Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Oylegate National School
Enniscorthy, Co. Wexford
Uimhir rolla:16828U

Date of inspection: 24 March 2010
WHOLE-SCHOOL EVALUATION

A whole-school evaluation of Oylegate National School was undertaken in March 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 Physical Education. 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

Oylegate NS is a nine-teacher, co-educational school situated in the parish of Oylegate and Glenbrien. It operates under the patronage of the Catholic Bishop of Ferns. While pupil attendance levels are generally good, a significant number of pupils were absent for between eleven and twenty days during the last school year. The school’s initiatives to promote pupil attendance should now be included in a formal attendance strategy.

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pupils enrolled in the school</td>
<td>171</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainstream classes in the school</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers on the school staff</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainstream class teachers</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers working in support roles</td>
<td>2 full time, 1 shared</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special needs assistants</td>
<td>1 full time, 1 part time</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT

1.1 Characteristic spirit, mission or vision

Oylegate NS aims to enable all pupils to realise their potential and to achieve satisfaction and success at their own level. It endeavours to create a happy learning environment in which respect and a spirit of cooperation are promoted. During the course of the evaluation, these commitments were seen to be reflected in the welcoming, supportive school atmosphere and in the positive and respectful interactions between teachers, pupils and their peers.

1.2 Board of management

The board of management is committed to supporting the work of the school and is properly constituted. The board convenes regularly, minutes of meetings are maintained carefully and accounts are now to be audited annually. Individual board members undertake a number of roles and responsibilities diligently. The board is operating in compliance with departmental regulations regarding the retention of pupils. The board should ensure that the integrity of the school day and the school year are maintained as per the terms of departmental circular 11/95, Time in School. The board has been involved in developing and ratifying a number of...
organisational policies. It is recommended that the school’s code of behaviour be reviewed to incorporate the provisions of the Education Welfare Act (2000) regarding suspension and expulsion and the guidelines of the National Education Welfare Board. The school’s enrolment policy provides for the deferral of enrolment of pupils with special educational needs. It is recommended that this policy be reviewed to ensure it is in full compliance with pertinent equality legislation. The board’s active engagement in the systematic review of all curriculum plans and organisational policies is recommended. It is also advised that the board formally ratify, sign and date all plans and policies. Positive relationships between the board and school staff, parents and the local community are reported.

1.3 In-school management

The in-school management team comprises the principal, the deputy principal and two special-duties teachers. The principal was appointed to this position in September 2009. The cultivation of a happy school environment, which embraces all the partners in education, and the promotion of high standards of education are central to his vision for the school. A culture of teamwork is fostered effectively by the principal and the in-school management team. The dedication of staff to the care of pupils and to the ongoing development of the school is commended. The principal is ably supported by the in-school management team and designated responsibilities are undertaken diligently. In order to ensure the ongoing responsiveness of assigned duties to the evolving needs of the school, it is recommended that these responsibilities be reviewed regularly to incorporate the school’s current priorities. In maximising the curriculum leadership role of the in-school management team, it is advised that the in-school management team fulfil a more active role in monitoring the effectiveness of curriculum implementation. Formal and informal meetings of the team are convened on a regular basis.

1.4 Management of relationships and communication with the school community

Oylegate NS is a focal point of the local community and the parents’ association, parents generally and the wider community are very supportive of the work of the school. The parents assist with paired-reading activities at home, supervision of school trips and fundraising activities. They are informed of their children’s progress through annual, formal parent-teacher meetings and an annual written report. Additional meetings with parents are held on request. Parents value the traditional open-door atmosphere of the school. To this end, the provision of additional opportunities for their more direct involvement in in-school activities should be considered. Regular contact with parents is maintained through letters, a text-a-parent initiative and newsletters. The parents’ association meets regularly and meetings are attended by the principal. Parents have been involved in the development of a small number of policies and a range of draft organisational policies has been furnished recently to the parents’ association for their input. The proposed enhanced role of parents in policy formation and review is noted and welcomed.

