

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

**Whole School Evaluation
REPORT**

**Kiltiernan Church of Ireland National School
Kiltiernan, County Dublin
Uimhir rolla:166290**

Date of inspection: 1 February 2010



**AN ROINN DEPARTMENT OF
OIDEACHAIS EDUCATION
AGUS SCILEANNA AND SKILLS**

WHOLE-SCHOOL EVALUATION

A whole-school evaluation of Kiltiernan Church of Ireland 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 Irish, English, Mathematics and History. 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

Kiltiernan Church of Ireland National School, under the patronage of the Archbishop of Dublin, is a co-educational school situated in the foothills of the Dublin Mountains. It operates. The school building was significantly refurbished and extended in 2007 and is a warm, bright and inviting learning environment. Planning is underway to create an eight-classroom school. The school grounds are very attractive and provide safe and secure surroundings for the pupils. Pupil attendance levels are very good and any individual attendance issues are monitored closely and addressed sensitively.

The school is now entering a more settled phase after a period of significant change both in personnel and in its physical environment. As a result of recent changes, most of the class teachers are teaching their allocated class grade for the first time.

The following table provides an overview of the enrolment and staffing in the school at the time of the evaluation:

	Number
Pupils enrolled in the school	192
Mainstream classes in the school	7
Teachers on the school staff	12
Mainstream class teachers	7
Teachers working in support roles	3.8
Special needs assistants	6

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT

1.1 Characteristic spirit, mission or vision

Teaching and learning in Kiltiernan Church of Ireland NS takes place in the context of respectful relationships in which every pupil is valued and affirmed. The school's mission is that the pupils are encouraged to become confident, responsible, life-long, self-motivated learners. This aim is reflected in the responsibilities given to the pupils, in the positive and encouraging school atmosphere, in the relationships between staff and pupils, in the teaching approaches used and in the broad and balanced curriculum provided. The school community is vibrant and committed and its members work very well together.

1.2 Board of management

The board of management, which is properly constituted, works effectively to support the education of the pupils including those with special educational needs. The roles of the members have been defined clearly and they undertake these responsibilities effectively. The board oversees the management of the school's finances and the funding of information and communication technology (ICT) and other learning resources for the pupils. It supports staff professional development and ensures that a budgetary allowance is made available to facilitate staff development on an annual basis. It complies with statutory requirements and departmental guidelines and circulars. The chairperson visits the school on a regular basis to meet with the principal and staff and to keep informed of the day-to-day activities of the school. The board maintains good links with the parent body and the local community. The board reviews all organisational policies and ratifies each curriculum plan. It is recommended that the board now take an active role in supporting the school as the staff members engage in review and self-evaluation practices. This would ensure that the board has a secure and comprehensive knowledge of the school's particular strengths and of pupil achievement.

In recent years, the work of the board has been dominated by the building programme and the associated expansion of pupil and staff numbers. It is currently concerned with managing the growth of the school. In light of this challenge, it is recommended that the board devise a clear vision and a five-year strategic plan for the school. This plan should identify the priorities for the school in terms of its ethos, teaching and learning, enrolment and accommodation. All members of the school community would then be secure in the knowledge of the future directions planned for the school.

1.3 In-school management

The principal leads and manages the school in a highly effective manner. A very positive school climate is established that is characterised by positive working relationships. The transparent and meaningful structures she has put in place to ensure clear lines of communication both within the school and between the school and the wider school community sustain this positive climate. She promotes a culture of teamwork and collaborative and democratic decision-making and fosters leadership and management skills among the staff members. A high priority is placed on the welfare of individual pupils and on the development of independent learning and personal responsibility. She visits classrooms regularly and monitors the quality of schemes of work and teaching and learning. She has excellent interpersonal skills, is highly organised and, together with the school secretary, ensures that the school operates smoothly and effectively. She has taken a lead role in the planning process to date which has resulted in clear and focused procedures and practices and a comprehensive plan for each curriculum area.

The in-school management team consists of a deputy principal and one special-duties teacher. They both carry out their assigned duties very effectively. They meet regularly with the principal and support her by taking responsibility for significant management tasks and by contributing to the decision-making process. The school has a focused development plan which outlines the priorities for the school that need to be addressed. The principal and in-school management team intend to use this plan to guide and direct their work in the immediate future. This development plan should also be used to begin the systematic evaluation of all the school's provision.

