommended so that all pupils’ skills and concepts can be developed appropriately at each class level.
• A whole-school focus on improved attainment in reading should be an immediate priority for staff.
• It is recommended that the large number of pupils who are withdrawn for literacy and numeracy support be provided with a differentiated programme within their mainstream class in all instances and that mainstream and support teachers liaise closely in the implementation of these programmes.
• The whole-school policy and approach to learning support provision should be reviewed to reflect best practice as outlined in the Learning Support Guidelines.

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 Board of Management wishes to thank the inspectorial team and staff alike for the thoroughly professional and courteous way in which the Whole School Evaluation was conducted and reported. The Board recognises the many positives highlighted throughout this WSE including particularly the following:

1. The In-School Management team ably supports the Principal in the effective running of the school.

2. Parents are actively involved in many areas of the school’s activities.

3. Parents appreciate the professional approach of the staff in dealing with issues of concern.

4. The school is committed to prioritising positive behaviour.

5. Staff are commended for the effort invested in whole school policies for key curriculum and organised areas.

6. Child protection is a priority at our school.

7. A wide range of methodologies is used effectively in many classes leading to an enjoyable experience in Irish.

8. A comprehensive oral English language programme is undertaken in all classes throughout the school while teaching of English, especially the higher thinking order skills is developed consistently.

9. A maths rich environment is well established in most classes with well developed mathematical language consistently apparent.

10. The Visual Arts programme is creatively integrated into many curriculum areas.

11. Early intervention tests in Senior Infants are used to identify any emerging difficulties in learning.

12. Written work in all classes is monitored and affirmed.
13. In the area of S.E.N., literacy, numeracy and social skills are capably supported with progress being monitored, recorded and regularly reviewed.

14. The commendations by the inspectors of the staff in their efforts to minimise class disruptions and provide greater continuity of intervention for pupils with S.E.N.

15. The comprehensive school policy which informs the delivery of E.A.L. programme to children of non-national background, minority and other groups.

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 and staff have already begun to implement many of the recommendations in particular those relating to planning and Special Education. The other recommendations are under consideration with a view to their implementation within the constraints of resources over a period of time. The Board would like to point out some contextual factors which have a huge bearing on the success of implementing the recommendations, such as: the relatively high number of pupils presenting with the need for assessment, unsuccessful appeals on Equality grounds to the Staffing Appeals Board & DES for disadvantaged support which our pupils’ sisters benefit from.