An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Scoil Náisiúnta Cnoch Sceach
Clonakilty, County Cork
Uimhir rolla: 17152R

Date of inspection: 10 December 2010
1. Introduction

SN Cnoch Sceach is a rural co-educational school situated between Clonakilty and Enniskeane in West Cork. Current enrolment is 108 pupils with four mainstream class teachers. The school is under the patronage of the Roman Catholic Bishop of Cork and Ross. The staff strives to create an atmosphere of mutual respect where all members of the school community feel happy and secure. 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.

2. Summary of Findings and Recommendations for Further Development

The following are the main strengths of the work of the school:

- The board of management is committed to fulfilling its functions assiduously.
- The parents are very supportive of the school.
- The quality of teaching throughout the school is good.
- The quality of teaching and learning in Science is very good.
- The achievement of pupils in literacy and numeracy is good.
- The commitment of the special educational needs team to the education and welfare of the children is praiseworthy.

The following main recommendations are made:

- The results of assessment tests should be monitored regularly and used to inform teaching and learning.
- A review of special needs provision is recommended.

3. Quality of School Management

- The board of management has a clear understanding of its roles and responsibilities and these are exercised assiduously. Board members display a genuine commitment to the ongoing development of the school and to its regular upgrading.

- The principal succeeds in creating a positive school climate through the openness and respect with which he deals with staff, pupils and parents. In the main, the special duties teacher takes responsibility for all curricular and organisational planning in the school. These duties are undertaken in a competent manner and contribute positively to the identified priority needs of the school.

- All staff give willingly of their time to undertake a variety of management duties that contribute positively to overall school development. The school is particularly well resourced in terms of information and communications technology (ICT) and the rooms
and corridors are decorated attractively. The classrooms, particularly in the main building, are small and consequently, teachers are constrained in promoting active learning processes.

- The parents are very supportive of the school. Their recent funding of computers, the development of the school garden and the installation of playground games are worthy of mention. There are very good systems in place to keep parents informed of events in the school and on the progress of pupils. An analysis of questionnaire returns indicates that parents are very satisfied with standards of education, care and support provided to pupils.

- The pupils are well behaved and courteous. During the whole-school evaluation, they worked cooperatively during group-work and were on task throughout classroom activity. An analysis of pupils’ responses to questionnaires indicates that pupils like school, they feel supported by teachers and overall, they are positively disposed to the teaching and learning processes.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- The school plan contains a comprehensive range of organisational and curricular policies. Commendably, the school implements an action-planning approach to policy development and review. Curriculum plans provide a clear reference to important aspects of teaching and learning. Many plans indicate the subject content to be taught at each class level.

- The class teachers prepare long-term and short-term schemes. In general, teachers adopt a common approach to lesson planning and provide significant detail with regard to lesson content. In some instances, a greater focus on differentiated planning to address pupils’ varying abilities in multi-class settings is recommended. Teachers should consider alternative approaches to recording the monthly progress records so as to inform future planning at a whole-school level and thus impact positively on the school’s self-evaluation practices.

- Staff members engage in school self-evaluation practices and these have resulted in the implementation of a number of curricular and organisational initiatives. There is a tradition of collaborative review and decision-making, albeit informal, within the school and teachers are keen to identify new projects for implementation. To assist in the ongoing development of this area, staff should now adopt a more formal and systematic approach to school self-evaluation and consider how this can be facilitated by reference to the Department of Education and Skills publication, Looking At Our Schools, 2003.

Child protection policy and procedures

School authorities provided evidence that, in compliance with Primary Circular 0061/2006, the board of management has formally adopted the Department’s Child Protection Guidelines for Primary Schools. Evidence was provided to show 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.
5. Quality of Teaching, Learning and Pupil Achievement

- The quality of teaching throughout the school is good. In many cases, teachers provide opportunities for pupils to work in small groups and many examples of differentiated learning were observed.


Overall, a good standard is achieved in Irish. Lessons are taught in a lively fashion. Visual aids, concrete materials word games and drama are used gainfully to extend the children's vocabulary and understanding. Listening and speaking skills are carefully developed, however pupils' conversational skills could be improved by putting more onus on them to use the language. Irish is used as the language of instruction throughout, contributing significantly to the pupils' understanding of the language. It is now recommended that Irish be used more throughout the day. An appropriate emphasis is placed on fostering the pupils' skills in reading in the middle and in senior classes. A broader range of reading material is needed to engage pupils further in the reading process. Care is taken in the teaching of writing and the work is presented neatly.

