Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Scoil na Naoineán,
Askeaton, Co. Limerick
Uimhir rolla: 16913L

Date of inspection: 25 February 2010
WHOLE-SCHOOL EVALUATION
A whole-school evaluation of Scoil na Naoineán, Askeaton was undertaken in February 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 on the findings and recommendations of the report; the board chose to accept the report without response.

INTRODUCTION – SCHOOL CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND
Askeaton Junior School, Askeaton, Co. Limerick, is a seven-teacher, co-educational school, under the patronage of the Catholic bishop of Limerick, which caters for pupils from infants to second class. The school shares the building and campus with the senior primary school. The school is situated in the town of Askeaton approximately twenty miles from Limerick city. The enrolment in the school is stable. Amalgamation of the two schools should be considered by the board in the future. A number of Traveller pupils attend the school and are very well integrated in the school going population. A small number of pupils with English as a second language also attend the school. In general, the attendance of pupils is very good.

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>119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainstream classes in the school</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers on the school staff</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainstream class teachers</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers working in support roles</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special needs assistants</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT

1.1 Characteristic spirit, mission or vision
The mission statement of the school is inclusive and fosters an atmosphere where everyone is valued and respected, regardless of race, creed, colour or cultural background. Every attempt is made to provide a happy and safe environment for all children attending the school. It was evident during the evaluation period through the interactions with the school community that these values are shared by all and every attempt is made by the staff to ensure their attainment.

1.2 Board of management
The board of management is properly constituted and is supportive of all school-related activities. It convenes at least five times per year and more frequently when the need arises. The chairperson of the board visits the school regularly. These features of good practice are commended. The board expressed that it was satisfied with the quality of the education provision in this school. The management of the school is devolved in nature. The principal is responsible for the daily operation of the school, while nominated individuals on the board address specific responsibilities
in respect of decisions taken at board of management meetings. The board takes an active interest in the support of staff development.

The board takes an active role in overseeing the maintenance of the school, managing school finances, discussion and ratification of school planning policies and the employment of staff. Members of the board have received training in their varied roles. Circulars from the Department of Education and Skills are discussed at board of management meetings and copies of planning documentation are distributed at these meetings. The board has been very active in ensuring that the school building is maintained to a very high standard and have recently undertaken the replacement of flooring, improvement of insulation, resurfacing of the school playground and the erection of fencing around the school.

1.3 In-school management
The principal carries out her teaching and administrative duties in a very professional manner. She has a long-standing relationship with the local community. Her focus is clearly on teaching and learning in the school. She relates well to her teaching colleagues, members of the board of management and the parent’s association. She displays very good qualities of leadership and this is exemplified through the comprehensive school plan that has been developed and implemented in collaboration with the other members of the staff. During the evaluation it was noted that the principal was acting in the role of a learning-support teacher. In light of the widely acknowledged pivotal role of a principal teacher in the overall management of a school, it is recommended that the principal shall not undertake the duties of any type of a special education post, as outlined in Circular 17/00. A wide range of relevant administrative, curricular and pastoral duties have been allocated to the deputy principal and the special duties post-holders in the school. The post-holders carry out these duties in a very effective and conscientious manner.

Staff meetings are convened once per term and matters relating to curricular areas, organisational issues and parent and pupil communication are discussed. Minutes of these meetings are recorded and filed and this feature of good practice is commended. Informal communication is facilitated among members of the in-school management team on an ongoing basis. It is recommended that formal meetings should take place with the in-school management team on a regular basis.

1.4 Management of relationships and communication with the school community
There is a very good relationship evident between the parent’s association and the school staff. A regular newsletter is published by the school providing the school community with updates in relation to the work of the school and the board. It is reported by the principal that parents are welcome to visit the school whenever the need arises and formal parent-teacher meetings are organised on a yearly basis. Written school reports are disseminated each summer. The parents’ association is a long established body and very active in the provision of extra-curricular events for the pupils in the school and fund-raising activities. The parent’s association is affiliated to the National Parents’ Council. The association aims to assist in supporting the work of the school and in promoting links with the general parent body.

1.5 Management of pupils
There is a very welcoming and open atmosphere in this school. Pupils are very well mannered and were found to interact in an open and honest way with teachers, fellow students and visitors. Classroom rules, which are focused on the responsibilities of pupils, have been established in consultation with the pupils and it clearly evident that they are willing to co-operate with the teachers in implementing the school’s code of behaviour. The teachers work collaboratively and are committed to creating a learning environment that fosters pupils’ learning and self-esteem.
2. Quality of School Planning

2.1 Whole-school and classroom planning
The school plan outlines very comprehensive policies on organisational and administrative matters and also on curricular areas. It is evident that collaboration between staff and board of management has taken place in the formulation of this documentation and this practice is commended. The signature of the chairperson of the board is recorded on school planning documentation. School planning policies are discussed by the board and then ratified and signed by the chairperson of the board of management. The contribution of the staff to the formulation of these comprehensive policy documents is acknowledged and the level of work completed to date in relation to school planning is highly commended.

