Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Drumfad National School
Kerrykeel, County Donegal
Uimhir rolla: 16137Q

Date of inspection: 07 March 2012
1. Introduction

Drumfad National School is a mainstream, co-educational primary school under the patronage of the Presbyterian Church. While the school has a Protestant ethos, it welcomes all children regardless of religious affiliation. The school currently caters for 23 pupils. The pupils are taught in two multi-grade classrooms. Attendance levels are very good. Provision for English, Irish, Mathematics and History was inspected. The board of management 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.

2. Summary of Findings and Recommendations for Further Development

The following are the main strengths of the work of the school:

- The work of the board of management is very effective.
- The principal provides highly commendable leadership to the school community.
- There is a very good sense of team among staff and shared teaching practices are highly praiseworthy.
- The pupils present as motivated and confident in their learning.
- The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement is very good.
- The standard of the pupils’ creative work is highly commendable.
- The study of local history and the folklore of the Fanad peninsula is highly praiseworthy.
- Parents and grandparents are very closely involved in school life.

The following main recommendations are made:

- Learning-support provision and policy should be developed further.
- B’fhiú na scileanna léitheoireachta sa Ghaeilge a threisiú a thuilleadh. B’fhiú freisin an triail Ghaeilge Dhroim Conrach a úsáid chun caighdeáin na foghlama a mheas. Reading skills in Irish should be strengthened further. The Drumcondra Irish Test should be used to assess learning standards.

3. Quality of School Management

- The work of the board of management is very effective. Members are committed to continuous improvement in pupils’ learning experiences. Current priorities include the introduction of the Aistear programme and the Active Schools programme. The board is commended for the development of the building and grounds. The board is asked to review its practice of facilitating private piano tuition during school time.
The principal provides highly commendable leadership to the school community. Administrative duties are carried out to a very high standard. The principal strives to keep parents closely involved in their children’s school life. She works very diligently to ensure that learning is maximised and that pupils’ emotional and social learning are also nurtured. There is a very positive sense of shared responsibility between the principal and the special duties post-holder. The post-holder contributes very significantly to whole-school initiatives.

The staff comprises two mainstream teachers and a shared learning-support teacher. The commitment of teachers to the pupils’ welfare and to their own professional development is commendable. Shared teaching practices are highly praiseworthy. The school benefits significantly from the work of its secretary/caretaker. There is a very good sense of team among the staff.

The quality of school accommodation is excellent. Classrooms are very attractive, print and number-rich learning environments and outdoor play facilities are very good. The display of the pupils’ creative work is highly commendable. Comprehensive libraries and plentiful teaching aids are available. There has been significant investment in information and communications technologies (ICT). The development of a more appropriate setting for learning-support is a priority for the board.

The management of relationships with the school community is very good. While there is no formal parents’ association there is evidence that parents, and indeed grandparents, are very closely involved in school life. A parent representative from the board of management reported that parents are very satisfied with the quality of education provided in the school. Responses to parental questionnaires, administered as part of the evaluation, indicated that the school is very well run, that there is a good atmosphere in the school and that the children like school.

The management of pupils is very good. They are valued and treated respectfully by their teachers. The pupils present as motivated and confident in their learning. Responses to the pupils’ questionnaires administered during the evaluation indicate that they know the school rules and enjoy supportive relationships with their teachers.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

The scope and quality of whole-school administrative planning are very good. The views of parents are sought as polices are reviewed. A school web site will be a useful means of sharing key polices and the pupils’ work with the school community.

Curriculum planning is good overall. The learning-support policy should be reviewed to include whole-school approaches to supporting pupils at various stages on the continuum of support.

Very effective self-evaluation practices have been initiated by the teachers. They track the pupils’ attendance and literacy and numeracy development with great care. Appropriate targets for developing literacy, numeracy, assessment, ICT, environmental work and learning through play have been laid out clearly in a three-year action plan.

Classroom planning is very good. Teachers prepare thoroughly for lessons and provide a wide range of materials to support learning. Excellent use is made of ICT resources.

Confirmation was provided that the board of management has formally adopted the Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools without modification and
that the school is compliant with the requirements of the Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools.

