Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Glentogher National School
Carndonagh, County Donegal
Uimhir rolla: 16611S

Date of inspection: 22 May 2012
1. Introduction

Glentogher National School is a mainstream, co-educational primary school under the patronage of the Catholic Bishop of Derry. The school currently caters for 30 pupils. They are taught in two multi-grade classrooms. Attendance levels are generally good. Provision for English, Irish, Mathematics and Social Personal and Health Education (SPHE) 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:

- Glentogher National School provides a very happy, secure and comfortable learning environment for its pupils.
- The principal provides commendable leadership to the school community.
- There is excellent teamwork and collaboration between the principal and the special duties’ post-holder. Both are very committed to their pupils.
- The overall quality of teaching and learning is commendable and the individual learning needs of pupils are catered for very effectively.
- The Stay Safe programme is taught very comprehensively as part of Social, Personal and Health Education.
- There are very high levels of parental satisfaction with the school.
- The pupils behave in a very pleasant manner and are enthusiastic about their learning.

The following main recommendations are made:

- The board of management should hold a minimum of one meeting per term and not less than five meetings each school year as per the Rules of Procedure for Boards of Management (2011).
- Pupils’ reading skills should continue to be prioritised and their attainments in standardised tests should be monitored carefully.
- Team-teaching and in-class support for pupils with additional learning needs are recommended.
- Assessment practices should be developed further.

3. Quality of School Management

- The board of management is properly constituted. Members work hard to secure resources and to develop the school building. Financial accounts are maintained
appropriately. While the chairperson keeps in regular contact with the principal, board minutes indicate that there were only two meetings in the school year 2010-2011. It is strongly recommended that the board of management should hold a minimum of one meeting per term and not less than five meetings each school year as per the Rules of Procedure for Boards of Management (2011). It is further recommended that board members avail of relevant management training for their posts and that an annual report on the operation of the school be issued to parents.

- The principal provides commendable leadership to the school community. Administrative duties are carried out very diligently. The principal has excellent working relationships with his colleagues and with the school community. He is very dedicated to his pupils and aspires to ensure that they achieve to their potential. There is highly commendable collaboration between the principal and the special duties’ post-holder. The duties attached to the latter post should be formalised and reviewed regularly.

- The staff comprises two mainstream teachers. Based elsewhere, a learning-support teacher supports pupils with additional needs. The work of the secretary and cleaner greatly enhances the day-to-day life of the school.

- The quality of school accommodation is good. Classrooms present as stimulating, very well-resourced learning environments. There has been very significant investment in information and communications technologies (ICT) as a support for teaching and learning. Further resources to support the development of comprehension skills in English and reading in the Irish curriculum are required.

- The management of relationships with the school community is very good. At a pre-evaluation meeting, parents’ representatives reported that the children are happy in school and that they transfer very successfully to post-primary education. While there is no parents’ association, this school has a strong community focus and parents are generous with their time and skills in maintaining the building and grounds and in fundraising for resources. Responses to questionnaires, administered as part of the evaluation, indicated very high levels of parental satisfaction with the school. Parents believe the school to be welcoming of parents and to provide a well-run environment for their children.

- This school is a very happy learning environment. Pupils behave in a very pleasant manner and are enthusiastic about their learning. Pupils’ questionnaire responses indicate that they all feel safe in school and enjoy very supportive relationships with their teachers.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- The quality of whole-school administrative planning is very good. All policies should, however, be signed by the chairperson of the board on ratification. While parents are informed that they can view these policies at any time, the use of a web site would be beneficial in further facilitating the sharing of such information with the parent community.

- Curriculum planning is good overall. However, the school policy for Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) should be reviewed and a clear programme of learning outlined for each class level. This policy, along with a list of the RSE resources available to support families, should then be disseminated to all parents. The learning-support policy should also be reviewed and the supports provided to pupils with additional learning needs at each stage on the continuum of support should be clearly outlined. An assessment policy should be devised.
• Both classroom teachers are reflective in their approach to teaching and have undertaken some initial self-evaluation strategies. Appropriate literacy priorities have been identified including oral language and reading. A more systematic approach to self-evaluation is now recommended, including the monitoring of the pupils’ reading and numeracy attainments to ensure they are reflective of national norms.

• The quality of classroom planning is very good. All teachers prepare a wide range of materials to support learning. Very good monthly progress reports are maintained by all teachers. However, reports of monthly progress in the learning-support context should indicate specific learning outcomes in respect of individual pupils.

