An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Carrig National School
Birr, Co. Offaly
Uimhir rolla:16166A

Date of inspection: 3 March 2010
WHOLE-SCHOOL EVALUATION

A whole-school evaluation of Carrig National School, Birr was undertaken in February 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 Science. The board of management of the school was given an opportunity to comment on the findings and recommendations of the report; the board chose to accept the report without response.

INTRODUCTION – SCHOOL CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

Carrig National School is a six-teacher co-educational school situated eight kilometres from Birr town. The school was extended and refurbished in 2008 and the school building provides a very attractive learning environment. School enrolment has fluctuated somewhat in recent years but projections suggest that the future enrolment will stabilise at current levels. The attendance of the majority of pupils is very good.

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>
<th>Number</th>
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<tr>
<td>Pupils enrolled in the school</td>
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<td>Mainstream classes in the school</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teachers on the school staff</td>
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<td>Mainstream class teachers</td>
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<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

Carrig National School is under the patronage of the Catholic Diocese of Killaloe. The school, as stated in its vision statement, strives to provide a well-ordered, caring, happy and secure atmosphere where the intellectual, spiritual, physical, moral and cultural needs of the pupils are identified and addressed. In order to ensure the holistic development of the pupils, the school participates in a range of music activities, drama and performing arts activities, sports competitions and initiatives to support film making, science, engineering, creative writing and healthy eating. The school is involved actively in the Green Schools’ programme. The ethos statement outlines the school staff’s commitment to maintaining high professional standards and to promoting a spirit of mutual respect, trust, co-operation and responsibility among all members of the school community.

1.2 Board of management

A strong board of management provides committed and effective management to the school. The board meets regularly and an agreed report of its decisions is communicated to members of the broader school community. All the members of the board give voluntarily of their time in the service of the school community. Board members undertake specific responsibilities and the roles
of secretary, treasurer and health and safety representative are delegated. Financial reports and end of year accounts are prepared. The school accounts are audited on a three-yearly basis. The annual certification of accounts, in accordance with Section 18 of the Education Act 1998, is recommended.

The board has availed of training provided by the Catholic Primary School Management Association (CPSMA). Members of the board and the staff attended a child protection course facilitated by the Health Service Executive. The board has discussed and ratified many of the organisational policies of the school.

The board’s main priorities over the past number of years included the appointment of staff and the refurbishment and extension of the school building. It places very good emphasis on providing a learning environment that supports the holistic development of the pupils. A wide range of resources is provided for the different areas of the curriculum. The board also funds the teachers’ attendance at continuing professional development courses. Given the board members’ strong interest in the school, it is recommended that they review the standards attained by pupils in literacy and numeracy on an annual basis.

The board members visit the school informally and maintain close links with the staff. They report that there is a good working relationship with parents and the further development of links with the parents’ association is identified as a priority for the future work of the board. The board members value the positive atmosphere in the school and support the work of the teachers. It identifies among the strengths of school the commendable attention given to the care and welfare of the pupils, the high-quality provision for special educational needs pupils, the cohesive nature of the school community, the positive atmosphere in the school and the very good relationships between pupils and their teachers.

1.3 In-school management
The principal, who was appointed to this position in 2005, provides effective leadership to the school. With the members of the board of management, he has overseen the extension and renovation of the school building. The promotion of a positive school climate and the maintenance of good communication among all members of the teaching and ancillary staff, are key priorities of his work.

The principal, together with the teaching staff, have achieved much progress in relation to the development of the school plan. It is advised that, as a central aspect of his instructional leadership role, the principal should lead the review of the implementation of curricular policies. It is also recommended that a whole-school review of standards in curricular areas should be undertaken on an annual basis.

The in-school management team comprises the deputy principal and one post-holder. They carry out their duties with commitment and dedication. The duties are primarily organisational and administrative in nature. The postholders have curricular related responsibilities such as the maintenance of equipment, the organisation of the Green Schools programme, the co-ordination of resources for special needs, the management of the standardised tests and the recording of whole-school assessment information.

The leadership team is well supported by a very efficient and capable school secretary.
1.4 Management of relationships and communication with the school community
The school has a good relationship with the school community. There is an active parents’
association that supports the school through fundraising activities. The parents’ association
contributes to the organisation of the school play, religious celebrations and educational
excursions, and community related activities that are facilitated in the school.