1.4 Management of relationships and communication with the school community

Excellent processes are in place to ensure clear and regular communication between home and school. The principal and secretary provide a warm welcome for all entering the school. Formal information meetings for parents take place each September. Parent-teacher meetings are

organised on an annual basis for all classes and twice yearly for the junior infant and sixth classes. An induction meeting is also organised for all prospective parents. The open-door approach adopted by the school ensures that parents are facilitated in meeting teachers on an informal basis to discuss their child's progress. A school newsletter, a text-a-parent initiative and a school notice board all contribute to parents being kept informed of events in the school. The school is commended on the comprehensive information folder issued to parents. This furnishes them with the relevant policies, procedures and routines that inform school life. The special education team are commended particularly on the procedures in place to facilitate ongoing contact with individual parents. The board of management is also praised for its practice of reporting annually to parents on the achievements of the school at its annual information evening. Consideration should be given to publishing this report for circulation among the entire parent body.

The school has a very active parents' association which works diligently and enthusiastically to support the school and its pupils. It facilitates and coordinates a wide range of extra-curricular activities. It has raised significant monies to enrich the ongoing implementation of the curriculum. As a group, the parent body demonstrates high levels of commitment to, and interest in, all aspects of their children's education.

1.5 Management of pupils

The management of pupils is excellent. A comprehensive code of behaviour is implemented successfully. The pupils are encouraged to take on a range of responsibilities during their time in the school. Formal opportunities are provided to them to voice their opinions and to be involved in school decision-making. Pupil behaviour is excellent and they are confident, articulate and animated about their school experience. Pupils are also given opportunities to participate in the student council, which operates very successfully. The council is very well structured and organised. It provides an excellent forum for developing personal and interpersonal skills, and for fostering citizenship and the democratic process.

2. QUALITY OF SCHOOL PLANNING

2.1 Whole-school and classroom planning

The quality of whole-school planning is excellent. Organisational policies are clear and accessible and take due account of the context of the school. They have been developed on a consultative basis and provide clear guidelines regarding school procedures and practices for all members of the school community. Curriculum plans are of an equally high standard. The development of formal systematic review processes for particular aspects of the curriculum has been identified by the in-school management team, as the next priority in the planning and review process. In so doing, an action planning approach should be employed to address identified priorities.

The quality of classroom planning is very good. A format to guide individual teachers' planning in mainstream classes and in special education settings has been agreed. Overall objectives for learning are stated clearly. This consistent approach is commended. Each teacher records monthly progress on an agreed school template. Consideration should now be given to reviewing the current format of the monthly progress record as part of the school's work on developing its self-review processes.

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 modhanna múinte éagsúla in úsáid ag na hoidí, idir dhramaí, obair i bpéirí, chluichí agus thascanna, chun líofacht na ndaltaí sa Ghaeilge a fhorbairt. I bhformhór na ranganna, úsáidtear an Ghaeilge mar theanga cumarsáide sna ceachtanna uile. Moltar an cleachtadh seo a chur i ngníomh ar fud na scoile. Cé go bhfuil plean cuimsitheach curtha ar fáil don Ghaeilge agus go bhfuil na hoidí ag obair go rialta, tá díomá orthu nach bhfuil caighdeán níos airde á bhaint amach ag na daltaí sa Ghaeilge. I rith an mheasúnaithe, tugadh faoi deara nach bhfuil a dhóthain béime curtha ar neartú agus ar dhaingniú cumas cumarsáide na ndaltaí agus nach bhfuil leanúnachas soiléir ó rang go rang. Cé go bhfuil na daltaí in ann téacsleabhair a léamh i ngach rang, níl siad ábalta na hábhair éagsúla a phlé nó ceisteanna a chur ná a fhreagairt go cumasach.

Tá sé socraithe ag an bhfoireann athbhreithniú a dhéanamh ar an bplean don Ghaeilge i mbliana. Moltar san athbhreithniú seo clár leanúnach a leagan amach ó rang go rang; atmaisféar Gaelach, idir chultúr agus teanga, a chothú; agus tréimhse a chaitheamh i ngach ceacht ar neartú agus ar dhaingniú chumas cumarsáide na ndaltaí.

Irish

A range of teaching approaches which foster fluency in Irish is being used in the school. These include drama, language tasks, pair work and games. Most teachers use Irish as the language of instruction and this practice should be extended to all classes. While the school has a comprehensive plan for the teaching of Irish and the teachers work diligently to implement the plan, they are disappointed that the standards being achieved are below expectations. During the evaluation process, it was noted that insufficient emphasis is being placed on the consolidation and reinforcement of the language that has been taught and that a development in language competency is not evident from class to class. While the pupils are able to read the various Irish textbooks in use, their ability to discuss the content or to ask and answer questions is limited.

