

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**

**Department of Education and Skills**

**Whole School Evaluation  
REPORT**

**Scoil Bhaile na gCailleach  
Collinstown, Mullingar, Co. Westmeath  
Uimhir rolla:16868J**

**Date of inspection: 16 March 2010**



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

## WHOLE-SCHOOL EVALUATION

A whole-school evaluation of Scoil Mhuire, Collinstown 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 Science. 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

Collinstown NS is a six-teacher co-educational primary school located in the village of Collinstown in county Westmeath. It is a Roman Catholic school and serves the needs of a wide catchment area surrounding the village. The school was constructed in 1980 and was extended in 1985. The accommodation includes five classrooms, a learning-support room, a general-purpose room and a staff room. There are spacious play areas to the sides and rear of the building. Enrolment numbers have been stable in recent years and are expected to remain at these levels for the immediate future. Attendance levels are very good. 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	110
Mainstream classes in the school	8
Teachers on the school staff	7
Mainstream class teachers	5
Teachers working in support roles	1
Special needs assistants	1

#### 1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT

##### 1.1 Characteristic spirit, mission or vision

Collinstown NS operates under the patronage of the Bishop of Meath. The school's vision is outlined in its mission statement. This vision focuses on the development of a community where children can grow in knowledge and understanding and in the acquisition of skills, attitudes and values. It is hoped that the pupils will leave the school with an enthusiasm for learning, a thirst for knowledge and an appreciation of their religion and the world in which they live.

##### 1.2 Board of management

The board of management is properly constituted and meets once a term. It complies with statutory requirements and with departmental guidelines and circulars. It uses available finances effectively in order to meet the needs of the school. Accounts are certified annually by an external accountant. The board is supportive of the work of the school and the chairperson is a regular visitor to the school. The board is to be commended for its careful maintenance of a safe and attractive environment both within and outside the school and for the regular upkeep of the school building.

The board is involved in the whole-school planning process. School policies required by legislation have been formulated, approved and ratified as have a range of organisational and curricular policies. The school's enrolment policy requires review to ensure compliance with recent equality legislation.

### **1.3 In-school management**

The in-school management team comprises the principal, deputy-principal and one special duties post which is shared between two teachers due to a job-sharing situation. The principal, who was appointed to the position in 2007, has been a member of the school staff for many years. She has a good understanding of the school context and is well acquainted with the majority of the pupils and their families. In addition to her role as principal, she also has responsibility for teaching a multi-grade mainstream class

She is supported by the work of the other members of the in-school management team. Their duties relate to a range of organisational and pastoral responsibilities as well as to certain curricular responsibilities and are carried out conscientiously and diligently. The experience and expertise of the in-school management team could be further explored and utilised in order to develop the middle management role and to have a greater impact on the quality of teaching and learning in curricular areas. It is recommended that the instructional leadership aspects of their roles be enhanced and cultivated to further equip them to lead developments in those areas and to meet the evolving needs of the school. It is recommended that regular review dates be incorporated into post of responsibility contracts. Consideration should also be given to drafting and submitting an annual action plan to the board outlining proposed activities for the year, followed by an annual review of achievements

### **1.4 Management of relationships and communication with the school community**

While the parents' association has met regularly in the past, in recent times meetings have been infrequent. Parents actively fundraise and are generous in their financial support. They participate in sporting and religious events and organise and subsidise a successful book rental scheme. Procedures for communicating with parents and the wider school community could be further developed, however. Opportunities could be provided for parents to contribute more fully to their children's educational provision and to the development of school policies. The development of a school newsletter or the establishment of a website would assist parents in accessing school procedures and policies and would facilitate them in receiving regular updates of school news. Parent-teacher meetings are held in December and parents feel free to discuss their child's progress with teachers at any time. Written reports of progress are issued at the end of each school year.

### **1.5 Management of pupils**

The standard of pupils' behaviour is very good and they are respectful, courteous and polite. It is recommended that the language of the school rules be reviewed in order to continue to promote a positive school climate that will support and sustain the good behaviour.

