Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Largy National School
Largy, County Leitrim
Uimhir rolla: 17206O

Date of inspection: 7 May 2010
WHOLE-SCHOOL EVALUATION

A whole-school evaluation of Largy National School was undertaken in May 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 History. The board of management 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

Largy National School is a rural, primary school in the parish of Cloonclare-Killasnett in County Leitrim. There are two mainstream multi-grade classes; the junior classroom includes classes from infants up to, and including, second and the senior classroom includes classes from third to sixth. There were no pupils at fifth-class level in this school year.

The pupils’ attendance patterns are satisfactory. Projected enrolment figures indicate that there will be a slight increase in the next few years.

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pupils enrolled in the school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainstream classes in the school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers on the school staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(including the teaching principal)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainstream class teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers working in support roles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(two teachers carry out this post in a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>job-share capacity)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special needs assistants</td>
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1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT

1.1 Characteristic spirit, mission or vision

The school is under the patronage of the Roman Catholic Bishop of Kilmore. The school’s ethos and mission statement promotes the holistic development of the child. Observation of daily school interactions and routines indicates that this is being realised successfully.

The board and teachers place significant emphasis on the pupils’ spiritual development. The school has a very welcoming atmosphere and provides a well-ordered, caring and happy atmosphere for all pupils. The school climate nurtures self-confidence among pupils. The school participates in a range of activities including the Modern Languages in Primary Schools Initiative and the Northwest Wildlife Programme. Regular opportunities are provided for pupils to participate in extracurricular activities.
1.2 Board of management

The board of management is hard working and effective. It meets at least five times a year and minutes of meetings are recorded. Various roles and responsibilities have been assigned to members and these are carried out very well. The chairperson is successful in leading the board and offers consistent support to the school. He participates regularly in school activities including assemblies. Board members are proactive in their approach to policy development and review. The enrolment policy has been ratified recently and the code of behaviour, health and safety statement and homework policy are under review.

The school is maintained well. Originally built in 1940, it was renovated in 2002 when a small multi-purpose room was provided and interior toilets were installed. The school site is very spacious with ample hard-surface playing space. A praiseworthy garden has been developed to the front of the school with a variety of trees, shrubs and flowers and a willow walk for pupils. A vegetable garden has been created also. Flooding caused severe damage to the school roof earlier in the school year and work to repair the damage, particularly interior damage, was completed shortly before the evaluation. Many classroom resources had to be replaced.

It is noted that the junior classroom is very small for its purpose and the converted cloakroom used for supplementary teaching is not satisfactory. The board should explore all the opportunities available to refurbish and extend the school building.

At present, the board is seeking to implement rule 56(4)(a) of the Rules for National Schools which allows for the earlier dismissal, by one hour, of infant pupils. Compliance by parents with this rule would greatly assist in providing dedicated time for the first and second classes.

1.3 In-school management

The principal provides very good leadership to staff members and pupils and fulfils her duties effectively. She demonstrates a strong commitment to her work and efficient organisational skills. Administrative duties are performed diligently. The principal has established purposeful routines which greatly facilitate the day-to-day life of the school. A strong sense of teamwork and collaboration is evident between staff.

The deputy principal supports the work of the principal successfully. Her specific duties include the monitoring of attendance, fire safety and the organisation of school trips. She attends to these duties in a conscientious manner and contributes significantly to the overall management of the school.

1.4 Management of relationships and communication with the school community

The partnership between teachers and parents is positive. Home-school communication is very good; regular letters are issued to share information with parents. The parents are actively involved in fundraising and support school events enthusiastically. The parents’ association is affiliated to the National Parents’ Council (Primary) and its members are invited regularly to contribute to the review of school organisational policies. The officers of the parents’ association report a high level of satisfaction with the opportunities provided for pupils.
Information about pupil progress is communicated regularly and appropriately through parent-teacher meetings and written school reports. Parents’ receive an information booklet when they first enrol their children containing key policies. Furthermore, an updated booklet containing new information on school policies is issued to all parents when policies are reviewed.

1.5 Management of pupils

The management of pupils is very good. Pupils present as very well behaved, respectful and friendly. They participate eagerly in school activities and teachers are commended for their regular use of the Irish language in the day-to-day management of pupils.

2. Quality of School Planning

2.1 Whole-school and classroom planning

The quality of whole-school planning is good. It includes an action plan which outlines priority areas for development over the next number of years. Curricular policies have been devised in line with the strands and strand units of the curriculum and they are contextualised to the specific needs of the school. Some curricular policies have been reviewed recently. All policies have been ratified at board level and this process is ongoing.

The quality of classroom planning is very good. Teachers provide relevant long-term and short-term plans and useful monthly progress reports. Classroom teachers plan collaboratively with support teachers to provide for pupils with special and additional learning needs.

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 (Published 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 caighdeán an teagaisc inmholta i múineadh na Gaeilge sa scoil seo. Tá dul chun cinn maith a dhéanamh ag na daltaí i dtuiscint, i labhairt, i léamh agus i scríobh na teanga. Báineann na hoidí sa dá rangsheomra dea-úsáid as fearas léirithe, as ábhair choine Réitfeachta agus as teicneolaíocht an eolais agus na cumarsáide chuimh frásaí, abairtí agus scéalta a mhúineadh. Cuirtear béis cheirdidíunach ar rainn, dánta, amhráin, cluichí agus go leor cleachtaithe cruthaithteachta eile chun cumarsáid a spreagadh go taiteamhach i measc na ndaltaí. Is suntasach an dea-thairbhe a bhaintear as an timpéallacht phhrionnta sna bunranganna chun deis a thabhairt do na daltaí iad féin a chur in iúl agus chun daingniú a dhéanamh ar na hathanna nu a cainte. Tá béis inmholta ar
The quality of teaching and learning in English is very good. Clear learning outcomes are identified for the development of oral language. In both classrooms, teachers encourage pupils to engage in discussion based on age-appropriate topics. Pupils communicate well and discuss topics with confidence. Poetry is taught effectively and pupils recite rhymes and poems successfully. During the evaluation the senior pupils wrote *haiku* poems based on characters studied in History and their efforts were of a high standard.

