Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Desertserges National School,
Enniskeane,
County Cork.
Uimhir rolla: 16863W

Date of inspection: 20 April 2010
WHOLE-SCHOOL EVALUATION

A whole-school evaluation of Desertserges NS was undertaken in April 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 Drama. The board of management of the school was given an opportunity to comment on the findings and recommendations of the report; the board chose to accept the report without response.

INTRODUCTION – SCHOOL CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

Desertserges NS is one of 6 schools in the rural parish of Enniskeane in West Cork. It is one of two two-teacher, co-educational, Church of Ireland primary schools under the patronage of the Bishop of Cork, Cloyne and Ross in that parish. School statistics indicate a consistent enrolment pattern in recent years. Pupil attendance levels are high. The school adopts effective approaches with regard to attendance which conform with National Education Welfare Board (NEWB) and Departmental guidelines and best practice.

The following table provides an overview of the enrolment and staffing in the school.

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

1.1 Characteristic spirit, mission or vision

Desertserges NS is a Church of Ireland school with an inclusive ethos which affords due recognition for all other religions whilst striving, ‘...to provide a well ordered, caring, happy and secure atmosphere where the intellectual, spiritual, physical, moral and cultural needs of the pupils are identified and addressed’. At the time of the whole-school evaluation the daily practices of the school were in harmony with the mission statement.

1.2 Board of management

The board of management plays an important role in managing the overall affairs of the school community. It is properly constituted in line with the expectations of the Patron and Departmental guidelines. The board meets on a regular basis, follows agreed procedures and plays an active role in building a community base for learning. The board displays an awareness of the legislative framework in which schools operate and is compliant with Departmental regulations with regard to the length of the school year, length of the school day, the allocation of teachers, class size and the retention of pupils. Minutes of board meetings are satisfactorily recorded and maintained. The
board oversees the financial affairs of the school in line with Departmental guidelines and best practice and accounts are certified annually. Financial reports are issued at each board meeting and end-of-year accounts are made available for viewing by the school community.

The board has been active in the development of some school administrative and organisational policies. Relevant examples include the school code of behaviour and enrolment, admissions and health and safety policies. It is recommended that these policies continue to be reviewed to reflect school practices as closely as possible.

The board has not been, as yet, directly involved in the development of curricular policies and it is advised that they now become active, where appropriate, in the ongoing review of these important documents. In that context, it is also recommended that the board ratify, sign and date all policies, including curricular policies on their completion and set review dates.

1.2 In-school management

The principal of the school was appointed in 2000 and she has worked effectively since then to lead the school community in line with the agreed school ethos and mission statements. She works closely with the chairperson of the board of management, organises and participates in the effective supervision of pupils, acts as an instructional leader in the community, maintains school records appropriately, co-operates fully with Departmental officials and seeks to win the confidence, co-operation and goodwill of the pupils, the parents and the whole school community.

One special duties post in the school is structured in line with departmental guidelines and contains a suitable mix of administrative, pastoral and educational duties which are subject to regular review.

Staff meetings are held, at least once per term, in line with Departmental guidelines. In-school management practices are enhanced by informal staff dialogue on a regular basis. Mutual support and collegiality are significant aspects of the in-school management practices in the school and a positive, productive team orientation is apparent.

1.3 Management of resources

The board of management of the school employs two permanent teachers. One is assigned Infants to second class (12 pupils) and the other third to sixth class (10 pupils). This has been a permanent arrangement for a number of years. Opportunity does exist for individual teachers to enjoy a wider variety of teaching experience on a regular basis through internal arrangements which facilitate classroom exchanges in a number of curricular areas. Both staff members engage with professional development opportunities on a regular basis and have used available support services expertise, where appropriate, for the benefit of the school. To ensure that the continuous professional development (CPD) of staff remains in line, where possible, with agreed school needs it is advised that an agreed formal CPD policy be devised for the school.