1.5 Management of pupils

The management of pupils is very good. The pupils are well behaved, mannerly and courteous. They engage in the range of school activities with interest and work effectively in a collaborative manner. Senior pupils respond well to opportunities to exercise responsibility and the pupils’ participation in whole-school decision making is promoted through the work of the Green Schools committee. In the pending review of the school’s code of behaviour and anti-bullying policy, the collaborative involvement of teachers, parents and pupils should be facilitated.
2. QUALITY OF SCHOOL PLANNING

2.1 Whole-school and classroom planning

The school staff, under the coordination of the principal, has embarked recently on a renewed whole-school planning process involving the redrafting and revising of all curriculum plans and organisational policies. The challenges for the school in regard to planning include: the establishment of key curriculum and organisational priorities; ensuring that curriculum plans outline clearly the spiral approach to curriculum implementation and that they are used to guide individual teacher planning; and the development of systems to regularly monitor the implementation and impact of whole-school objectives. The development and implementation of action plans to address agreed whole-school priorities is recommended. All teachers provide long-term and short-term plans of work. Overall, there is scope for development in the quality of classroom planning. Some planning is based primarily on the textbooks in use and it does not take sufficient cognisance of the curriculum guidelines. The proposed adoption of a common framework for planning is welcomed. To this end, ensuring that all plans provide clarity and direction for teaching through the identification of specific learning objectives is advised. Monthly progress records are maintained by all teachers. It is advised that these records detail clearly the learning outcomes that have been achieved by the pupils and that they are reviewed systematically to evaluate the effectiveness of curriculum implementation at a whole-school level.

2.2 Child protection policy and procedures

There is no formal child protection policy in place in the school. The Board is reminded that, in compliance with Primary Circular 0061/2006, it should immediately and formally adopt the Child Protection Guidelines for Primary Schools (Department of Education and Science, September 2001). These child protection procedures should be brought to the attention of management, school staff and parents; a copy of the procedures should be provided to all staff (including all new staff); and management should ensure that all staff are familiar with the procedures to be followed. A designated liaison person (DLP) and a deputy DLP should be appointed in line with the requirements of the guidelines.

3. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

3.1 Language

Gaeilge

Is léir go bhfuil na hoidí ag iarraidh spéis agus dearcadh dearfach i leith na Gaeilge a chur có a chhothú i measc na ndaltaí agus cruthaítear lánthigh suíme don Ghaeilge sna ranganna uile. Ar an iomlán, múnntear an Ghaeilge go sásúil. Tríd an scoil, baintear feidhm as acmhainní oiriúnaíocht, drámaíocht agus obair bheirte chu í scileanna teanga i ndaon Ghaeilge sna ranganna. I roinnt ranganna, éirionn leis na hoidí an ghradach a chomhtháthú gheilleachtaí ins na ceachtanna. Cé go bhfuil stórfhocal cuí ar eolas ag eolais nó ndaltaí, tá mionchuid do chuid iarracht a dhéanamh le scileanna dearsaí a thabhairt. Na mblathar buan bheaganaí le haghaidh a dhéanamh le bhfuil stórfhocal cuí agus leis na hoidí a chur i bhfeidhm déanta air. Ní mór athbhreithniú a dhéanamh ar an chur chuige cumarsáide. Ní mór athbhreithniú a dhéanamh le scileanna dearsaí a chur chuige cumarsáide. Ní mór athbhreithniú a dhéanamh le scileanna dearsaí a chur chuige cumarsáide.
Irish

It is evident that the teachers aim to foster an interest in and a positive attitude to the Irish language among the pupils and designated interest areas are created in all classrooms. In the main, the teaching of Irish is satisfactory. Throughout the school, appropriate resources, drama and pair work are employed in the promotion of the pupils’ language skills. In some classes, teachers succeed in integrating grammar effectively in lessons. While a majority of the pupils demonstrate suitable vocabulary development, a minority are capable of asking and answering simple questions. It is recommended that the pupils’ communication abilities be enhanced. A more structured and clearer emphasis should be placed on the communicative approach to learning. More regular opportunities should be provided for the pupils’ to participate in authentic communication. It is recommended that the school plan for Irish be reviewed and attention be given to continuity and progression in the pupils’ learning from class to class. Reading is, in the main, based on the workbooks in use, with good use being made of large-format books in some classes. Some pupils demonstrate satisfactory reading competence. To further develop their reading skills and to enhance their accuracy, the use of a broader range of reading material and a structured approach to the teaching of phonics is recommended. Functional writing activities are primarily practised while some examples of the pupils’ personal writing are in evidence. In some classes, songs and poems are employed appropriately to reinforce learning.