The teaching staff has planned a review of teaching and learning in Irish for the coming school year. It is recommended that this review include the development of guidelines for the implementation of a developmental approach to language acquisition from class to class; fostering a school environment that promotes the Irish language and culture; and ensuring that sufficient emphasis is placed on the consolidation and reinforcement of the language in every lesson.

English

The overall quality of teaching and learning in English is very good. Oral language is taught effectively and very good emphasis is placed on vocabulary development. Pair and small group work, drama and games are used widely to develop language skills. Pupils speak competently and can express individual opinions with confidence. Poetry is explored meaningfully at every class level.

The teachers foster a love of reading and independent reading is facilitated at every class level. All classrooms provide print-rich environments in which language and reading are promoted. Overall reading skills are taught effectively and the consistent implementation of an agreed phonological awareness programme is commended. Large-format books, class readers, supplementary readers and library books are used well. The introduction of a class novel at senior level is currently under discussion. Progress in reading is monitored carefully and overall pupil attainment is very high with some excellent levels of achievement in evidence. Catering for all levels of ability in reading is an ongoing challenge for the school. Those experiencing difficulties are catered for effectively and very good progress is being achieved by these pupils. Consideration should now be given to providing a more structured early intervention programme in the junior classes and a wider range of comprehension tasks as the pupils progress through the school.

The pupils are enabled to engage in writing in a variety of genres and pupil work is displayed effectively. Some teachers provide excellent scaffolding of the writing process using a range of successful strategies. Good examples of meaningful feedback to the pupils on their work are also in evidence. The standard of handwriting in the school is excellent.

3.2 Mathematics

The overall quality of teaching in Mathematics is good with very good practice evident in some classes. The pupils use a range of mathematical language very well, reflecting the emphasis placed on this aspect of provision by the school. All strands of the mathematics curriculum are taught and in the main the pupils are able to answer questions related to topics previously covered in a competent and knowledgeable manner. Among the elements of best practice in evidence in some classes are: the use of active-learning approaches; the attention to the development of mental mathematics skills; the links made between the strands of the curriculum; pupil access to relevant resources and manipulatives; and the structure and pace of lessons. It is recommended that these practices be reflected at every class level.

The school monitors pupil progress in Mathematics systematically. There is a wide range of ability levels among the pupil cohort. The school caters very well for pupils experiencing difficulties in Mathematics and significant improvements have been made in the achievement levels of these pupils in recent years. A substantial number of pupils show exceptional ability in Mathematics. To cater for this range within the school, it is recommended that the mathematics programme be further differentiated at all class levels. To support this approach, some in-class support should be provided by the learning-support/resource teachers and more emphasis should be placed on problem-solving and higher order thinking skills. The pupils' written work in Mathematics is generally very good through the school and copybook work is presented neatly and corrected diligently.

3.3 History

The quality of the teaching in History overall is very good and the pupils are engaged actively in their learning. A very good range of resources, including artefacts, timelines, photographs and ICT, is used to support teaching and learning. A commendable emphasis is placed on the development of the skills of an historian. An understanding of chronology is fostered through a variety of sequencing activities, the creation of timelines and the attention given to particular historical events. Textbooks are used judiciously to provide background information on historical topics. Some examples of excellent practice in teacher questioning are in evidence. The school is commended for its involvement in the *Grandparents in the School* initiative through which pupils are effectively taught a number of traditional skills by local grandparents. More emphasis should now be placed on in-depth teacher questioning which would facilitate deeper understanding and exploration. A more developmental approach to the teaching of history from class to class is also advised.

3.4 Assessment

The school carries out a range of formal and informal assessments during each school year. The informal assessment includes reading records, spelling tests, checklists and pupil profiles. Standardised tests are administered according to a planned schedule. Results at whole-school level are analysed closely and very good information is available regarding pupil progress. A range of work samples is retained each year to create individual pupil portfolios. All this work is commended. Information on pupil achievement is disseminated to parents and is used to identify pupils who may require further diagnostic assessment and those who exhibit high levels of ability in both English and Mathematics. The information gleaned from assessments has been used directly to influence and inform the reading programme being implemented in the school. The school's assessment policy should also clearly indicate how the assessment outcomes collated are to be used to inform teaching and learning in other aspects of the curriculum.