## **2. QUALITY OF SCHOOL PLANNING**

### **2.1 Whole-school and classroom planning**

The quality of whole-school planning is good. Commendably, the school has developed a three-year developmental plan which targets curricular, organisational and administrative areas. Organisational and administrative issues are comprehensively addressed and policies include statements on enrolment, code of behaviour, attendance and health and safety.

Curricular plans have been developed for all subject areas. In general, these plans are comprehensive and reflective of the content, skills and methodologies of the *Primary School Curriculum* (1999) and provide appropriate guidance to teachers. The English and Mathematics plans provide for the delivery of broad and balanced programmes. The plan for Irish would benefit from the inclusion of detailed guidance for its implementation at classroom level. The plan for Science needs to reflect the particular context of the school and to include the rich variety of habitats and living things within the vicinity of the school itself.

The quality of classroom planning overall is very good. All teachers provide long and short-term planning and present detailed monthly records of work completed. The majority of teachers engage in good-quality, objectives-based planning. Copies of individual education plans (IEPs) for all pupils in receipt of support are included in the class teachers' planning folders. In a few classroom settings, planning needs to indicate how programmes of work are differentiated to meet the needs of all learners in those classes. Each teacher prepares a timetable outlining the weekly allotment of time for each subject. It is recommended that timetables be amended to take account of the minimum suggested timeframe for each curricular area.

## **2.2 Child protection policy and procedures**

Confirmation was provided that, in compliance with Department of Education and Science Primary Circular 0061/2006, the board of management has formally adopted the *Child Protection Guidelines for Primary Schools* (Department of Education and Science, 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***

Tugann na hoidí faoi mhúineadh na Gaeilge go fonnmhar, díograiseach agus gabhann taitneamh agus bríomhaireacht bhreá i gcoitinne leis na modhanna múinte i bhformhór de na seomraí ranga. Baintear úsáid éifeachtach as raon leathan d'acmhainní léirithe chun an curaclam Gaeilge a chur i bhfeidhm i ngach rang agus moltar an sár-chleachtas seo chun tuiscint na ndaltaí a fhorbairt i bhfoghlaim na teanga. Baintear úsáid freisin as lipéidí i nGaeilge d'fhógraí na scoile agus sna seomraí ranga.

Cuirtear na ceachtanna foirmiúla i láthair go hábailta. Spreagtar na daltaí le ceisteanna agus lorgáitear iarracht cheart uathu le linn teagaisc. Baintear úsáid as cluichí, pictiúir, scéalta agus leabhair chun na ceachtanna a mhúineadh. Cuirtear na daltaí ag obair i mbeirteanna nó i ngrúpaí go rialta agus eagraítear na gníomhaíochtaí seo go soiléir. Aimsítear bríomhaireacht agus rannpháirtíocht oiriúnach san obair agus cothaítear meon dearfach i measc na ndaltaí i leith na Gaeilge. Léann na daltaí go cruinn sna meán agus sna hardranganna agus déanann siad iarracht chreidiúnach ar shliochta a scríobh. Baintear úsáid as modh na drámaíochta agus as rainn agus amhráin chun an chumarsáid a chothú. Leagtar béim ar chruinneas foghraíochta a fhorbairt. Moltar modh an aistriucháin a sheachaint go hiomlán agus an dea-chleachtas atá in úsáid ag formhór de na hoidí ó thaobh úsáid an churaclaim de sa phleanáil a leathnú ar fud na scoile.