- The quality of teaching and learning in English is good. Pupils' oral language skills are developed conscientiously and consistently. A regular engagement in the recitation of poetry would enhance pupils' competence further in the use of language. From an early age pupils' skills are developed competently through the Jolly Phonics programme. Rhyme and song are used to good effect to develop the pupils' word-attack skills. A good variety of reading material is accessed to develop pupils' proficiency in reading. Pupils are encouraged to write in a variety of genre. Staff is advised to develop consistent good practice in presentation during copybook activity and in habitual good handwriting routines.

- The quality of teaching in Mathematics is good. While resources were used effectively in a number of the lessons observed, teachers should ensure they are used more consistently throughout the school. Pupils participate enthusiastically in the lessons, which are regularly related to everyday situations relevant to their experiences. Mental maths activity and problem-solving are well developed and due emphasis is placed on expanding pupils' mathematical vocabulary. Teachers employ a variety of teaching strategies and value the importance of discussion during lessons. Pupils' written work is neatly presented and well monitored by teachers.

- The quality of teaching and learning in Science is very good. There is good variety in science activity, with aspects such as care for the environment, healthy eating and experimentation featuring regularly in lessons. The pupils' skills in Science are developed...
consistently while conducting experiments. Their skills as scientists are carefully nurtured through fieldtrips and through productive habitat exploration. Teachers place a worthy emphasis on fair-testing and on the language of Science during classroom activity. Pupils work in Science is celebrated regularly through photographic displays in corridors. It is commendable that pupils present their work to other classes during Science Week.

• The school's assessment strategies allows for a range of approaches. The results from standardised tests in literacy and in numeracy indicate pupils are making good progress. Practice in assessment should now be developed further by analysing results on a whole-school basis and using the results of this to identify trends and to inform teaching and learning.

6. Quality of Support for Pupils

• Individually and collectively the teachers are committed to addressing the learning needs of pupils in a conscientious and professional manner. A wide range of resources is utilised to good effect to support pupils’ learning. In general, support teachers share a mixed caseload of pupils in receipt of learning-support and resource teaching. As some pupils are supported by more than one teacher, the skills of the team should be realigned in order to ensure that each pupil receives supplementary support delivered by one individual.

• Support teachers prepare appropriately and maintain individual education plans as well as individual profile and learning programmes. This is a collaborative process with school personnel, parents and relevant professionals involved. These plans are characterised by good detail. However, teachers are advised to identify targets that are more specific and achievable. The tracking and recording of pupils’ progress should also be further advanced to ensure the prioritised needs of the pupils are met.

• For the most part, withdrawal sessions provide support for pupils in literacy and numeracy. In addition, the school has initiated a variety of team-teaching and in-class support practices. While this expansion of provision is commendable, some of these practices are not specifically focused on supporting pupils with special education needs. It is recommended that these particular programmes be discontinued and that staff ensure that the initiatives in place clearly support pupils with special education needs. A renewed emphasis should be placed on differentiating teaching and learning in classrooms, and an early intervention programme in infant classes should be introduced.

• Three special needs assistants capably support the special educational provision in the school. They are proactive in supporting all pupils as needs arise in their respective classrooms.

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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

We welcome the report and agree that all stakeholders- the Board of Management, Parents, Staff and Pupils work to promote a healthy teaching and learning environment for all.

The experience, of the inspection was found to be positive, affirming and thorough. Both inspectors were professional and pleasant to deal with. Their interaction with the children, staff, parents and the board was always cordial and unobtrusive.

It is heartening that the inspectorate concurs with our view that the main school classrooms are restrictive due to their size We have sought funding for the extension and upgrading of the school for well over a decade and extensive documentation of our efforts in this regard are testament to this.

The recognition of the efforts in the teaching of Literacy and Numeracy, particularly in the areas of problem-solving and building vocabulary, is welcome.

The school has always been committed to Early Intervention for Learning Support Resource. The Infant teacher formally taught in Learning Support Resource, and initiates contact with outside agencies. She keenly promotes early intervention from her particular vantage point of meeting and interviewing pupils and parents on entry in to the school.

Literacy Launch was implemented in the infant classes in January 2011 (as was outlined in the five year plan in which was devised in August 2010).

Engagement in continuing professional development will continue to be actively fostered and encouraged to ensure that the staff remain abreast of current developments in education.

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

Evidence/ records of assessments are already being used to inform teaching and learning. Discussions at whole school level around assessment take place already. These discussions are now being formalised, as was recommended.

We agree that the commitment of Special Educational Needs Team is praiseworthy. Inclusion of SEN pupils is our priority. There have been a variety of innovations and expansion in the provision of SEN support in Knockskeagh NS. It has always our objective to focus on the needs of the SEN pupils. We will continue to ensure that our practices are specifically devised to focus on children with Special Educational Needs.