The representatives of the parents’ association report that there is good communication between
parents and the school staff. Parents can avail of opportunities to have ongoing, informal
meetings with teachers and annual parent-teacher meetings are organised. Parents reported that
they received high quality information about their children’s progress. They also reported their
satisfaction with the educational provision in the school and the standards that are achieved by
their children. The further involvement of parents in school life should be explored by the board
of management and the staff.

1.5 Management of pupils
The management of pupils is very good. A very caring and positive climate prevails in the school
and the teachers display a keen interest in the pupils and provide a range of learning opportunities
to enable pupils to maximise their potential. Pupils with learning difficulties and special
educational needs are included in all school activities. The staff encourages the inclusion of pupils
with hearing impairment in school life and teach sign language to support their full integration.
This work is much appreciated by the board of management and the parents’ association.

The pupils appear secure and confident in their learning environment. During the inspection the
pupils displayed courteous, friendly and respectful behaviour towards others, staff and visitors.
The organisation of an annual school play where all pupils have opportunities to participate is a
worthwhile experience in developing pupils' self-confidence. A pupils’ committee is organised
through the Green Schools programme and this is a commendable development.

2. QUALITY OF SCHOOL PLANNING

2.1 Whole-school and classroom planning
The quality of whole-school planning is good. Curricular and organisational plans are generally
comprehensive and reflect the specific approaches to teaching and learning and the organisation
of school life in Carrig National School.

All teachers devise satisfactory long-term and short-term planning. Monthly progress records are
maintained and these provide clear evidence of the work completed in each curricular area. It is
recommended that greater attention be given in teachers’ planning to the objectives of the
curriculum, to the differentiation of learning outcomes and activities for pupils with learning
difficulties. The very good planning undertaken by the special needs teams, which is based on
identifying specific learning targets for pupils, should provide guidance for classroom planning.
At some class levels there is an over-reliance on textbooks as the main source of planning and this
restricts the implementation of a broad and balanced curriculum.

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

An Ghaeilge
Tá cáílúíocht na foghlama agus an teagaisc sa Ghaeilge sásúil ar an iomlán sa scoil seo, le samplaí dea-chleachtais an-mhaith le sonrú i ranganna áirith e. Cloítear leis an nGaeilge mar theanga an teagaisc le linn na gceachtanna agus úsáidear í go rialta mar theanga bhallmainfíochta i rith an lae i ranganna áirithe. Bainntear úsáid as raon leathan d'acmhainní oiriúnacha chun tóamaí an churaclairt a mhúineadh. Úsáidear an drámaíocht go héifeachtach i gcuid de na ranganna agus ní foláir anois an cur chuige éifeachtaí theanga seo a scapadh trí an scoil. Tá cnuaíochadh dán ar eolas ag na daltaí agus áithrisitear le beocht agus le táitneamh iad. Meastar go bhféadfaí an dea-chleachtas atá le sonrú i gcuid de na ranganna a chur i bhfeidhm tríd an scoil. Tá cnuasach dán ar eolas ag na daltaí agus áithrisitear le beocht agus le táitneamh iad. Meastar go bhféadfaí an dea-chleachtas atá le sonrú i gcuid de na ranganna a chur i bhfeidhm tríd an scoil. Tá cnuasach dán ar eolas ag na daltaí agus áithrisitear le beocht agus le táitneamh iad. Meastar go bhféadfaí an dea-chleachtas atá le sonrú i gcuid de na ranganna a chur i bhfeidhm tríd an scoil. Tá cnuasach dán ar eolas ag na daltaí agus áithrisitear le beocht agus le táitneamh iad. Meastar go bhféadfaí an dea-chleachtas atá le sonrú i gcuid de na ranganna a chur i bhfeidhm tríd an scoil.

Irish
The standard of learning and teaching in Irish is satisfactory in general in this school, with very good practice in evidence in some classes. Irish is used continuously as a medium of instruction during lessons and as a classroom management device throughout the day in some classes. A broad range of resources is used to teach the different themes of the curriculum. Drama is used effectively in some of the classes and it is recommended that this effective practice be extended throughout the school. The pupils can recite a repertoire of poems in a lively and enjoyable manner. The good practice which is in evidence in some classes should be extended throughout the school and more regular opportunities should be provided for pupils to practise their oral Irish in pairs and in groups.

