Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Scoil Náisiúnta Dhún Darmhuí, Dunderrow, Kinsale, County Cork
Uimhir rolla: 16940O

Date of inspection: 25 March 2010
WHOLE-SCHOOL EVALUATION

A whole-school evaluation of Dunderrow NS 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 Gaeilge, English, Mathematics and Science. The board of management was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the report; a response was not received from the board.

INTRODUCTION – SCHOOL CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

This is one of six primary schools in the parish of Kinsale and is located in close proximity to a site of major historical significance. A major pharmaceutical plant is also close by. The school building is modern and additional permanent classrooms have been added in the recent past. Such development ensures that the school is now in a position to offer its pupils high quality education in very comfortable surroundings.

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pupils enrolled in the school</td>
<td>210</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainstream classes in the school</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers on the school staff</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainstream class teachers</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers working in support roles</td>
<td>3</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

This school is under the patronage of the Catholic Bishop of Cork and Ross and has involved parents in a very effective manner in agreeing a vision statement. This statement highlights the central importance of holistic development, mutual respect and the promotion of a sense of responsibility and self-confidence among the pupils. The statement clearly emphasises the value placed on partnership with parents and with the local community generally. The provision of a happy, safe and supportive learning environment is central to school work and is valued accordingly. Regular attendance is successfully promoted.

1.2 Board of management

The board of management is properly constituted and manages the school in a highly effective manner. The board meets regularly and accurate records are maintained. Financial matters are carefully managed and the school accounts are audited. Individual board members take responsibility for particular aspects of management. In addition, the board expresses its clear satisfaction in relation to the commitment and professionalism of the school staff.
1.3 In-school management
The principal provides organisational and instructional leadership of a very high quality and maintains a clear focus on teaching and learning throughout the school. She successfully promotes a collegial atmosphere and has built positive relationships with all the stakeholders. The principal acknowledges the support of an effective teaching and ancillary staff. The deputy principal has responsibility for a range of agreed duties and supports the principal in a very professional manner.

1.4 Management of relationships and communication with the school community
The school’s success in building an effective partnership between parents and the community are particularly praiseworthy. The parents’ association has significant involvement in school life and provides invaluable support across a range of activities. This support is much appreciated by the board and by the teachers. The association’s role in the school planning process is highly commendable. Parent teacher meetings are normally held in November each year and written reports are issued to parents at the end of the school year.

1.5 Management of pupils
During the evaluation pupils’ behaviour was exemplary. They presented as caring and respectful towards the staff and each other and exhibit commendable levels of confidence.

2. Quality of school planning

2.1 Whole-school and classroom planning
The quality of whole-school planning is very good and records of progress in school planning over recent years are a source of valuable information. Strategic planning is carefully organised in organisational and curricular terms. Staff development, extra-curricular activities and community involvement are also very positive features of the planning process. The wide range of organisational policies ratified by the board includes those required by legislation. The assistance of the Department’s support services has been availed of in drawing up curricular policies to guide curriculum implementation.

All teachers approach classroom planning in a very conscientious manner. Common approaches have been agreed and the breadth and balance provided in plans indicate a genuine commitment to curriculum implementation. In this regard, the emphasis placed on both teaching and learning is highly commendable.

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 Language

**Gaeilge**

Tá caighdeán Gaeilge na n-oidí sa scoil seo le mola dh lena n-iarrachtaí chun an teanga a theagasc go taitneamhach agus ar bhonn córasach faoi scáth pleán éifeachtach scoile. Dá réir sin is mór is fiú an aire a dhírítear ar spriocanna c innte teanga sa chomh rá agus ar thoradh soiléir na gceachtanna. Is mór is fiú chomh maith an bhéim a l eagtar ar obair dhúshlánach a sholáthar agus ar an dtéanga chumarsáideach san obair trí chéile. Dá réir sin moladh ag an iarchomhdháil go ndíreodh an scoil a tuilleadh béime feasta ar an bpáirt-thumadh maidir le teagasc na Gaeilge.

Déantar an-chúram de theagasc na léitheoireachta ar fud na scoile agus tá toradh chomh torthúil céanna ar fhorbairt scileanna na scríbhneoireachta. Dá thoradh sin uile saibhrítear cumas Gaeilge na ndaltaí ar bhonn scoile agus léiríonn siad suim le moladh san obair.

Cuireadh comhairle ar fáil faoi mar ab fhéidir an Cúntas Míosúil a úsáid a thuilleadh chun leanúnachas breise a chur chu n cinn.

**Irish.**

The teaching staff in this school displays a commendable standard in Irish. In addition their efforts to teach the language are both attractive and systematic within the parameters of an effective school plan. Hence, the attention devoted to specific language objectives and also to clear learning outcomes merit much favourable comment. The emphasis placed on suitably challenging exercises and on communicative language is also very commendable. It was recommended accordingly that greater emphasis be placed in future on partial-immersion approaches in the teaching of Irish.