### **Irish**

*The teachers approach the teaching of Irish eagerly and zealously and the teaching methodologies used are appealing and lively in most classrooms. Effective use is made of a wide range of illustrative resources to implement the Irish curriculum in every class and the good practice in developing the pupils' understanding and learning of the language is commended. Labels in Irish are also used for school notices and in classrooms.*

*Formal lessons are presented ably. Pupils are prompted with questions and accurate efforts are required of them during the lessons. Games, pictures, stories and books are used to teach the lessons. Pupils are put working in pairs or in groups regularly and the activities are well-organised. Liveliness and suitable participation are evident in the work and a positive attitude towards Irish is cultivated. The pupils read accurately in the middle and senior classes and they make credible efforts to write passages. Drama is used as a methodology in addition to the use of verses and songs to encourage communication. Emphasis is placed on accuracy of pronunciation. It is advised that the translation method be avoided completely and that the good practice which is in use by the majority of teachers in terms of using the curriculum to inform planning be emulated by all.*

### **English**

The quality of teaching and learning in English is good. Oral language development is addressed at all levels through discrete lessons, paired work and class discussions, language games and graded programmes. While the majority of pupils express their thoughts articulately, it is recommended that further emphasis be placed on developing individual pupils' speaking confidence in the middle and senior classes. All teachers provide print-rich environments and well-stocked libraries in their classrooms to encourage pupils' interest in reading. Emergent reading skills are supported effectively and pupils at all levels demonstrate very good phonological awareness, word-attack skills and knowledge of sight vocabulary. Reading standards are high and class readers and novels are generally well-matched to ability levels. While the majority of pupils demonstrate good comprehension of reading material, further specific differentiation in mainstream class-teaching approaches would be beneficial for those pupils with special educational or additional language needs. Writing skills are developed commendably at all levels and pupils write in a variety of genres and from various perspectives. Process writing techniques are fostered effectively and there is evidence that teachers help pupils to plan, draft, edit and present their creative writing. Collections of writing are presented in handwritten and typed formats in class booklets. Handwriting skills are developed incrementally and monitored conscientiously throughout the school and most pupils present their work very legibly. Poetry is explored effectively in all classrooms and pupils enjoy reading, reciting and writing a range of age-appropriate rhymes and poems.

### **3.2 Mathematics**

The quality of learning and teaching in Mathematics is good and achievement levels are high for most pupils. A broad programme is implemented in each classroom with due balance between the curriculum strands. Most classroom displays include attractive and stimulating mathematical themes and this good practice should be extended to all classrooms. Lessons are presented effectively through the use of discovery learning activities and exploration of concrete materials. Group-teaching methodologies are frequently employed to promote pupil involvement and peer collaboration. Lessons are structured effectively to allow for the incremental development of strand units and topics are linked to pupils' lives and interests. Throughout the school there is commendable emphasis on the accurate use of agreed mathematical language. Most lessons routinely address the revision of mental mathematical facts and pupils in all classes recall these facts with speed and accuracy. Written work is carefully monitored and demonstrates good

mastery of mathematical operations and computational skills. A whole-school approach is evident in relation to the problem-solving and reasoning strategies used by pupils while solving word problems. Further differentiation of problem-solving tasks would be beneficial in assisting pupils with special educational needs in some classrooms. The skills of estimation, reasoning and measuring are emphasised effectively in all classrooms.

### **3.3 Science**

The quality of teaching and learning in Science is good. Most lessons are well-structured and appropriately paced with due emphasis on using pupils' ideas as the starting point of the lessons. Concept-mapping is used in some classes to gather information about those ideas. Opportunities are provided in all classes for the pupils to be actively engaged in a wide variety of learning experiences. An extensive range of suitable resources is available and is used for teaching Science. In most classes, challenging questions are used to consolidate, extend and verify what pupils know and understand. Pupils enjoy science lessons. They work collaboratively in a variety of circumstances involving groups of differing composition and size. The provision of further opportunities for pupils to discuss their work, in addition to allowing them greater autonomy in planning and conducting investigations and in deciding how to record results and findings, is recommended. A more structured approach to *designing and making* will further add to the pupils' experience of Science. Discussion with pupils, in addition to a review of their work in copies, classroom displays and folders shows evidence of the appropriate use of scientific language and a growing understanding of concepts. A high level of awareness is evident in relation to energy conservation and recycling. The school has formed a Green Schools committee and is currently working for its fourth green flag.