The pupils succeed well in reading and most pupils read with understanding. The pupils record their functional writing in their copybooks. In the senior classes the pupils’ standard of writing is at an appropriate standard and most pupils can write a short story unaided. In order that greater benefit may be derived from this work, greater emphasis could be placed on pupils’ free writing and personal writing.

English
Teachers at all class levels prioritise the teaching of English and the programme consists of reading, writing and oral language. The oral language lessons observed provided good opportunities for the pupils to engage in pair work and group work. The learning experiences were structured so that pupils were encouraged to predict, to give opinions and to collaborate. The pupils’ language skills were extended and they were provided with different contexts to practise
new vocabulary. Commercial materials and teacher-devised materials are used as the stimulus for some lessons. Most pupils express themselves confidently and can express opinions and discuss and debate topics. The pupils recite poems which they have studied and pupils have opportunities to write their own poetry and these poems are displayed in the classroom and in the corridors. It is recommended that discrete oral language lessons should be taught on a weekly basis. Additional emphasis should be placed on the development of the pupils’ higher order thinking skills and on the cultivation of their cognitive, emotional and imaginative responses through language.

The standard of pupils’ reading is good. Pupils read from a variety of texts. In the infant and junior classes commercial textbooks are supplemented by the use of parallel readers and materials for shared reading. In the infant and junior classes commendable emphasis is placed on the development of word identification strategies. Comprehension strategies and skills are taught systematically. Commendable attention is given to the development of phonological awareness and the Newell Literacy Programme is used. Attention is given to the development of spelling skills and daily dictation exercises ensure that pupils develop good skills in this area. Pupils are encouraged to read books from the class library and reading records are maintained. Class novels are introduced to pupils in the junior, middle and senior classes. Regular opportunities for personal reading are encouraged. A comprehensive learning-support system is in place and pupils with learning difficulties are identified at an early stage and planned intervention programmes are implemented.

The English plan makes good provision for teaching different genres in writing. Process writing is undertaken and pupils in some class levels are participating in the Write a Book Project. In some classes a wide variety of writing was in evidence in pupils’ copybooks. A greater balance of functional and personal and creative writing should be achieved at each class level.

The standard of pupils’ written work is good. At some class levels, there is consistent and careful correction of pupils’ work and this good practice needs to be a feature of all classes. A whole-school approach to the more consistent monitoring of copybooks and pupils’ writing should be agreed and implemented. It is recommended that a portfolio of pupils’ work be maintained so that the progression in children’s writing in the variety of genres can be monitored and reviewed at different class levels.

3.2 Mathematics
The quality of teaching in Mathematics is satisfactory and some good lessons were observed during the evaluation. Whole-class teaching is the predominant methodology in use and teachers provide individual supports to pupils as required. Concrete materials are used to support pupils’ concept development and some classrooms provide mathematics-rich environments. Where good practice was observed, teachers gave commendable emphasis to the language of Mathematics. In these classrooms, teachers used skilful questioning and discussion to embed and consolidate concepts.

Many pupils are making progress in Mathematics and the majority of pupils achieve satisfactory outcomes. In the classes where teachers emphasise oral mathematics, the pupils have a good knowledge of number facts, fractions, decimals and place value. They display accuracy in computational skills when responding to oral questioning. In some classes there is commendable emphasis placed on revision, consolidation and re-visiting concepts with pupils on a regular basis.

Consideration should be given to extending the methodologies and teaching strategies employed to teach Mathematics. These should include oral discussion, problem solving and estimation
strategies, group work, activity-based learning, guided discovery and the consistent use of concrete materials in all classes. While textbooks are used to promote mental mathematics, the focus of the work should be placed on increased oral work during each mathematics lesson. It is also recommended that the results of standardised tests in Mathematics should be analysed and trends in pupils’ attainment of different concepts at individual class and whole school-level should be reviewed to facilitate the school staff in planning appropriate interventions for pupils experiencing difficulties.

3.3 Science
The teaching of Science is good. In general pupils are enabled to develop a framework of scientific ideas and concepts about Living Things, Energy and Forces, Materials, Environmental Awareness and Care. Experiments and investigations are undertaken at each class level. Good use is made of the available scientific equipment. The pupils develop a broad range of enquiry skills including, observing, predicting, experimenting, planning and analysing results. Good use is made of the local environment and pupils develop their concepts of living things through work in the school garden and through fieldtrips to local bogs and other habitats.