4. QUALITY OF SUPPORT FOR PUPILS

4.1 Pupils with special educational needs

The school's policy on special educational needs is comprehensive and informative and provides clear direction for the school's provision for pupils with additional learning needs, including more able pupils. Consultation, collaboration and communication are hallmarks of the effective work being carried out by the special education team. The various programmes of work are of a very high standard and are prepared in consultation with class teachers, relevant expert personnel and parents. This approach ensures a cohesive approach for each pupil and progress is tracked and monitored carefully. Very good communication exists between class teachers and the support teachers. Regular discussions and planning take place to ensure that individual needs are being met consistently. Records are maintained meticulously and are of a very high standard. A clear procedure is also in place for discontinuing support. The teaching strategies used in the support settings are very effective and include active engagement, learning in incremental steps, consistent reinforcement and consolidation. Interesting and creative approaches are being used with pupils who have particular social or behavioural needs. The pupils grow in confidence and become independent learners in these support settings. The special needs assistants (SNAs) provide very good support to the individual pupils in their care and meet regularly with the

principal. Class teachers discuss plans daily with the SNAs to ensure that pupil needs are met effectively.

In the context of the current early intervention emphasis in the school, further in-class approaches should be considered. Specific targets and focused programmes of work should be devised for these interventions and learning outcomes should be monitored carefully.

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

The policies, procedures and practices of Kiltarnan Church of Ireland NS promote the inclusion of all pupils. The school atmosphere is very positive and all pupils are valued and affirmed. The weekly school assembly is used to celebrate achievements and to foster a sense of belonging to the school community. Parents are invited to this assembly and some attend on a regular basis. The pupils are encouraged to develop a broader perspective on the world by organising events to raise monies for particular charities and by participating in the *Green Schools* initiative. The school has a very good procedure in place for those pupils who have been exempted from the study of Irish and there is an equally well-planned protocol for the introduction of new pupils to the school.

5. CONCLUSION

The school has strengths in the following areas:

- The pupils are highly motivated, articulate and enthusiastic. They display very good levels of achievement and pupil behaviour is excellent.
- The principal's work in leading and managing the school is highly effective. All members of the school community are valued and affirmed.
- The teachers create a positive learning environment and use a wide range of teaching approaches in implementing a broad and balanced curriculum.
- Special education provision is of a very high standard.
- Very high standards in learning in English are being achieved in the school.
- The board of management and the parents' association carry out their duties conscientiously and effectively and are very supportive of the school.

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

- It is recommended that a five-year strategic plan be devised and implemented to guide the future development of the school.
- In the school's planned review of curriculum implementation, it is advised that an action planning approach be employed to address identified priorities.
- In order to raise pupil achievement levels in Irish, a greater emphasis should be placed on enhancing the profile of the language in the school community and on the practice and consolidation of the language in teaching and learning.
- The outcomes of pupil assessment should be used systematically to guide the teachers in further differentiating and adapting programmes of learning.

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 BOM and staff wish to acknowledge the positive and professional manner in which the evaluation of the school was carried out.

We wish to thank the inspection team for the affirmation of the school as laid out in their report and we recognise areas that have been referred to in its recommendations in section 5. A number of these have already been addressed and the others will be addressed by the BOM, principal and the staff.

The generosity of staff to carry out duties previously undertaken by post holders, which have not been replaced, is recognised by the principal and the Board of Management.

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 recognises there has been rapid growth and change over the last few years. The school will now focus on the implications of all the recent building and developments – the desired acquisition of an eighth class teacher, further review of the curricular and organisational plans, maintaining the school ethos and the school's new enrolment policy as the school continues to grow in staff, parents and pupil numbers. We are now entering a period of consolidation and one during which we will build on our strengths.

An action plan for the next three years has been drawn up by the principal and staff that allows for review of the existing curricular and organisational plans and policies in addition to prioritising identified areas yet to be completed. Through this, self and school reviews will be carried out and monitoring of the learning and teaching that is going on within the school.

Greater emphasis has been put on the everyday general usage of the Irish language and further work is being done to reinforce what is being taught in the classrooms.

An enhanced differentiated teaching approach has been discussed and is now being implemented, particularly in the area of Mathematics, thus ensuring that children can work at their own level of ability and pace in order to maximise their potential. In doing this, more use will be made of the Special Education team within the school to work in the classes with groups of children and to co-teach with the class teacher.