### **3.4 Assessment**

The quality of assessment and recording is very good. Pupils' written work is monitored regularly and constructive feedback is given. Methods used for assessing and recording pupils' achievements and progress are accurate and efficient. Standardised tests in English and Mathematics are administered to all class levels from senior infants through to sixth class and pupils are performing very well. Some high-quality analysis has been carried out on the results of standardised tests from the 2008/09 school year and the school is encouraged to ensure that this very good practice becomes a regular feature of its approach to assessment. Evidence from teacher observation records and results of standardised and diagnostic tests is used to prioritise additional supports for pupils with special educational needs.

## **4. QUALITY OF SUPPORT FOR PUPILS**

### **4.1 Pupils with special educational needs**

The quality of supports for pupils with special educational needs is very good and effectively co-ordinated. School policy is in line with the recommendations of the Department's *Learning-Support Guidelines* and *Special Educational Needs – A Continuum of Support* publications. The strong focus on phonological awareness and sight vocabulary acquisition in the junior classes contributes to the success of the school's early-intervention strategy in literacy. Effective systems are in place for the identification of learning difficulties. The staged approach is implemented successfully to ensure appropriate supports for pupils in literacy, numeracy and social skills. One full-time teacher fulfils the joint role of learning-support and resource teacher. A special needs assistant supports the inclusion of pupils with special educational needs in mainstream classrooms. Commendable individual profile and learning programmes (IPLPs) and individual education plans (IEPs) are drawn up for each pupil receiving support in consultation with parents and mainstream class teachers and these are reviewed at the end of the instructional term. Support

teaching is provided through use of the withdrawal model and some in-class interventions. The learning-support classroom is visually attractive and educationally stimulating for pupils and suitable resources and methodologies are used during lessons to encourage active learning. The quality of the interaction during support teaching is very productive and affirming for pupils.

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

A small number of pupils for whom English is an additional language are provided with some extra language tuition by the learning-support teacher. Further differentiation of work in mainstream classrooms would be beneficial in supporting these pupils.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

The school has strengths in the following areas:

- The board of management is committed to providing a safe, secure and comfortable learning environment for the pupils and staff.
- Some very good examples of teaching and learning were observed in all four curricular areas during the inspection and pupils are achieving high standards, particularly in Mathematics and English.
- The quality of planning and supplementary support for pupils with additional and special learning needs is of a very high standard.
- The pupils present as courteous, respectful and friendly and their behaviour is very good.
- Pupils' learning is enriched by the implementation of active learning methodologies in all classroom settings.

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

- A much greater focus should be placed on the development of the pupils' oral language skills, particularly on the development of their confidence in using language across all curricular areas.
- The duties of the in-school management team should be subject to regular review in order to address the evolving needs of the school. Opportunities for curriculum leadership could be explored and developed to a greater extent.
- The provision of differentiated work programmes for different attainment groups is recommended in order that each pupil can be appropriately challenged and be enabled to make progress.
- Opportunities for involving parents in a meaningful way in their children's education should be investigated and the goodwill and willingness of parents should be harnessed to a greater extent for the benefit of the whole school community.

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**

### **Quality of school management**

#### **1.2 Board of Management**

The school's enrolment policy has been reviewed to ensure that it complies with recent equality legislation.

#### **1.3**

Post of responsibility contracts will be reviewed annually and an action plan will be drawn up for the year and presented to the board.

#### **1.5 Management of pupils**

The language of the school rules has been reviewed in order to continue to promote a positive school climate that will support and sustain good behaviour.

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

### **Quality of school planning**

**2.1** This year we will work on our Irish plan in order to include detailed guidance for its implementation in the classrooms.

The science plan has been reviewed and it now incorporates lessons which reflect the particular context of the school and it includes a variety of habitats and living things within the vicinity of the school itself.

Timetables have been amended to take account of the minimum suggested timeframe for each curricular area.

## **3. Quality of teaching and learning**

### **English**

A priority area we will work on this year is the development of the pupils' oral language skills and we hope to promote their confidence in using language across all curricular areas.