Individual teacher planning is undertaken in the form of long-term and short-term preparation in accordance with Rule 126 of the Rules for National Schools. The teaching staff is commended for the level of work undertaken and for the effective practice which is in evidence throughout the school. Good work is also being undertaken pertaining to individual teacher planning and comprehensive with regard to supplementary teaching and support provision. There is evidence of linkage between long-term, short-term planning and the principles and structure of Primary School Curriculum (1999). Effective practice in this regard was observed: it was evident that very thorough, focused and comprehensive written preparation was presented, which informed classroom practice in a very productive manner.

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
Tá plean cuimsitheach ar fáil do theagasc agus d’fhoghlaim na Gaeilge sa scoil. Múintear an Ghaeilge go féiltiúil tríd an scoil agus cothaíonn na hoidí dearadh dearfach i leith na teanga. Tá iarracht chreidiúnach á déanamh ag an bhfoireann cur chuige cumarsáideach a bhí oiriúnach i measc na ndaltaí agus chonacthas móran samplaí de theagasc a bhí ar ardchaighdeán. Bunaítear na ceachtanna ar ábhair go bhfuil suim ag na daltaí iontu. Baintear úsáid fhónta as cluichí, drámaíochtaí, rainn, amhráin agus as acmhainní oiriúnaí a thugann duine cainte a bheith atá i ndálat an scoil. Saothraithear an chomhrá go díograisí, idir fhoirmiúil agus neamhfhoirmiúil agus neamhfhoirmiúil agus déantar iarracht chreidiúnach a chur in iúl i ndaltaí a bhí ann. Aithrisíonn na daltaí leathan na rainn, dán agus amhrán Gaeilge atá de ghlanntheacht air.

3
Irish
A comprehensive Irish plan informs teaching and learning. Irish is taught in a pleasant manner throughout the school and the teachers display a positive attitude towards the language. A credible effort is made by the team to develop a communicative approach among the pupils. Many examples of high quality teaching were observed. Lessons are based on areas of interest to the children. Good use is made of games, drama, rhymes, songs and suitable resources to develop the oral language of the pupils in the classrooms. Conscientious work is undertaken in the teaching of oral language, formally and informally and a credible effort is made to develop the oral language of the pupils. The pupils recite a range of poems, rhymes and songs that they have memorised and laudable attention is being paid to phonetic correctness, phonology, accent, pace and rhythm of the language. A good start has been made in formal reading in the junior classes. The pupils read from a graded reading scheme with understanding and they display a very good understanding of the topics. The pupils complete formal writing exercises in their copybooks and appropriate emphasis is placed on the development of creative writing. The pupils write in a manner that is suited to the various age groups. It is recommended that increased opportunities for pupils to use the language that they have acquired in a variety of contexts be organised in each class. It is further recommended that increased emphasis be placed on Irish print displays in the school environment.

English
English is very well taught in the school and pupil attainment is of a very good standard. Lessons observed during the evaluation period were well structured and paced and succeeded in engaging the pupils in learning activities which enhanced their learning. Discrete time is allocated to the teaching of oral language by all teachers. The pupils have developed an appreciation of the listener-speaker relationship and attend actively and respond to verbal and non-verbal cues that are used to convey meaning. Increased focus might however be placed on the development of the pupils’ confidence and competence in the use of language and on their emotional and imaginative responses to language. It is therefore recommended that current practice be reviewed and evaluated and that the staff develop a plan for the systematic development of pupils’ oral language skills in discrete lessons and in an integrated manner across the curriculum areas. Central to this will be the provision of increased opportunities for pupils to engage in talk and discussion and the encouragement of pupils to express feeling about and reactions to a wider range of everyday experience, texts and learning activities.

All teachers plan and implement a very effective approach to the teaching of reading. Appropriate attention is placed on the development of pupils’ emergent reading skills in the infant classes and collaborative and experiential reading activities are organised on a regular basis. All teachers foster an approach to reading that is based on pupils’ general language development and the central role of phonological and phonemic awareness in the acquisition of word identification strategies is recognised and addressed in a very effective manner. Of particular note is the
systematic assessment of pupils’ reading skills and the use of graded reading schemes which facilitate the pupils to read a wide range of material which is appropriate to their abilities.

The teaching of writing is systematically developed throughout the school. A variety of pupils’ writing is attractively displayed in each classroom and these samples are of a very good standard. Letter formation and handwriting skills are well developed and pupil handwriting and presentation are of a very high quality throughout the school. Pupils’ work is regularly monitored and evaluated and particular attention is paid to grammar, sentence structure, spelling and punctuation. A range of written activities is engaged in on a school-wide basis. The provision of further opportunities for pupils to experience a wider variety of writing genres at each class level would further enhance their writing skills.