The pupils’ reading attainments are very satisfactory. In the junior classes pupils word-attack skills and sight vocabulary are developed in a systematic manner. Early intervention approaches such as shared reading are implemented beneficially with the help of the support teacher. The pupils in the senior classes read and discuss a variety of texts very effectively. It is advised that additional supplementary reading activities be provided to promote the independent learning of the more able pupils in particular. Writing is well taught throughout the school. The pupils engage in a range of writing activities that includes functional and creative work. The pupils’ engagement in project work across a number of curricular areas also provides opportunities and inspiration to write.
3.2 Mathematics

The quality of teaching and learning in Mathematics is very high. Suitable activities are planned for the multi-grade context in both classrooms. Active approaches, pair-work, group work, investigative activities, and information and communication technologies (ICT) are used very effectively. Exercises to help pupils memorise number facts feature regularly in class work and revision tests are administered at frequent intervals. In the junior classroom number rhymes and song are utilised productively to promote a good understanding of number. The learning-support teacher works in the classroom and assists the mainstream teacher to provide purposeful group activities for the pupils’ varying learning needs. Mental computation is developed very well in the senior classes. During the evaluation senior pupils were encouraged to work collaboratively to estimate the capacity of a variety of containers. The engagement of pupils and level of discussion during this lesson were very high. Calculator use is introduced from fourth class onwards. Pupils in both classrooms display competence across all strands of the curriculum and their overall attainment, as evidenced in standardised test results, is good.

3.3 History

The quality of teaching and learning in History is very good. Many worthwhile projects on local studies have been completed including a project on the school itself and on Glenade House and surrounding lakes. Both classrooms have timelines of various historical events and they are used very well during teaching and learning. In the junior classes good emphasis is placed on the development of the pupils’ skills as historians. During a very good lesson based on continuity and change over time the junior pupils read stories collected from their grandparents about schools long ago. A recreation of a school setting from previous times had been created. Role play is used as an approach to learning in the senior classroom and is effective in helping pupils to empathise with historical characters. The senior pupils demonstrate a very good knowledge of topics which have been taught. The internet and ICT software are used judiciously to enhance pupils’ learning in History.

3.4 Assessment

The quality of assessment is very good. The teachers are commended for their record-keeping in respect of the pupils’ progress. In the junior classes assessment records are maintained of progress in letter sounds, letter names, new words and simple comprehension skills as well as progress in Mathematics. In addition, samples of the pupils’ work and reading records are kept. In the senior classes results of dictation tests, spelling tests, reading records and writing tests are maintained. Records are also maintained of the pupils’ progress in Irish.

Standardised tests are administered annually in both classrooms and the results of standardised tests in English reading and Mathematics are used by the class teachers in consultation with the learning-support teacher to plan programmes for pupils who need further support.

It is recommended that assessment methods in History are augmented to include, for example, the use of progress checklists.
4. QUALITY OF SUPPORT FOR PUPILS

4.1 Pupils with special educational needs

A learning-support/resource teaching post is based in the school and shared with one other school. Currently, the board of management facilitates two teachers to job-share for this post.

Literacy and numeracy support is provided through supplementary teaching, as appropriate. The quality of the provision is very good overall. Based on the evidence available during the evaluation, teaching is purposeful and well prepared and there is commendable variety in the learning activities and resources provided. Record-keeping is very good. Team teaching is undertaken and there is successful in-class support provided to both classrooms. Parents are informed regularly of their children’s progress in achieving well-chosen learning targets.

The special needs assistant works successfully under the direction of the junior class teacher. She attends carefully and diligently to the care needs of pupils to whom she is assigned. She is employed also as a part-time school secretary and assists ably in this role.

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

Mainstream and support teachers are sensitive to any instances of disadvantage which manifest and endeavour to be as supportive as possible of pupils who may need additional support.

5. CONCLUSION

The school has strengths in the following areas:

• The quality of teaching and learning in Irish, English, Mathematics and History is very good in both classrooms. The standard of project work in History is high.
• The chairperson and board of management are supportive of the school and engage successfully in policy development and review.
• The principal and deputy principal work in a very dedicated and professional manner.
• The support for pupils with additional and special educational needs is very good.

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

• The board should explore all opportunities available to extend the school building to provide more suitably for the junior classes and for supplementary teaching.
• The drafting, editing and re-drafting of written work in Irish should be developed further in both classrooms. (B’fhíú forbairt a dhéanamh ar dhréachtú, eagarthóireacht agus ar ath-dhréachtú obair scríofa na ndaltaí sa Ghaeilge sa dá rangsheomra.)

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

The Board of Management of Largy NS welcomes the recent WSE report and its acknowledgement of the high standard and quality of teaching and learning it found in the school. The Board also welcomes the fact that the report highlights the many strengths of the school in every aspect of school life. The Board wishes to thank the inspector for the courtesy and professionalism shown by her during the course of the WSE.

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

The Board welcomes the various recommendations and suggestions in the report and will give due consideration to these in the ongoing planning for the future development of our school.