5. Quality of Teaching, Learning and Pupil Achievement

- Tá caighdeán maith le sonrú i múineadh agus foghlaim na Gaeilge. Déantar na scileanna teanga a tharlaí tri úsáid chruthaitheach a bhaint as gniomhaochtaí atá spreagúil. Tá stóirí leathan de dhánta agus amhráin ar eolas ag na daltaí. Tá cuid maith dóibh ag déanamh dul chun cinn oiriúnach i dtuisíocht agus i labhairt na teanga. Léann cuide de na ndaltaí go caighdeán sásúil. Moltar na gniomhaochtaí réamhléitheoireachta a mhéadú chun scileanna aithint agus fuaimniú na háfacht a dhaingniú. Moltar freisin deiseanna níos rialta a chur ar fáil chun scríbhneoireacht pearsanta a chleachtadh.

- The quality of teaching and learning in Irish is good. Language skills are developed through the creative use of stimulating activities. The pupils have memorised a wide repertoire of poems and songs. A good number is making appropriate progress in understanding and speaking the language. Some pupils read to a satisfactory standard. It is recommended, however, that prereading activities should be increased to consolidate word recognition and the pronunciation of new words in the text. More regular opportunities to engage in personal writing should also be provided.

- The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in English is very good. The pupils' oral language, reading, comprehension and writing skills are progressed in a very effective way. Commendable emphasis is placed on listening to, reciting, writing and appreciation of poetry. The quality of writing in projects completed across the curriculum is very good. In particular, the standard of pupils' creative writing is praiseworthy. Pupils are very familiar with the writing process and use ICT very effectively in this context. The pupils' handwriting has some scope for development, however.

- The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in Mathematics is very good. Effective practice observed included mental mathematics sessions, emphasis on the social importance of mathematics, use of ICT and concrete materials. Pupils engage very enthusiastically in learning activities. Attainment in standardised tests is very good.

- The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in History is highly commendable. Lesson are planned carefully to develop pupils' skills as historians in exploring artefacts and evidence from the past. Local studies are particularly praiseworthy. Excellent work has been carried out in collecting the folklore of the Fanad peninsula. Senior members of the community are invited into the school regularly to share their stories of emigration, hiring fairs, life and school long ago with the children. The pupils' knowledge of and interest in the topics covered are very good.

- The overall quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement is very good. A very stimulating, integrated programme of learning is organised for the pupils. Teaching is creative and the local environment is exploited very effectively in support of pupils' learning. All parents report that teaching is good in the school and that the children are doing well. Pupils' responses to questionnaires indicate that teachers explain things clearly to them and correct the work they do. However, additional input from pupils into the assessment of and for their learning would be beneficial.

- The quality of assessment is good. Screening and standardised tests are administered and results are shared with parents. Written work is well monitored. It is recommended that standardised tests in Irish should be used to measure the quality of pupils' learning in relation to national norms.
6. Quality of Support for Pupils

- Provision for pupils with additional educational needs is good. While planning and recording of work are undertaken diligently, individual pupil learning programmes require more specific learning targets. These targets should be based on pupils’ priority learning needs as determined through diagnostic testing.

- Learning support is provided through group and individual support. Early identification and intervention procedures are working very well. The learning-support teacher works very successfully, alongside the class teacher, in the junior room as part of the early intervention programme. While there is very good collaboration and communication between the support teacher and classroom teachers, the introduction of formal planning and review meetings is recommended in progressing individual learning programmes.

- Very effective home-school links are maintained. Parents receive a very informative information booklet when their children enrol. They receive regular letters and parent-teacher meetings are held annually. End-of-year reports are very comprehensive. External speakers are invited to address parents on a range of important issues. A wide range of supportive reading materials and resources is available to parents. Informative meetings are conducted with parents to introduce them to the learning programmes of both classrooms.

- This is a fair trade school which promotes pupils’ awareness of justice and equity in commercial endeavours worldwide. It has a strong environmental focus with composting and recycling initiatives and an organic garden. The school facilitates a very wide range of co-curricular and extracurricular activities. These include involvement in programmes such as Roots of Empathy, Active School and the Pushkin Trust. The school is also involved in a school-twinning programme with a cross-border Gaelscoil. Regular visits by artists and participation in charity events are also encouraged.

Published June 2012
Appendix

School response to the report

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

We, as a Board were very impressed with the professional and empathetic manner in which the W.S.E. was conducted. The report is most affirmative and encouraging and we are enthusiastically addressing its recommendations.

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