3.2 Mathematics
The school is very well resourced with a wide variety of mathematical materials and equipment. These are very effectively utilised to support teaching and learning. All lessons observed during the evaluation period were of a very high standard. Teachers display a keen awareness of the importance of activity-based learning. Pupils are facilitated to manipulate and use objects and equipment constructively in the development of mathematical concepts and skills. Mathematical language is systematically taught and opportunities for pupils to use this language effectively and accurately are provided. Pupils have developed proficiency in fundamental mathematical skills and in recalling basic number facts. Their problem-solving abilities are developed through the provision of learning activities in which concepts and skills can be learned and in which discussion and co-operative work are practised. Differentiated learning programmes are organised to accommodate pupils of different levels of ability. Pupils engage actively in their learning and have achieved very good standards of attainment. To further enhance current provision in the area of Mathematics it is recommended that Maths Trails and the use of the immediate school environment feature more regularly in the programmes planned.

3.3 Science
A very comprehensive whole-school plan has been prepared for the teaching of Science and a useful range of resources has been acquired which provides for investigative work across the four strands. Very good lessons were observed in which the pupils’ natural curiosity was channelled and which equipped them with the strategies and processes to develop scientific ideas and concepts. Opportunities are provided for the children to observe and interact with their environment on a seasonal basis and visits to the Church garden and Curragh Chase feature in the lessons delivered. Collaborative investigative work is organised regularly for the pupils and their scientific skills are being nurtured and developed. Pupils worked collaboratively in groups on practical investigations while the teachers capably challenged their ideas. Pupils in the infant classes are familiar with local flora. The setting of bulbs and seeds in all classes allows pupils to observe growth and change. The strand environmental awareness and care is well addressed in the junior classes and pupils explore the environmental repercussions of human actions on physical, natural and human environments. Pupils were observed to actively engage and to enjoy their lessons and they are making very good progress in their learning. It is now recommended that opportunities be provided to enable the pupils to apply and use scientific knowledge, skills and resources in designing and making tasks.

3.4 Assessment
The school employs a wide range of assessment modes and strategies in the areas of literacy and numeracy. These effectively inform teachers of the progress and difficulties which individual pupils are making and they are very appropriately utilised to identify those pupils in need of extra support. Teachers are praised for the manner is which this data is utilised to plan for differentiated
programmes of work for pupils within the classroom context. The learning-support team employ a wide variety of diagnostic tests and checklists to enable them to plan a very suitable intervention programme for those pupils who have identified learning difficulties. It is now recommended that the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment guidelines *Assessment in the Primary School Curriculum* be consulted in the identification of a systematic means of assessing pupil progress across the other curriculum areas.

4. **QUALITY OF SUPPORT FOR PUPILS**

4.1 Pupils with special educational needs

The programmes of learning, formulated for pupils for whom supplementary and support teaching are provided, focus on the development of literacy and mathematics. The planning is clearly documented through the formulation of Individual Pupil Learning Profiles (IPLP) or group IPLPs as the situation merits. Weekly plans, daily planning sheets, records of parental meetings, progress reports, daily records of work and timetables are maintained in a methodical manner. Pupil records are neatly maintained and organised. There is evidence of effective collaboration and consultation among mainstream class teachers, the learning-support and resource teacher in the formulation and development of pupils’ IPLPs. Parents are also consulted as part of this process. Feedback regarding pupil progress is provided to parents at annual parent-teacher meetings.

A very comprehensive learning-support policy has been formulated and is included in school planning documentation. The learning-support environments are organised in an attractive and stimulating way. A range of appropriate teaching strategies and methodologies is also implemented. In general, pupils are withdrawn for support provision from mainstream classes, both individually and in groups. Effective use is made of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and a wide range of educational software is employed to enhance the pupils’ learning experiences.

An early intervention programme is provided by the learning-support teacher in collaboration with the mainstream class teachers in the infant and junior classes. This programme is implemented in the infant classes on a daily basis. It is focused on Mathematics and delivered in a very structured format. It is recommended that the special education team be organised in such a way as to provide support in a fully integrated and inclusive manner at all times.

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

Traveller pupils are well integrated into the daily life of the school and are provided with equality of opportunity. A fulltime resource teacher for Traveller pupils (RTT) provides support to the Traveller pupils primarily through in-class support and through the organisation of a differentiated reading programme. It is recommended that the school review the current practice in relation to integration in respect of support provision for all pupils in line with best practice and Department guidelines.

5. **CONCLUSION**

The school has strengths in the following areas:

- The quality of teaching and learning in this school is of a very high standard.
• The principal displays very good qualities of leadership.
• Every effort is made to create stimulating and attractive learning environments in the classrooms, support rooms and corridors.
• The board of management plays a very active role in the development of policy and ensures that the school is very well resourced.
• The parents’ association are very supportive of the school.
• The school has an effective policy on staff rotation.
• The quality of whole-school planning and individual preparation is of a very high standard.

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

• The staff might consider the development of an oral language programme to enhance the systematic development of pupils’ oral language skills in discrete lessons and in an integrated manner across the different curriculum areas.
• It is recommended that the provision of support to pupils with learning needs be provided in a more integrated manner.
• In light of the widely acknowledged pivotal role of a principal teacher in the overall management of a school, it is recommended that the principal shall not undertake the duties of any type of a special education post, as outlined in Circular 17/00.

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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