Pupils are well-able to discuss their experiments and their underlying concepts and respond enthusiastically to the activities in which they engage. Nature tables and investigation tables are organised in some classrooms. The Green Schools programme provides an ongoing focus for environmental-based work. The skill of fair testing should be further developed and designing and making activities should be incorporated further into the programmes at each class level.

3.4 Assessment
The class teachers maintain comprehensive records of pupils’ progress. Copies of teacher-devised tests are maintained and teachers use a range of commercially devised checklists and tests to monitor pupils’ progress. Records for each pupil are maintained.

The school’s commitment to the early identification of pupils’ needs and to early intervention is praiseworthy. The Belfield Infant Assessment Profile (BIAP) is used to identify pupils’ overall progression in junior infants. The Middle Infant Screening Test (MIST) is undertaken with pupils in senior infants. Standardised tests such as the Sigma-T and Micra-T are administered annually and the individual pupils’ results are tracked. This is good practice. It is advised that a whole-school analysis of the results of standardised tests be undertaken annually and this analysis should be used to inform teaching and learning, by identifying particular aspects of literacy and numeracy to be targeted in the mainstream classes. This will help to raise the attainment levels of all pupils in the school, including pupils who are not identified as being in need of additional support.

A range of diagnostic tests is used to provide further information on the needs of pupils who present with learning difficulties. These screening tests are used to provide detailed information on pupils’ learning needs and inform the intervention programmes devised.

4.  QUALITY OF SUPPORT FOR PUPILS

4.1 Pupils with special educational needs
The provision for pupils with special educational needs and learning-support needs is very good. The teachers use a wide range of methodologies to match the abilities, learning needs and the
social and emotional needs of the pupils. The teachers manage pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties and pupils with significant developmental delays very effectively.

Supplementary teaching on a withdrawal basis is delivered to most pupils on a daily basis. Pupils receive supports in literacy and numeracy. Pupils’ oral language skills are developed and closely monitored. During lessons, the support teachers present new content and skills through a variety of learning activities and teachers emphasise consolidation and repetition. The pupils’ understanding is regularly monitored through skilful questioning. The teachers use a wide range of resources and stimulating teaching environments have been created. Concrete materials, visual supports and information and communication technology are used, along with teacher-designed materials, to support individual and group teaching.

Comprehensive education plans and individual pupil learning profiles (IPLPs) are drawn up for pupils who receive additional supports. The individual plans outline information from diagnostic assessment as well as the results from standardised tests. Realistic, time-limited targets are recorded, monitored and assessed systematically. In one setting there is a very well-developed approach to short-term planning and as a result there is a very coherent approach to implementing the learning targets from week to week. Daily and monthly progress records are maintained for each pupil or group of pupils who receive support teaching and these contribute to the review of the programmes for each pupil.

The teachers work in the mainstream classroom and this development is a positive aspect of the inclusive ethos of the school. They also provide ongoing advice and support to the special needs assistants. The contribution of the special needs assistants to the full integration of the pupils in the mainstream class setting is very effective.

5. CONCLUSION

The school has strengths in the following areas:

- Effective and strong leadership is provided by the board of management.
- The principal and the in-school management work cohesively as a team and provide good leadership to the school community.
- The school building is bright, spacious and very well maintained and resourced.
- The school provides an inclusive environment for pupils with learning difficulties and special educational needs. The provision for pupils with special educational needs is very good.
- The teachers work enthusiastically and conscientiously and are committed to the welfare of their pupils.
- Pupils are confident and engage effectively in their learning.
- The parents are very supportive of the school.
- The teaching of English and Science is good.
- A wide extracurricular programme is provided.

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

- The greater involvement of parents in the life and work of the school is recommended.
• School review, with specific emphasis on the implementation of the curriculum, should receive greater attention.
• In Irish, more emphasis should be placed on developing pupils’ oral skills and extending teaching strategies and methodologies to focus on the communicative method.
• More opportunities for creative writing in English and Irish should be provided.
• The Mathematics programme should further emphasise oral mathematics, skill development, activity-based learning, and guided discovery. The results of standardised testing should be analysed and used to plan focused interventions for pupils experiencing difficulties in Mathematics.
• The consistent monitoring of copybooks and pupils’ written work should be undertaken.

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.