An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Ceann Eitigh National School
Kinnitty, Birr, Co. Offaly
Uimhir rolla: 16802C

Date of inspection: 14 May 2010
WHOLE-SCHOOL EVALUATION

A whole-school evaluation of Ceann Eitigh National School was undertaken in May 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 Geography. 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.

INTRODUCTION – SCHOOL CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

Ceann Eitigh National School is a co-educational primary school under the patronage of the Catholic Bishop of Killaloe. It is situated in the village of Kinnity, which is a small community outside Birr, County Offaly. The school caters for children from the village and its immediate locality.

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pupils enrolled in the school</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mainstream classes in the school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers on the school staff</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mainstream class teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers working in support roles</td>
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<tr>
<td>Special needs assistants</td>
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1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT

1.1 Characteristic spirit, mission or vision
Ceann Eitigh National School strives to provide a well-ordered, caring, happy environment where the holistic needs of its pupils are identified and addressed. Its mission statement also notes the importance of staff development and parental and community involvement in the life of the school. The school atmosphere and the range of activities undertaken by the school make a meaningful contribution towards the realisation of this vision.

1.2 Board of management
The board discharges many of its functions effectively. It meets frequently, ratifies school policies, ensures the regular upkeep of the school environment and is aware of matters such as staff in-service and main school events. School accounts are diligently maintained and certified annually. Minutes of board meetings are recorded. It is recommended, however, that these minutes should provide more information on matters considered by the board as this would enhance their potential to serve as a reference point for the current board and future boards on matters of school governance. In line with best practice each board meeting concludes with an agreed report on the meeting. It is suggested that the board should consider the dissemination of a greater proportion of items to the school community. The board is referred to The Constitution of Boards and Rules of Procedure (Department of Education and Science 2007 p. 10) for guidance on this matter. Overall within the school there is need for clarity in relation to the role and responsibility of the board and its relationship with other members of the school community. In this regard the board is advised that, under The Education Act (1998), it has a duty to manage the
school on behalf of the patron for the benefit of the students and their parents and that it is responsible for the quality and effectiveness of education and the management of staff. In order to fulfil their statutory responsibility the board should inform itself of all issues of relevance to school life and, having due regard for established procedures, discuss matters that impact upon the quality of education provision.

1.3 In-school management
A collaborative leadership culture permeates in-school management. The principal affords the school firm, purposeful direction and works in close co-operation with the deputy principal and special duties teacher in leading the school. The effectiveness of the in-school management structures is enhanced through the convening of regular meetings of the in-school management team and the delineation of clear duties for the deputy principal and the special duties teacher. These duties encompass responsibilities across the curricular, organisational and pastoral domains, are ratified by the board and are subject to regular review. Currently members of the in-school management team have specific responsibility for four curricular areas and have overseen some specific whole-school initiatives in these areas. However there is an implicit understanding that curricular areas will be alternated regularly so that all areas are included in curriculum leadership responsibilities for at least one school year. This is commendable, and in realising it school management is encouraged to ensure that whole-school initiatives that impact directly on teaching and learning become central to the curricular responsibilities of the in-school management team.

1.4 Management of relationships and communication with the school community
The school plan and mission statement emphasise that parents are integral to the life of the school and always welcome at the school. Parents receive information on their children’s education through informal meetings which take place on an ongoing basis. A formal parent-teacher meeting is held annually and school policy makes provision for other formal parent-teacher meetings by appointment. Parents also receive an annual written report on their children’s progress which includes standardised test results in English and Mathematics. Helpful explanatory leaflets on standardised testing and on paired reading are also available for parents. This is good practice and the staff is encouraged to explore the possibilities of devising similar leaflets on other areas of relevance to pupils’ learning. Information on whole-school issues is provided to parents through an introductory meeting, held prior to the child’s enrolment, an information brochure containing relevant school policies and procedures and through regular text messages and letters.

Parent and community involvement in learning is facilitated through craft activities, paired reading at infant and junior levels and through a specific literacy programme. This programme informs parents on the reading process, provides regular feedback to them on their children’s progress and enables occasional parent and child collaborative work on literacy. This is commendable and the continued development of similar programmes within the school is encouraged.