Additional supports are provided through a shared learning-support teacher and a part-time resource teacher. Both of these positions are based in other nearby schools.
A number of additional tutors are used to deliver aspects of the curriculum in certain subjects. These include a gymnastics coach, a drama teacher and a tin-whistle tutor. All external coaches and tutors have Garda clearance certificates and are confined to definite timeframes which do not, where possible, overlap.

A good standard of overall accommodation was evident and the school has recently been refurbished to a high standard with financial assistance from the Department. A generous supply of appropriate resources is available to support teaching and learning in all classroom settings. Satisfactory levels of compliance with health and safety legislation existed at the time of the evaluation.

An outstanding matter with regard to the planning status of a temporary section of the building was raised during discussions with the board and it is advised that the relevant retention process be now completed as quickly as possible.

1.4 Management of relationships and communication with the school community

The board acknowledges the importance of cultivating good relationships between all partners and stakeholders and it actively embraces the involvement of parents as key partners in the educational process. Structures, including a parents’ association, are in place and clear channels of communication exist. Almost all parents promote the interests of the school in co-operation with the board. They play a role in the development of appropriate school policies, assist in aspects of curricular provision (school gardening, cookery demonstrations, etc), assist in community events and extra-curricular activity and regularly engage in fundraising in support of agreed school objectives.

1.5 Management of pupils

The uniqueness and individuality of each pupil is respected in the school. Pupils respond positively to the effective use of appropriate teaching methodologies and a broad and balanced curriculum is on offer. An emphasis of the promotion of positive behaviour was noted and very good pupil behaviour was observed in all classroom settings during the evaluation.

2. Quality of school planning

2.1 Whole-school and classroom planning

The whole-school planning process in the school conforms to Departmental guidelines and best practice. A comprehensive range of documentation was presented for evaluation and evidence of a developing collaborative approach was noted. In order to further enhance the value of the school plan, as a key guide to teaching and learning, it is recommended that a policy of review be initiated now. Within that review process existing plans can be re-evaluated, ratified and signed by the board and review dates agreed.

All teaching staff presented appropriate long-term and short-term plans for examination and recorded learning achievements in a monthly progress record. Current long-term planning practices would be enhanced by the use of common templates which would identify key
curricular topics in all subjects. Outcomes-focused objective-based templates are recommended for short-term planning at classroom level.

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 Department’s Child Protection Guidelines for Primary Schools (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 English

There is a commendable emphasis on literacy development in the school. Language is emphasised across the curriculum and pupils converse, read and write to a high standard. A positive attitude to books and reading is evident and the written work of pupils is, generally, impressive. Test results indicated appropriate progress in reading.

Individual pupils experiencing difficulty are supported by means of a comprehensive programme of interventions which are based on school policy and on the informed analysis of appropriate assessment data.

3.2 Gaeilge

Déantar sár-iarracht suim sa Ghaeilge a chothú. Úsáidtear an Ghaeilge mar theanga chumarsáide agus mar theanga bhainistíochta ranga go leanúnach ar fud na scoile. Bhí caighdeán maith le sonrú i measc na ndaltaí ó thaobh labhairt na Gaeilge de agus moltar iarrachtaí na n-oidí atmaisféar fábhreach don Ghaeilge a chothú. Léirítear na ceachtanna go struchtúrtha, bríomhar agus bionn caighdeán na h-óibre sásúil. Úsáidtear cluichí cainte oiriúnacha agus obair i bpleiriú agus déantar gach iarracht an t-ábhar foghlama a nascadh le taitbhí agus le timpeallacht na ndaltaí. Cuirtear béim ar ionchar teanga agus is léir go bhfuil spriocanna cinnte teanga á mbaint amach ag na daltaí ar fud na scoile.

Léann formhór na ndaltaí le tuiscint agus le cruinneas oiriúnach. Bhí caighdeán na scribhneoireachta le moladh. Chuirfeadh a thuilleadh deiseanna éisteachta leis an obair mhaith atá ar bun cheana i múineadh na Gaeilge.

