Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Coolbock National School
Riverstown, County Sligo
Uimhir rolla: 16781U

Date of inspection: 3 February 2012
1. Introduction

Coolbock National School is a small, rural school, currently catering for twenty-five boys and girls from infants to fifth class. It is under the patronage of the Catholic Bishop of Elphin. The staff has undergone significant change in the current school year with the promotion of a staff member to principal and the appointment of a new teacher.

This whole-school evaluation focused on the quality of teaching and learning in Irish, English, Mathematics and the Visual Arts. The board of management of the school 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 staff is hardworking and conscientious, led by a principal who promotes professional practice.
- The quality of pupil management is exemplary with pupils displaying an inherent respect for teachers and peers at all times.
- The very strong pupil-teacher relationships that exist greatly support pupil confidence and ensure high levels of pupil participation in lessons.
- Parents actively support the work of the school and provide invaluable assistance with information and communication technology and with the school garden.
- Pupils’ oral language skills are of a very high standard and they result in confident, competent expression from pupils.
- A praiseworthy emphasis is placed on the recitation of poetry at all class levels.

The following main recommendations are made:

- It is recommended that the school’s child protection policy be formally adopted by the board of management and that this be clearly documented in the board’s minutes to ensure compliance with Circular 0065/2011 and Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools as a matter of priority.
- As the school develops its literacy plan it is recommended that a structured phonological awareness programme be implemented throughout the school, together with a reading approach based on pupils’ ability rather than on their class level.
- Teachers should consider a structured, whole-school approach to writing in English and Irish with a greater emphasis on creative, independent writing in a variety of genres to better reflect pupils’ strong oral abilities.
- It is recommended that assessment procedures be developed with greater use of checklists, teacher observation, teacher-designed tests and pupil self-assessment. Individual pupils’ progress should be tracked annually in literacy and Mathematics.
- There is a need to introduce a coherent planning process, in conjunction with staff and board of management, to include evidence-based self-evaluation leading to the identification of specific priorities for development.
3. **Quality of School Management**

- The quality of the work of the board of management is good. Roles and responsibilities have been assigned to different board members. The school building and grounds are maintained to the highest level. The board is reminded of the need to meet the minimum requirement of five meetings per year. School policies should be discussed at board meetings and their ratification should be formally recorded in the minutes. It is recommended that school accounts be certified, as required under Section 18 of the Education Act, 1998.

- The quality of the work of the in-school management team is very good. The recently appointed principal is hardworking and organised and promotes professional practices in various aspects of school life. As a previous member of staff, the tradition of open communication with parents and staff is continued. The principal is supported by an equally dedicated special-duties teacher.

- The quality of the management of resources is very good. Resources are stored appropriately to ensure ease of access and are used effectively to support teaching and learning.

- The quality of home-school communication is very good. Parents are kept informed of the progress of their children through regular parent-teacher meetings, annual end-of-year written reports and communication in pupils’ homework journals. Parents are very supportive of the work of the school and help out in practical ways, in particular with the development of information and communication technology and with the maintenance of the school garden.

- The quality of pupil management is very good. Pupils behave in exemplary manner displaying an inherent respect for their teachers and their peers. Teachers implement the school’s code of behaviour in a fair and consistent manner.

4. **Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation**

- Bearing in mind that a new principal was appointed this year, the quality of school planning is good. The staff has begun a review process of the school plan and has redrafted a number of key policies.

- There is a need to introduce a coherent structure to ensure the planning process supports school improvement. This should include evidence-based self-evaluation leading to identified priorities. The use of a detailed long-term plan and planning diary would support the staff in this process. The board of management is urged to play an active role in the planning process. The recent development of a school website where parents can access the school’s administrative policies is praiseworthy.

- The quality of teacher planning is good. Teachers provide long-term and short-term schemes of work and monthly progress reports. It is recommended that schemes of work be based on pupil outcomes and curricular objectives rather than on textbook content or topics. Differentiated pupil outcomes should be documented as necessary.

- School authorities provided evidence that arrangements are being put in place to meet the requirements of the recently published Circular 0065/2011 and *Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools*. However, while the revised policy has been signed by the chairperson, there is no evidence of the discussion of this policy in the board of management minutes. It is recommended that the formal adoption of these procedures be clearly documented in the board’s minutes to ensure compliance with Circular 0065/2011 and *Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools* as a matter of priority.
5. Quality of Teaching, Learning and Pupil Achievement

- The overall quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement is good. Lessons are structured and paced effectively and teachers use concrete materials and visual aids to good effect. The obvious strong pupil-teacher relationships which exist greatly support pupil confidence and ensure high levels of pupil participation. It is recommended that more regular assessment of outcomes be undertaken across the curriculum to ensure subsequent work can be differentiated effectively.