English

The teaching of English is generally good. The pupils’ oral language skills are developed across a range of curriculum areas and talk and discussion form an integral part of lessons. A majority of the pupils display an appropriate ability to communicate across a range of topics and themes. In order to ensure that all pupils express themselves with competence and confidence, it is recommended that a more focused approach to oral language development be implemented throughout the school. All teachers should ensure that the breadth of oral language objectives of the primary curriculum is addressed at each class level. In many classes, the pupils recite a range of poems with interest and expression. The use of thematic approaches to poetry, with pupils being encouraged to learn preferred poems or excerpts from such poems, should be considered. The pupils demonstrate good reading standards in accordance with their differing ability levels. A number of strategies are employed effectively to foster an interest in reading across the school. These include paired and buddy reading, silent reading and shared reading with parents. Supplementary readers and well stocked libraries are available in some classes. A review of the reading material available in all classes is advised to facilitate the pupils to engage in independent reading at an appropriate instructional level. A praiseworthy emphasis is placed on the development of the pupils’ phonological and phonemic awareness. In implementing the reading programme, the more widespread use of language-experience approaches and a review of the early introduction of formal reading are advised. Class novels are used to enrich the reading programme in the middle and senior classes. As a means of building on the pupils’ existing abilities, a more in-depth exposure to a wider range of class novels is recommended.

In most classes, the pupils engage in a range of writing genres and some opportunities are provided for the promotion of a process approach to writing. The implementation of a whole-school approach to writing is recommended. This should include regular opportunities for the
pupils to engage in developmental process writing and their exposure to the breadth of writing genres. Spelling tests are a feature of practice across the school. A multi-strategy approach to the teaching of spellings should now be considered.

3.2 Mathematics

Overall, the teaching of Mathematics is good. Features of effective practice include structured talk and discussion, focussed questioning and the clear explanation of concepts. A suitable range of resources is employed, including well-devised opportunities to use the classroom and school environments. Activity-based learning is facilitated through the effective use of group work and pair work. Many fine examples of linkage and integration of Mathematics are in evidence. In the main, the pupils display positive levels of understanding of content previously completed across the strands. They would benefit from additional development of their estimation and problem-solving abilities. In order to further improve pupil achievement levels, it is recommended that whole-school approaches to the promotion of mental mathematics and problem-solving be agreed and implemented. A greater level of structured differentiation is recommended to respond to the variations in individual pupils’ ability levels.

3.3 Physical Education

Teaching and learning in Physical Education is very good. Lessons are well structured and successfully combine the development of specific physical skills with learning in other curriculum areas. A wide range of resources is utilised effectively and the full participation of all pupils is encouraged. The pupils demonstrate enthusiasm and positive levels of achievement. The pupils from first to sixth classes are provided with opportunities to participate in aquatics training at defined intervals during their time in school. The use of external tutors for specific periods of time is an aspect of provision and the pupils are tutored by coaches from the Gaelic Athletic Association and the Irish Rugby Football Union. The dedication of staff and parents in the provision of after-school and lunch-time games for pupils is lauded.

3.4 Assessment

Individual teachers keep ongoing formal and informal records of their pupils’ progress. Some effective examples of assessment practice, in which teachers analyse and use assessment results to guide teaching and learning, are in evidence. These include the provision of formative feedback on the pupils’ written work. Standardised tests in English and Mathematics are administered annually to pupils from first to sixth classes. Early screening tests are administered to the pupils in infant classes. The proposed extension of this practice and the implementation of a follow-through, early intervention programme are welcomed. A whole-school approach to assessment should be formulated and implemented. This should incorporate the use of a broad range of assessment strategies to monitor the ongoing learning of individual pupils as they progress through the school. The analysis of assessment outcomes should be used to inform higher levels of differentiated teaching and learning. The proposed implementation of a whole-school, data-sharing system is noted and welcomed.
4. QUALITY OF SUPPORT FOR PUPILS