Irish

A commendable effort is made to create a positive attitude to Irish in the school. Irish is used consistently as a means of instruction and communication throughout the school. A good standard of spoken Irish was observed amongst pupils and the efforts of the staff to cultivate a favourable environment for Irish were commendable. Lessons were presented in a structured, lively manner and a satisfactory standard pertained. Word games and pair work are used and
every effort is made to relate the work to the experience and environment of the pupils. Emphasis is placed on language input and it is clear that specific language objectives are being achieved by pupils throughout the school.

The majority of pupils read with understanding and precision. The standard of pupils’ written work is commendable. More opportunities to listen to Irish would add to the existing good work in the teaching of Irish.

3.3 Mathematics

There is a consistent emphasis on concept development in mathematics throughout the school and suitable methodologies are used to promote understanding of basic operational procedures. There is an appropriate balance between mechanical operations and higher-order thinking skills and the language of mathematics is given a necessary prominence, where appropriate. The range of resources in support of mathematics development is impressive throughout the school and concrete operations and active learning methodologies are effectively used to further mathematical understanding at the appropriate levels. Standardised test results indicated age-appropriate levels of success in mathematics in the majority of instances.

Advice was given with regard to the advantages of using programmes such as *Maths for Fun* as a means of further developing existing good practice in the teaching of mathematics.

3.4 Drama

The Arts Education curriculum is given appropriate priority in the school. Drama is taught effectively in all mainstream classroom settings and is used frequently as a methodology to enhance the quality of the learning experience in other curricular areas. Pupils are afforded opportunities to experiment with Drama and to improvise. Situations and characters encountered by pupils are used as a means to explore feelings, emotions and to determine possible solutions to problems.

A good use of relevant approaches and methodologies, suitable availability of resources for Drama, and a good balance between Drama teaching and performance were key aspects of the work of the school at the time of the evaluation.

3.5 Assessment

Assessment practices are good and a wide range of screening (MIST) and diagnostic (CRT & LST) and standardised (Drumcondra Maths & English) tests are in regular use. Formal testing procedures are supported by teacher observation, teacher-designed tests, purposeful homework and other assignments as well as by frequent dialogue.

Records are maintained to a high level of efficiency and appropriate data are shared with parents and other relevant educational partners.
4. QUALITY OF SUPPORT FOR PUPILS

4.1 Pupils with special educational needs
Support for pupils with special educational needs is guided by school policy which sets out procedures for screening, planning and implementation. This policy is effectively implemented and the two staff members with responsibility for this work are professional and competent. Support is offered to all pupils who need assistance in English and Mathematics within the constraints of the availability of resources. Parental co-operation is sought and parents of children with special educational needs are consulted in the drafting of individual education plans (IEPs).

A reasonable variety of interventions take place, resources are used effectively, records are maintained to a high standard and information sharing practices are adequate. Good communication has been established with external agencies and regular contact with speech therapists, occupational therapists and educational psychologists occurs.

4.2 Other supports for pupils: disadvantaged, minority and other groups
Dedicated provision for pupils from disadvantaged, minority or other groups was not required in the school at the time of the evaluation.

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

- The board of management, with the assistance of the parents and the community, has provided a suitable and well-equipped facility for teaching and learning.
- The principal works diligently in support of agreed school objectives and adopts a positive and efficient approach in the management of the school.
- There is a positive atmosphere in the school; good structures are in place to facilitate partnership and agreed procedures are followed.
- Good teaching occurs in the school.
- There is an appropriate emphasis on the achievement of good standards across a broad range of variables.
- The school is safe and well-ordered and excellent standards of discipline exist.

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

- It is recommended that the board of management formulate a long-term strategic development statement which sets out the school’s priorities in relation to maintenance, organisation, administration, curriculum planning and implementation, possible amalgamation, school policy development and review.
- It is recommended that, following review, all school policies be signed and dated by the chairperson on ratification by the board of management.
- It is recommended that the school further develop communication through the active celebration of school events, extra-curricular and co-curricular activities and other significant milestones in the life of the community.
• It is recommended that, in recognition of the key role of the staff in the success of the school, a formal policy on staff professional development, based on current or future anticipated school needs, be devised.

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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