- Sa Ghaeilge, tá cáilíocht an teagaisc, na foghlama agus ghnóthachtáil na ndaltaí go maith. Baineann struchtúr cinnte agus luas éifeachtachtaí leis na ceachtanna. Moltar go hard na cleachtas a chuireann neamhspleáchas na ndaltaí chun cinn. Tá na daltaí in ann iad féin a chur in iúl go héifeachtach ó bhéal. Moltar foclóir na ndaltaí a leathnú ar bhonn leanúnach agus an Ghaeilge a úsáid gur neamhfoirmiúil í rith an lae. Moltar réimse difriúla de thascanna cruthaiochta, neamhspleách a chur chun cinn don léitheoireacht agus don scribhneoireacht leis an caighdeán atá bainte amach ag na daltaí leis an nGaeilge ó bhéal.

- The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in Irish is good. Lessons have a clearly-defined structure and are paced effectively. The practices which promote pupil independence are highly commended. Pupils can successfully express themselves orally. It is recommended that pupils' vocabulary be continually extended and that Irish be used informally throughout the school day. It is recommended that creative, independent tasks in a variety of genres be promoted for reading and writing considering the standard achieved by pupils in oral Irish.

- The overall quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in English is good. Pupils’ oral language skills are of a high standard resulting in confident, competent expression. A praiseworthy emphasis is placed on the recitation of poetry at all class levels. Reading is promoted through the creation of print-rich environments, attractive class libraries and a shared-reading initiative with parents. Despite these efforts, evidence shows that some pupils are not making progress in literacy. It is recommended that a greater emphasis be placed on a structured phonological awareness programme throughout the school with regular assessment of pupil outcomes. It is further recommended that reading activities be pitched at pupils’ ability rather than class level to maximise their progress. Pupils’ handwriting and presentation of work is of a high standard, although cursive writing should be used consistently by pupils in senior classes. Pupils write in a variety of genres but would benefit from a more structured, whole-school approach to writing with a greater emphasis on creative, independent writing to reflect pupils’ strong oral abilities.

- The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in Mathematics is good. Teachers make very effective use of visual aids and concrete materials to enhance pupil comprehension. Classrooms have mathematical displays which support learning. Teachers place a very good emphasis on the learning of number facts. It is recommended that a greater emphasis be placed on the development of mathematical language by isolating key words, engaging pupils in pair work and asking open-ended questions. In addition, more regular assessment of outcomes should be undertaken to ensure subsequent work can be differentiated effectively.

- Many aspects of the teaching and learning in the Visual Arts are good. Pupils engage willingly in activities and display a very good knowledge of renowned artists and their work. There is, however, considerable scope for the development of pupil creativity through the visual arts programme and for a greater emphasis on the artistic process by working from the children’s experience and imagination, in line with curriculum guidelines.

- The quality of assessment shows scope for development. Standardised tests are administered annually in literacy and numeracy and pupil progress is assessed through the correction and monitoring of their work. However, it is recommended that
greater use be made of checklists, teacher observation, teacher-designed tests and pupil self-assessment. Programmes of work should be clearly differentiated based on the outcomes of such assessments and the progress of individual pupils should be tracked annually.

6. Quality of Support for Pupils

- The school avails of the services of a shared learning-support teacher. The quality of teaching in the support setting is very good. There is, however, a need to ensure a streamlining of the work in the mainstream classroom with the programmes of work established by the learning-support teacher.

- An effective blend of teaching methodologies is used to support pupils. Both withdrawal of pupils and in-class support are used. The staff is commended for its flexibility which ensures pupils’ needs are addressed effectively. It is recommended that pupils in junior infants be screened to provide an earlier intervention strategy for pupils with additional needs.

Published May 2012
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 of Coolbock N.S. is delighted that the whole school community has been affirmed in its work.

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 Child Protection Policy has been formally adopted and this has been minuted at B.O.M. meeting 18th April 2012.

- Coolbock N.S. is in the process of developing a phonological awareness programme which will include the Jolly Phonics Programme. The PAT Programme is being used in the area of Learning Support. Reading will in future be based on children’s ability rather than class level.

- We are in the process of introducing First Steps as this programme has a great emphasis on the various reading and writing genres which will reflect the strong oral abilities of the pupils.

- More checklists and teacher designed tests have been put in place to track individual pupil progress. A new report format has been selected and assessments for each child are being recorded and stored in individual files.

- All Board members and all staff members are aware of the benefits of a coherent planning process so that specific priorities for development are identified. As recommended written agreed reports from Board meetings are disseminated to all parents now.