The school has a strong parents’ association which provides valuable support to the school. This support includes the organisation of talks and courses for parents, specifically targeted fundraising and a contribution to policy formulation. The parents’ association is currently investigating the possibility of affiliating to the National Parents’ Council – Primary. It is encouraged to do so as affiliation would enable the school to benefit from the supports and expertise of the national representative body of parents.
1.5 Management of pupils
Effective arrangements are in place for the smooth reception and dismissal of pupils and they are
very well supervised during the school day. Discipline is very good in all classes and the
relationship between pupils and staff is positive and affirming.

2. QUALITY OF SCHOOL PLANNING

2.1 Whole-school and classroom planning
Overall the quality of whole-school planning is good. A comprehensive suite of administrative
policies provides succinct guidance on school procedures and displays an awareness of current
legislative requirements, guidelines issued from the Department of Education and Skills and the
specific context of the school. In the future development of policies, the school is advised to
devise a policy on the use of mobile phones and to formalise the attendance strategies utilised in
the school into a specific policy. It is also recommended that when the enrolment policy is
reviewed that the board should ensure that the order in which the criteria for enrolment is applied
is clearly outlined and that a section on staff use of technologies be included in the acceptable use
policy.

Plans for all curricular areas are in place. The plan for Irish is of a very good quality and has the
potential to enhance continuity in Irish curriculum delivery throughout the school. The outline of
strategies pertinent to each class level across the four strand units provides clear guidance to
teachers on content selection, thereby increasing the possibility that pupils’ learning in Irish will
progress in a structured way. Similar planning for the systematic treatment of curricular strand
units on a whole-school basis is evident in the plans for Science, Visual Arts, Social, Personal and
Health Education, Physical Education and Music. This is good practice. The plan for English
delineates helpful guidance on a whole-school approach to handwriting and spelling. Affording
more detailed consideration to appropriate content for each of the class levels, across the three
strands of Oral, Reading and Writing should now be considered. The mathematics policy
provides a very beneficial section on the language of Mathematics and on appropriate teaching
methodologies. Developing the section on mathematical skills and including a section on
appropriate use of technologies, such as calculators and computers, is now recommended. The
geography plan should identify topics for local studies at each class level and agreed locations for
the study of contrasting parts of Ireland and of European and non European countries for middle
and senior standards. In planning for this the staff should evaluate the advantages of
implementing a two-year cycle of locational Geography for each class level.

There is evidence of parental and board of management involvement in the planning process and
the staff have devised specific action plans for identified curricular areas. The school is now
encouraged to further develop this good practice by devising a strategic framework for the
systematic review and development of administrative and curricular policies and by affording a
formal role to staff, board and parents in this process.

All mainstream class teachers compile long-term and short-term schemes. Long-term schemes are
of a good standard and are based on curriculum strands and strand units. Short-term schemes
adhere to an agreed whole-school template, which also serves as a monthly progress record. In
some cases curriculum objectives are used very effectively to inform short-term planning. It is
now recommended that this practice be extended throughout the school. It is also suggested that
more specific short-term planning for Irish, indicating the specific vocabulary and language
structures to be taught would have a beneficial impact on teaching and learning. Teachers in
special educational needs (SEN) settings compile an individual educational plan (IEP) for all pupils with low incidence SEN. In line with best practice IEPs contain specific learning targets, are reviewed bi-annually and parents, class teachers and SEN teachers are involved in their compilation. Good quality short-term planning is completed by SEN teachers.

