An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Killian National School
Inver, County Donegal
Uimhir rolla:16603T

Date of inspection: 24 February 2010
WHOLE-SCHOOL EVALUATION

A whole-school evaluation of Killian National School 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 Visual Arts. 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.

INTRODUCTION – SCHOOL CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

Killian National School is a co-educational, rural primary school located in Inver, County Donegal. It participates in the School Support Programme of Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS), the action plan of the Department of Education and Skills for educational inclusion. The pupils’ attendance is generally good and attendance reports are submitted, as appropriate, to the National Educational Welfare Board.

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>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pupils enrolled in the school</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainstream classes in the school</td>
<td>2</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>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT

1.1 Characteristic spirit, mission or vision

Killian National School is under the patronage of the Catholic Bishop of Raphoe. There is a strong sense of community and collaboration which is nurtured by the board of management and the teaching staff. The mission statement outlines the school’s commitment to providing a well-ordered, happy environment where the intellectual, spiritual, physical, moral and cultural needs of the pupils are identified and addressed. The contribution of the principal in helping to create a very positive school atmosphere deserves special mention. The chairperson visits regularly and his contribution to school life is valued greatly by staff and pupils.

1.2 Board of management

The board of management is properly constituted and operates very efficiently. It meets regularly and roles and responsibilities are clearly defined. The chairperson provides effective leadership and board members give dedicated support to school activities. Minutes are taken and a financial report is presented by the treasurer at each meeting. The board complies with the regulations and
requirements of the Department of Education and Skills. It discusses and ratifies plans and policies on an ongoing basis. Communication procedures with the wider school community are very good.

The board has invested significantly in educational resources and supports the development of information and communications technology (ICT). The school is maintained to a high standard and, recently, the board has overseen many school improvement projects including major building works and the development of a wonderful school garden. The playground and the environmental habitats are praiseworthy.

1.3 In-school management

The quality of in-school management is very good. The principal is a highly efficient leader who performs her teaching and administrative duties with professionalism and dedication. She displays commendable clarity of vision and leads and manages the school effectively by setting relevant organisational, curricular and pastoral priorities. Learning and pupil welfare are at the heart of all school decisions. The principal has established a collaborative, inclusive working environment for all staff. She fulfils her curriculum leadership role effectively and promotes the regular review of teaching and learning. A website has been developed by the in-school management team to share information including key policies, plans and school activities with the wider community.

The deputy principal supports the work of the principal very well. It is recommended that the curricular aspects of this post of responsibility be reviewed annually to reflect the school’s chosen priorities for the year. All staff members undertake tasks willingly and co-operatively for the benefit of the pupils. They work in a professional, dedicated manner and enjoy the goodwill and support of parents.

1.4 Management of relationships and communication with the school community

The quality of the management of relations and communication with the school community is very good. The board and in-school management team recognise the supportive parent body to be one of the main strengths of this school. Regular communication is maintained with parents and the monthly newsletter is useful in this regard. Formal parent-teacher meetings are held annually. An end-of-year report is sent to parents; it provides a useful account of their child’s progress throughout the year. Data about attendance is also included in these reports.

The parents’ representatives on the board of management play a key role in ensuring that parents are consulted about school initiatives. Parents support fund-raising events such as the Mummers at Christmas time. Parents also support the Green-Schools and Súgradh le Chéile programmes. This year, grandparents were invited into the school on Grandparents’ Day.

1.5 Management of pupils

The pupils are very well behaved and interact respectfully with staff, peers and visitors. The pupils’ independent learning is valued and pupil co-operation is promoted successfully. Staff and pupils endeavour to work as a team to create a positive and productive environment for all.
2. QUALITY OF SCHOOL PLANNING

2.1 Whole-school and classroom planning

The quality of whole-school planning is very good. School policies are devised collaboratively by staff supported by planning guidelines from the Primary Professional Development Service (PPDS). All policies have been ratified at board level and target dates for reviewing policies are provided. At the time of the evaluation the teachers had begun to review their English plan.

The quality of classroom planning is very good. All teachers prepare long-term and short-term planning for their work. Mainstream class teachers collaborate very well with support teachers in planning for the needs of pupils with assessed special education needs. A range of active teaching approaches and methodologies for multi-grade classes is outlined clearly in the teachers’ short-term plans.