The appropriate reading skills are taught purposefully throughout the school. Such an approach also applies to the development of writing skills. Consequently the pupils’ overall command of Irish is enriched on a whole-school basis and their level of interest is commended.

Advice was provided regarding the further use of the Monthly Progress Records to promote additional continuity in the overall work.

**English**

The standard of teaching and learning in English in the school is very good. A purposeful whole-school plan clearly indicates that school policy for English has been developed following wide ranging consultation.

A comprehensive approach to aural / oral language development across the curriculum ensures that pupils discuss a wide range of topics with confidence and fluency. Role-play and improvisation are frequently used and, in general, fruitful emphasis is placed on language enrichment. Writing poetry and responding to poetry are also suitably attended to.

The creation of a rich print environment sets out a very positive basis for the development of key reading skills throughout the school. A highly structured approach to the teaching of phonological and phonemic awareness is carefully implemented. Reading schemes and class novels are used to very good effect and pupils confidently respond to text using a variety of comprehension strategies.
The writing process is carefully promoted at all levels and imaginative strategies are used to encourage pupils to write successfully. Pupils write for themselves and for a variety of audiences. Attractive writing centres are used to encourage writing in several classes and senior pupils display considerable skill in drafting, editing and publishing their work. The careful monitoring of pupils’ writing supports development in this important aspect of pupils’ work.

3.2 Mathematics
The standard of teaching and learning in Mathematics throughout the school is very commendable. The lessons observed were carefully structured and teachers frequently related the material to the pupils’ immediate environment in a very successful manner. The language of Mathematics, the systematic use of concrete materials and group-work are methodically emphasised on a whole-school basis. Attractive centres of interest are provided at all class-levels and pupils’ work is carefully recorded and monitored on a regular basis. The use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) as well as other materials also facilitates the mastery of concepts. The successful use of carefully chosen problem-solving techniques was also commended during the evaluation as was the positive use of assessment results to inform teaching strategies.

3.3 Science
The school plan for Science places very good emphasis on the key messages set out in the curriculum. The need to cultivate a suitable balance between knowledge and skills development is clearly highlighted. In this regard, the importance of observing, predicting, analysing and experimenting form an important basis for the plan and inform a wide range of important activities organised throughout the school. The pupils are provided with valuable opportunities to work scientifically and many speak enthusiastically about their work. Invaluable opportunities are also provided for outdoor experience of the immediate environment at all class levels. The emphasis placed on the monitoring and recording of pupils’ work is highly commended.

The school’s high quality emphasis on Science has recently been rewarded at the Young Scientists’ Exhibition. The school’s collaboration with a major locally based pharmaceutical company is also highly commended.

3.4 Assessment
Assessment practices in the school are both comprehensive and highly effective. A wide range of strategies is used by the teachers to evaluate and inform the learning and teaching process. These strategies include the monitoring of pupils’ written work, folders and project work, regular teacher-designed tests, miscue analysis and check lists. Pupils’ progress is also assessed through the use of diagnostic and standardised tests. The Middle Infant Screening Test (MIST) identifies early literacy difficulties and careful analysis of the results leads to effective intervention. The Micra-T and Sigma-T standardised tests are administered annually and the results of these tests are suitably analysed. Teacher collaboration in this area is commendable and ensures the implementation of highly effective assessment practices throughout the school.
4. QUALITY OF SUPPORT FOR PUPILS

4.1 Pupils with special educational needs
The principal assumes overall responsibility for the implementation of policy in special needs education. This policy clearly outlines roles, responsibilities and procedures established for the identification and selection of pupils for additional assistance and the implementation of early intervention programmes. Provision for pupils with special needs is undertaken by three Learning Support / Resource / English as an Additional Language Teachers (one full-time and two part-time). Two special needs assistants are appropriately deployed and work diligently under the direction of class teachers. Support for pupils in literacy and numeracy is provided on a collaborative basis and is of a high quality.

The teachers’ quality of preparation is exemplary.

4.2 Other supports for pupils: disadvantaged, minority and other groups
The principal and staff deal with any aspect of educational disadvantage that may arise in a caring and sensitive manner.

5. CONCLUSION

The school has strengths in the following areas:

- The creation of effective partnerships between school, parents and community is particularly praiseworthy.
- The principal is clearly committed to continuous improvement of educational provision in the school and is supported by an effective board and committed parents’ association.
- The school’s success in planning collaboratively and strategically is commended.
- The standards of teaching and learning in the areas that were evaluated are particularly praiseworthy.
- The teachers discharge their duties very professionally.
- There is very effective integration of ICT in teaching and learning throughout the school.
- The Science curriculum is implemented very successfully.

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

- It is recommended that the good practice already apparent throughout the school be further developed. In this context, the advantages of promoting partial-immersion approaches to the teaching of Irish were recommended.
- It is recommended that the Monthly Progress Record be further utilised to promote additional continuity in relation to the teaching process.
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.