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**

Feictear dea-chleachtas áirithe i dteagasc na Gaeilge. Cothaítear dearcadh dearfach i leith na Gaeilge trí fá uáisíod go neamhfoirmiúil ar fud na scoile agus, ó am go chéile, mar theanga bhainistíochta ranga. Ó thaobh scileanna éisteachta agus labhartha de tá sé ar chumas na ndaltaí sna ranganna sóisearacha agus sna hardranganna ceisteanna bunaíthe ar théamaí an churaclamaí ag thuiscint agus a fhreagairt go tuiscineach. Sonraítear deacrachtaí suntasacha, afach, ag daltaí i dtuisceant agus i labhairt na teanga sna méanranganna. Múintear comhráí Gaeilge go foirmiúil i ngach rang agus chorchaítear roint ceachtanna éifeachtacha. Ar an iomlán, afach, b’fhéarr caighdeán na múinteoirí a thabhairt go damaí, gníomhaíochtaí a bhaint amach i bhfoghlamaí ar cheachtanna éifeachtacha. Dá bhfuil sin, mholtar go mbeadh náisiúnta ina dhícheall, mar thoradh ar cheachtan choimeádach agus go bhfuil cosúil leis an gceachtadóirí agus an t-aítheas a bhíonn in ann eacnamaí agus ghráítear an teanga á deachtas a chur in inis. Bhíomar ag roinnt ceachtanna éifeachtachtaí an duine féin san iomráid seo. Leasúnann an scríbhneoireacht go foirmiúil i ngach rang agus cuirtear tús leasúnadh scríbhneoireachtach faoi threoir do na ndaltaí sna ranganna sóisearacha. Sna hardranganna soláthraítear taithí do na ndaltaí scríobh i réimse leathan seánaí agus baineann cruinneas lena saothair. Ba chóir scóp na hoibre sa scríbhneoireacht a leathnú agus a shaibhriú sna meánranganna.

**Irish**

Some good practice is evident in the teaching of Irish. A positive attitude towards Irish is cultivated through its use, informally throughout the school and, from time to time, to mediate classroom management. In oral and aural competencies, pupils’ in junior and senior standards are able to understand and respond with understanding to questions based on curriculum themes. However pupils in the middle standards display significant difficulties in understanding and speaking the language. Conversational Irish is taught formally in every class, and some effective lessons were observed. Overall however the quality of teaching and learning would be enhanced if conversational lessons had more specific objectives. It is therefore recommended that conversational lessons be structured around a specific phrase or language structure and that learning activities be designed to enable the pupils to use this new language in a variety of settings. Technology is skilfully employed to support reading, and effective links are made between reading and conversation in some classes. This practice could now be extended.
throughout the school. Writing commences appropriately with guided exercises in the junior classes. Pupils in the senior standards write with accuracy in a wide variety of genres. The scope of the writing programme in the middle standards should be broadened and enriched.

**English**
The quality of teaching and learning in English is very good. Discrete oral activities are conducted with all classes and pupils can discuss a range of topics with confidence and maturity. Work in poetry complements oral activities and, at various levels, pupils recite poetry with meaning and expression. Reading is systematically developed throughout the school. At infant level the early intervention strategies enable a focused targeting of reading skills. At infant and junior standard very good work is done on raising pupils’ awareness of reading conventions. Pupils at junior and middle standards read confidently and apply a range of word attack skills to successfully decode new words. A broad range of reading material, including novels and newspaper articles, is used to very good effect at senior standards. Pupils’ writing skills are carefully nurtured and pupils write in a variety of genres and are familiar with the processes of drafting and editing their work. In many cases effective practice such as maintaining writing folders, scaffolding of writing and story planning is a regular feature of teaching and learning. There is a whole-school approach to handwriting in place which is consistently applied and results in a high standard of penmanship. At various levels, learning activities in reading and writing are regularly differentiated and teachers are now encouraged to continue to develop and extend the practice of differentiation throughout the school.

3.2 Mathematics
Teaching and learning in Mathematics is characterised by very good practice. A commendable emphasis is placed on active learning. Pupils receive valuable opportunities to work collaboratively and lessons involve the development of skills in estimating, reasoning and problem-solving. Teaching is clear and purposeful. Concepts and procedures are carefully explained and questioning clarifies pupils’ understanding. At the end of lessons learning is frequently consolidated. This is commendable and should be consistently practised. In the senior standards pupils record mathematical procedures in a separate copy and use this subsequently as a reference source. This is praiseworthy and the staff should explore possibilities for replicating it at other levels. At some levels, learning activities are very appropriately differentiated through the use of station teaching. This is very effective, as it caters for pupils’ varying mathematical abilities, and should now be further developed throughout the school. The quality of pupils’ written work is good and the evidence of their attainment tests and tasks completed during the evaluation indicates a good retention of previous learning.