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

Baineann caighdeán ard le múineadh agus le foghlaim na Gaeilge sa scoil seo. Cothaíonn na hoidí dearcaadh dearfa i leith na teanga agus úsáideann siad an Ghaeilge go neamhfhoirmiúil i rith an lae. Bíonn na daltaí rannpháirteach go fonnmhar sna ceachtanna agus tá caighdeán ard a bhaint amach acu i labhairt na teanga. Tá raon acaireann ar fáil don teagasc agus is imholtanta an tsíl ina mbainisteoir úsáid as teicneolaíochtaí an eolais agus na cumais na teanga a mhúineadh. Sa dá roinn baineann fuinneamh, cinnteacht agus éagsúlacht leis an teagasc i gcóitinne. Baineann na daltaí tairbhe agus taitneamh as dramaíochtaí, ról ghníomhach, cluichí teanga agus is féidir le mórchuid na ndaltaí a mhóntú ar leith. Cothaitsear suim sa cheol agus sa chultúr Gaeilge san ardroinn agus is féidir leis na daltaí a chur i láthair ceoil taidisiúnta le cumas ar leith.

Tá na caighdeáin litéitheoiríocht agus scríbhneoiríocht go hard sa scoil. Múintear an fhoghlraíocht go céimníúil agus deantar leathan córasach ar an ngramadach ó rang go rang. Déanann na daltaí san ardroinn trialachta tuisceana go rialta agus freagraíonn siad ceisteanna le líofacht ar leith. Tugann na hoidí tacaíocht an-mhaith do na daltaí trí stór focail agus nathanna saibhre cainte a mhúineadh chun tascanna scríbhneoiríochta a chur i gcónaí. Déantar measúnú ar
Irish
The quality of teaching and learning in Irish is high in this school. The teachers promote a positive attitude towards the language and Irish is used informally throughout the day. The pupils participate enthusiastically in lessons and achieve a high standard in conversational Irish. There is a range of resources for the teaching of the language and the use of information and communications technology at the senior section to teach the strands is particularly praiseworthy. In both sections, there is energy, certainty and variety in the teaching observed. The pupils benefit from and enjoy drama, role play, language games and the majority of pupils can recite rhymes and poems with vigour. Interest in Irish music and culture is promoted in the senior section and pupils can play tunes on musical instruments with competence.

Standards in reading and writing in both sections are high. Phonics is taught in a gradual manner and grammar is broadened systematically from class to class. Pupils’ oral skills are developed through targeted activities. The pupils can express themselves very fluently. The pupils engage successfully in many projects and this work greatly enhances the development of their skills in oracy, reading and writing. Poetry is taught very effectively in both classrooms. The pupils recite poems with great understanding and discuss the conventions of poetry competently.

English
The quality of teaching and learning in English is very good. Lessons are very well implemented. Teachers place praiseworthy emphasis on the development of oral language across the curriculum. Pupils’ oral skills are developed through targeted activities. The pupils can express themselves very fluently. The pupils engage successfully in many projects and this work greatly enhances the development of their skills in oracy, reading and writing. Poetry is taught very effectively in both classrooms. The pupils recite poems with great understanding and discuss the conventions of poetry competently.

The quality of reading is very good. Reading lessons are very effective. Large-format books, reading schemes, shared reading events, class novels and silent reading activities are employed purposefully. Pre-reading activities and phonological awareness activities are implemented successfully and built upon from class to class. The pupils’ overall reading attainments are very good.

The quality of writing is very good. Pre-writing and early writing activities are taught to a very high standard. The pupils write in a variety of writing genres and their work is of a high standard. Their ability to use descriptive language, paragraph structure and punctuation is commendable. Pupils display a noted enthusiasm for Science in this school and concepts explored in lessons are used to very good effect in English writing activities. ICT is used successfully to promote writing-process activities. Some good self-assessment strategies are included in the pupils’ writing folders.

3.2 Mathematics
The quality of teaching and learning in Mathematics is very good. Teachers promote an integrated programme of activities successfully across all strands. Activity-based learning, group and paired work are used well in both classrooms. Concrete materials, calculators and computers are used appropriately to further pupils’ understanding. Activities are adapted effectively for pupils. There is good promotion of Mathematics in the environment with display areas and investigation tables.
in both classrooms. Mathematics trails, games and quizzes are used well to stimulate interest. Pupils in the junior classes have a sound understanding of number and they are acquiring good reasoning skills. In the senior classes the pupils’ attainment is very good overall. Most pupils respond to oral questioning accurately and have very satisfactory computation skills.