• 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**

• The overall quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement is commendable. Teaching is very skilful in both classrooms and the individual learning needs of pupils are catered for very effectively. ICT could be used further in teaching, however. In questionnaires, administered as part of this evaluation, all parents agree that teaching is good in the school and that their children are doing well. Pupils’ questionnaire responses indicate that teachers explain things clearly and tell them how to improve their work.

• Tá caighdeán maith le sonrú i múineadh agus i bhfoghlaim na Gaeilge. Baineann na daltaí taitneamh as rainn, dánta, amhráin agus drámaí. Léann mórchuid na ndaltaí go caighdeán maith. Moltar scéim ghrádaíthe léittheoireachta, fíor-leabhair agus leabhair mhóra a úsáid chun taithí níos leithne léittheoireachta a chur ar fáil. Tá caighdeán sásúil ar an scribhneoireacht. B'fhiú breis deiseanna a thabhairt do na daltaí scriobh i réimse seánaí na hاردranganna.

• *The standard of teaching and learning in Irish is good. The pupils enjoy rhymes, poems, songs and drama. The majority read to a good standard. It is recommended that a graded reading scheme, authentic books and large-format books be utilised to provide a wider reading experience. The standard of writing is satisfactory. Pupils should be given further opportunities to write in a range of genres in the senior classes.*

• The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in English is good. Commendable attention is paid to the development of reading skills in the junior classes. Thereafter pupils are exposed to a wide range of reading materials in the senior classes. While teachers have been working hard to create a culture of reading, results of standardised tests indicate that further improvements in reading attainments are necessary. Pupils’ appreciation of poetry is nurtured actively. They engage in an appropriate range of writing activities. Copybook presentation in the junior classes is highly commendable. Pupils undertake a variety of writing genres in the senior classes. Further emphasis on vocabulary enrichment will help to boost outcomes. Consideration should be given to the introduction of cursive writing in both classrooms.

• The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in Mathematics is commendable. Observed lessons were clear and well paced. Oral maths is prioritised in the junior classes and pupils engage enthusiastically in active learning experiences. Written work presents very neatly. In the senior classes, topics are related closely to pupils’ real life
experiences. Most pupils appear to enjoy problem solving. The use of interactive games to progress pupils’ learning in Mathematics is recommended.

- The overall provision in Social Personal and Health Education (SPHE) is effective. The positive school climate is very supportive of the pupils’ learning in SPHE. The Stay Safe programme is taught very comprehensively and pupils demonstrate very good awareness of the rules for staying safe. The circle time methodology is used very effectively in the junior classes. Pupils in the senior classes display commendable understanding and knowledge of topics covered. Teachers share responsibility for delivering aspects of the Relationships and Sexuality Education programme. This is very good practice.

- The overall quality of assessment is satisfactory. Suitable screening and standardised tests are used in literacy and numeracy. However, there is a need to develop the range of testing undertaken to include, for example, a screening test for oral language and standardised testing of Irish and of spelling. Pupils’ work is corrected appropriately and written tests are administered regularly. Comprehensive portfolios of pupils’ learning, including some evidence of assessment for learning, are maintained in the junior classes. This commendable practice should be extended into the senior classes.

6. Quality of Support for Pupils

- The quality of provision for pupils with additional educational needs is generally satisfactory. Individual profile and learning programmes (IPLPs) are formulated in consultation with class teachers and parents. These should be aligned more closely to the recommendations made in psychological reports, however. Pupils’ opinions should be sought in the review of IPLPs and clear targets set for home and classroom activities. Teaching sessions are conducted in a supportive manner. Currently, the pupils are withdrawn for support. The school is advised to develop inclusive in-class support and team-teaching models. The Learning Support Guidelines (2000) should be used as a reference when prioritising pupils for learning support.

- Regular newsletters, homework diaries and school-to-home text messaging are used to communicate with parents. Annual parent-teacher meetings are held and written reports are issued at the end of the year summarising pupils’ progress. From this year onwards, reports will include confirmation of pupils’ attainments in standardised tests.

- The school provides good co-curricular and extracurricular opportunities for pupils. Pupils engage in local cultural and sporting events and partake in a school savings scheme. Guest speakers are invited into the school to talk to the pupils on a variety of themes. An external tutor supports pupils’ learning in traditional music. While the board is commended for its provision of traditional instruments for pupils’ use, the practice of pupils bringing in a weekly fee to pay for this tuition should be discontinued.
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 of Glentogher National School wish to thank the Inspector for the courteous and professional manner in which the Whole School Inspection was conducted. We are encouraged by the positive affirmation contained in the Report. We welcome the recommendations and advice and will work collectively to ensure their implementation.

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, in consultation with the school community, is committed to implementing the recommendations outlined in this report.