3.3 Geography
Overall there is scope to improve provision for Geography within the school. At various levels positive attitudes towards the environment are fostered and the subject-specific language of Geography is carefully taught. Some classes also afford appropriate consideration to the principles of discovery-based learning through well-planned project work and active group learning. Some very valuable learning activities, designed around local, national and international environments, have also been covered. However the potential of the immediate local environment could be further exploited both to develop geographical skills and to serve as a comparison point for the study of other environments. Care also needs to be taken to ensure that pupils at all standards are exposed to a broad and balanced curriculum. Currently a number of strand units are not included in the programme delivered to middle standards and pupils at this level display poorly developed skills in the area of pictures, maps and globes.
3.4 Assessment
Effective assessment strategies are in place. At whole-school level, screening tests are administered to junior and senior infants and a non-reading intelligence test is administered twice during a pupil’s time in school. Standardised tests in English and Mathematics are also administered annually to all pupils from first class upwards. The results of these assessments are recorded and used both to inform selection for learning support and to differentiate learning activities in literacy. The value of collating assessment data in a format that facilitates comparison between individual pupil’s standard scores in English, Mathematics and non-reading intelligence and that facilitates a year-on-year comparison between pupils’ attainments in English and Mathematics should now be considered by the staff. At mainstream class level a range of assessment modes is in operation in various classes. These include teacher-designed tests, literacy checklists, reading logs and pupil profiles. Some of these strategies should now be incorporated into a coherent whole-school approach to assessment at mainstream class level. A uniform means of recording assessment data which would enable the tracking of pupils’ progress in various curricular areas throughout their school life and agreed means of informing parents and relevant teaching colleagues of results would be valuable elements of such a whole-school approach. Very appropriate diagnostic assessment tests are regularly used in SEN settings to monitor pupils’ progress and to inform learning activities.

4. Quality of Support for Pupils

4.1 Pupils with special educational needs
The quality of support for pupils with SEN is very good. Provision is structured according to the continuum of support and specific early intervention strategies are in place at infant level. SEN teachers liaise closely with parents and have opportunities for regular interaction with mainstream class teachers. Throughout the school, support is provided through in-class work and withdrawal both individually and in group format. Currently in-class work operates mainly at the junior level and is effective in mediating differentiated learning activities. The possibilities of replicating this practice throughout the school should now be explored. Instruction in all SEN settings is focused, clear and targeted to meet specific learning needs. Lessons are appropriately resourced, pupil-teacher relationships are warm and good use is made of information and communication technology to support learning. The special needs assistants make a significant contribution towards the inclusion of SEN pupils in mainstream classroom life.

5. Conclusion
The school has strengths in the following areas:

- The pupils are courteous and respectful both in class and throughout the school. They apply themselves willingly to all tasks and engage confidently with visitors.
- The board of management and parents’ association display a high level of commitment to the school.
- A spirit of collegiality and mutual support exists among school staff.
- Teaching and learning in English and Mathematics is characterised by effective practice.
- The school’s learning support system caters fully for the needs of the school and provides focused support for pupils’ in attendance.

The following key recommendations are made in order to further improve the quality of education provided by the school:
• The school’s procedures for monitoring curriculum implementation should be developed to ensure broad and balanced curriculum delivery at all class levels.
• Greater use should be made of the immediate local environment in mediating the geography curriculum.
• A whole-school approach to assessment at mainstream class level should be developed.

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.

Published, December 2010
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 wishes to acknowledge the courteous and professional approach of the inspector to pupils, staff, parents’ and Board of Management during the WSE. The Board will endeavour to address the recommendations in the report and will review on an ongoing basis.

Area 2 Follow-up actions planned or undertaken since the completion of the inspection activity to implement the findings and recommendations of the inspection.

- A whole school approach to assessment at mainstream class level has been adopted and assessment strategies agreed upon by the teachers.
- A two year cycle of locational Geography has been planned and implemented. Use of immediate and local environment has been planned.
- Use of technologies in Maths has been added to school policy.
- Mobile phone policy developed and adopted.
- Board of Management minutes now more detailed as per recommendation and an agreed report adopted at the end of each school meeting for the school community.
- Board of Management informing themselves of issues of relevance to school life.