3.3 Visual Arts

The quality of teaching and learning in Visual Arts is very good. Many examples of the pupils’ art and craft work from across the strands are on display in the school foyer, on the corridors and in both classrooms. Pupils enjoy the process of art making and discuss the works of famous artists with confidence. Lessons are very well paced and integrated with other areas of the curriculum. Pupils use a variety of art resources and materials and evidence from the pupils’ portfolios shows that their drawing skills are being developed appropriately. Lessons observed in the senior classes during the evaluation were focused on developing the pupils’ skills in tapestry and integrated very well with project work in Geography. The junior pupils experimented with paint and texture. Talk and discussion were integral to learning in both classrooms and the pupils demonstrated good understanding of themes already covered.

3.4 Assessment

Pupils’ progress is assessed on a systematic basis. Standardised tests are administered annually and the resulting data are analysed carefully. Effective screening strategies are used for the early identification of learning needs and appropriate action is taken to address identified needs. At classroom level there is a commitment to the continuous assessment and monitoring of pupils’ learning outcomes. The overall attainment of pupils is very good across the four subjects under review.

4. QUALITY OF SUPPORT FOR PUPILS

4.1 Pupils with special educational needs

The school’s provision for pupils requiring supplementary teaching is very effective. Its learning-support policy gives clear direction to teachers. A full-time learning-support/resource teacher provides intensive, high-quality intervention for those pupils who receive additional support. Individual education plans are prepared following consultation with classroom teachers and, as appropriate, personnel in other professional services. Parents are consulted so as to make the learning programmes as meaningful as possible.

The learning-support/resource teacher approaches her work in a dedicated manner and record keeping is commendable. Pupils are withdrawn individually or in small groups for support. The support teacher also provides in-class support where appropriate. She implements worthwhile writing improvement strategies and the pupils’ work shows a steady improvement over the course of the year. Two special needs assistants provide support for pupils with special educational needs and make a valuable contribution to their inclusion and care in the mainstream classrooms.

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

The quality of provision in this area is very good. The school is part of a cluster of five schools served by a DEIS coordinator. In-school support is provided on one day each week in this school focusing primarily on literacy and numeracy.
Very good work has been undertaken in the formulation of a DEIS strategic plan which is in its fourth year. It focuses specific attention on literacy and numeracy, attendance and parental involvement.

The coordinator provides in-class support to pupils and also works with groups of pupils on a withdrawal basis. He has ably promoted the completion of collaborative local history projects with a particular emphasis on literacy development.

A transition programme is coordinated from pre-school to primary school and from primary to post-primary school. Several information sessions are organised for parents including input on homework, paired reading and Mathematics.

5. CONCLUSION

The school has strengths in the following areas:

- The board of management is active and efficient in supporting the work of the school.
- The chairperson provides strong leadership and sound guidance to the board and staff of the school.
- A welcoming, collaborative school culture exists which serves to create a very successful learning and teaching environment.
- The principal is highly effective in her leadership of teaching and learning and she is very successful in promoting teamwork among pupils, staff and the parent community.
- All members of staff work in a conscientious and diligent manner.
- The quality of teaching and learning in Irish, English, Mathematics and Visual Arts is very good.
- Information and communications technology (ICT) is used as a very effective teaching and learning tool in the school.
- The school is very well resourced and the standard of the school accommodation and its garden habitats is commendable.

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

- Moltar forbairt a dhéanamh ar sheicliostaí bunaithe ar na cuspóirí teagaisc do mhúineadh na Gaeilge. (It is recommended that objective-based assessment checklists are developed for the teaching of Irish.)

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 school Board of Management is very satisfied with the recent Whole School Evaluation Report in respect of Killian N.S., Inver, Co. Donegal. The Board of Management greatly appreciates the thorough inspection of the school carried out by the School Inspector and accepts the contents and findings of the 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

The Board of Management and staff of the school have looked carefully at the report and highlighted all suggestions and recommendations. The school plan continues to be reviewed on an on-going basis. Steps have been put in place at staff meetings in April and September to put in place Assessment checklists with regard to the Gaeilge curriculum. Specific areas of the Curricular development have been added to the prescribed work of the Deputy Principal. As mentioned in the report the development of a reviewed English plan is well under way ensuring that it is in line with the DEIS plan now in its fifth year.