4.1 Pupils with special educational needs

The collaborative, collegial approach to supporting pupils with special educational needs (SEN) is lauded. Supplementary teaching for pupils is provided through a combination of in-class support and pupil withdrawal. In accordance with best practice, individual education programmes have been formulated in consultation with class teachers, parents and pupils, and are reviewed regularly. Copies of programmes are made available to parents. A range of diagnostic tests is used in the identification of pupils in need of additional support and in the development and review of learning targets. In all instances, learning targets should be based on the specific outcomes of school-based assessment and the particular recommendations of externally produced assessment reports. Competent practice is in evidence in the provision for pupils with additional learning needs. Lessons are well structured and a good range of resources, including information and communication technology, is employed purposefully. Interactions are positive and encouraging. The pupils clearly enjoy and benefit from the support they receive.

The proposed review of the whole-school policy to guide provision for pupils with SEN is noted. This review should include the formal adoption of a staged approach to assessment, identification and programme planning as outlined in departmental circular 02/05. It should provide clear guidelines in relation to the roles and responsibilities of all staff members. Attention needs to be given to the procedures for the selection and the discontinuance of pupils. In structuring caseloads, greater cognisance should be given to the implementation of prevention initiatives, increased levels of support for Mathematics and the use of a broader range of team-teaching interventions. Consideration should also be given to the organisation of formal, collaborative planning opportunities to enable support staff to share good practice.

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

The pupils in Oylegate NS experience being educated in a supportive environment and it is reported that all pupils are provided with access to the full range of school activities.

5. CONCLUSION

The school has strengths in the following areas:

- The commitment of the board of management to the work of the school is praised.
- A culture of teamwork is fostered effectively and the dedication of the principal and staff to the ongoing development of the school is commended.
- The pupils are well behaved, mannerly and courteous. They engage in the range of school activities cooperatively and with interest.
- The parents’ association and parents generally provide a high level of support to the school.
- The school staff interacts with the pupils in a caring manner and the collaborative, collegial approach to support for pupils with special educational needs is lauded.
- The teachers purposefully foster the pupils’ active involvement in their learning.
The following key recommendations are made in order to further improve the quality of education provided by the school:

- The board is reminded that, in compliance with Primary Circular 0061/2006, it should immediately and formally adopt the *Child Protection Guidelines for Primary Schools* (Department of Education and Science, September 2001).
- The identification of key priorities for development, the implementation of an action-planning approach to address curriculum and organisational priorities and the development of systems to regularly monitor the implementation and impact of all plans and policies are recommended.
- A review of the school’s plan for Irish is recommended to ensure a systematic approach to the development of the pupils’ communication abilities.
- In English, a schoolwide, structured approach to the development of the pupils’ expressive language competence should be implemented.
- A whole-school approach to assessment should be implemented to ensure the use of a broad range of strategies to monitor individual pupils’ progress and to inform higher levels of differentiated teaching and 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.

*Published November 2010.*
Appendix

School response to the report

Submitted by the Board of Management

Area 1: Observations on the content of the inspection report

• The school would like to thank the inspectors for their courtesy, encouragement and advice throughout the W.S.E. process.

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 school’s Child Protection Policy was ratified last year, and packs were distributed to all the staff. The policy is available on the school website.

• The school has begun a review of curricular planning and will be taking a subject by subject approach. One subject area has already been completed and we envisage completing a second by the end of this school year.

• Updating of libraries is in progress, and Irish books for pleasure have been ordered.

• Increased learning support in the area of Maths has been implemented, using a combination of group tuition and in-class support based on Sigma T results (below the 15th percentile) and teacher observation.

• The school has, for a number of years, implemented a staged approach to assessment, identification and programme planning as outlined in Departmental Circular 02/05. This will be formally ratified during the current school year.

• The SEN team has already begun a formal system of fortnightly meetings where collaborative planning and the sharing of good practice are facilitated.

• The extension of early screening through the completion of Belfield Infant Assessment Profiles with all children in Junior Infants has been implemented. The practice of early intervention has been in place in Oylegate N.S. for several years and acknowledgement of this will be formally ratified during the current school year.