Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Scoil Náisiúnta Cluain An Átha
Eidhneach, Inis, Co. An Chláir
Uimhir rolla: 17246D

Date of inspection: 17 January 2011
1. Introduction

SN Cluain an Átha is a co-educational primary school in the parish of Inagh-Kilnamona in West Clare. The school is under the patronage of the Catholic Bishop of Killaloe. There are currently two mainstream class teachers and twenty-nine pupils are enrolled.

Enrolment has declined somewhat since the last evaluation was carried out by the Inspectorate but it is expected to remain close to the current figure for the foreseeable future. Pupils’ overall attendance levels are very good. This whole-school evaluation focused on the quality of teaching and learning in English, Irish, Mathematics and History.

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 teachers are highly dedicated to the welfare of the pupils and work very hard to achieve the best possible learning outcomes.

- Very effective organisational strategies have been developed to cope with the challenges of multi-grade teaching.

- Commendable standards are achieved in the curriculum areas evaluated, with particular strengths in Mathematics.

- The board of management contributes in a praiseworthy fashion to the provision of a safe, well-resourced and pleasant learning environment for pupils.

- Parents are very supportive of the school and indicate high levels of satisfaction with overall school performance.

- Pupils interact with each other and with adults in a confident and respectful manner and are adept at working independently.

The following main recommendations are made:

- It is recommended that school self-evaluation practices be formalised to include the setting of specific and measurable targets and the systematic evaluation of planning outcomes.

- It is recommended that the teachers continue to build capacity to integrate information and communication technologies (ICT) into teaching and learning.
3. **Quality of School Management**

- The board of management supports the school in an effective manner. It is evident that the board has successfully harnessed the goodwill and assistance of the entire community in providing a productive environment for the pupils’ education. The board is commended for the care and attention it applies to ensuring compliance with legislation and departmental regulations. Records are maintained accurately and comprehensively and accounts have been subject to annual certification for a number of years. The board reports annually to parents. This good practice could be extended to include more frequent communication with parents to keep them informed of progress made by the board in meeting its objectives.

- The principal leads the school in an exemplary manner. She maintains high expectations for pupils’ achievement and learning outcomes. The holistic development of all pupils is prioritised. The principal and the assistant teacher enjoy a very productive and co-operative working relationship, a factor that is crucial to the effective operation of the school. Duties are assigned and shared appropriately and encompass a wide range of responsibilities.

- The school is well maintained and presented. A series of improvements has been carried out to the building and grounds and this work is ongoing. Resources to support teaching and learning are plentiful and attractive. However, the information and communications technology (ICT) infrastructure requires further upgrading.

- Productive home-school co-operation is integral to the success of the school. While the school does not have a parents’ association the board advises parents on a yearly basis of its willingness to facilitate the formation of such a body. It is reported, however, that parents feel such a venture would necessitate unnecessary duplication of effort by the relatively small cohort of parents involved. Analysis of parental questionnaires indicates very high levels of satisfaction with the school. Parents support the school through fundraising, maintenance, assisting in school outings and through involvement in policy formation. Teachers value highly the support of parents in the completion of homework activities.

- Pupils are very well managed. Relationships at all levels are respectful and inclusive. Of particular note is the pupils’ capacity to work independently in groups. This is a strong indicator of the effectiveness of the management of the multi-grade settings that pertain.

4. **Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation**

- Both teachers foster a culture of reflection and self-evaluation and they display a significant commitment to continuous improvement in standards. Information on pupils’ progress is systematically gathered through a range of assessment practices. This information is used effectively to adjust teaching to meet the needs of individual children and class groupings. A strategic plan has been developed which outlines the key developmental priorities in terms of curriculum and organisation. It is recommended that school self-evaluation practices be formalised to include the setting of specific and measurable targets and the systematic evaluation of planning outcomes.

- Curricular and organisational policies are drafted by the teachers and duly considered and ratified by the board of management. Most parents express the view that they are invited to contribute their views to school policies.
• The teachers have adopted common approaches to classroom planning and recording of progress. This work is highly commended and helps to ensure continuity in the delivery of a broad and balanced curriculum.

• 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, learning and pupils’ achievement in the areas evaluated is very good. Carefully compiled assessment data reflect the commendable progress made by pupils. A wide range of methodologies, approaches and resources is used to ensure that pupils engage positively and enthusiastically with their learning. Teaching is highly organised and managed to accommodate the particular demands of multi-grade teaching. Pupils are adept at working independently while the teacher works with various groups. It is recommended that the tasks assigned to pupils during these periods be varied and include an appropriate amount of active, hands-on learning activities.

• Müintear an Ghaeilge go cumasach, éifeachtach agus tá caighdeán inmholta á bhaint amach ag na daltaí i ngnéithe éagsúla den teanga. Moltar go speisialta na hoidí de bharr a ndearfacht i leith na teanga agus an saibhreas agus crunneas atá le sonrú ina gcuid Gaeilge féin. Aithrisitear raon leathan de bharr agus dánta. Tugtar tús áite don chumarsáid agus crunneas na foghraiacha agus déantar agallaimh bheire a ullmhú d’Fhéile Na hInse. Tá scéim faoi leith ar bun chun clár leathan léitheoireachta a chur ar fáil do na daltaí agus déantar dea-thhorbaírt ar na scileanna scribhneoireachta. B’fhiú tuilleadh bhéime a leagan ar an saorscríbhneoireacht.

Irish is capably and effectively taught and the pupils achieve a commendable standard in the various aspects of the language. The teachers’ positive attitude together with the richness and accuracy of their Irish are especially praiseworthy. A wide range of rhymes and poems are recited. Priority is given to communication and accuracy of pronunciation and duologues are prepared for Féile Na hInse. There is a special initiative in place to provide a broad range of reading materials for pupils and writing skills are well developed. It is recommended that increased emphasis be placed on independent writing.

• The quality of teaching and learning in English is very good. Oral language skills are purposefully developed through all appropriate contexts. Phonological and phonemic awareness are carefully fostered as pupils acquire the skills necessary to become good readers. Class libraries are well stocked and a strong culture of reading for pleasure is promoted in conjunction with parents. A process approach to writing is beneficially employed and pupils’ work in a range of genres is celebrated. Particular efforts are made to nurture a neat and legible cursive handwriting style.

• The quality of teaching and of pupils’ achievement in Mathematics is a particular strength of this school. In addition to productive use of concrete materials, the teachers make exceptional efforts to ensure that pupils acquire the language of Mathematics to the greatest possible extent. Concepts are presented, explained and developed very carefully. Pupils are given worthwhile strategies to develop their problem-solving skills.

• The teaching of History is effective and features an appropriate balance between delivery of topics and giving pupils opportunities to develop the skills of historians. History-specific cognitive language is skilfully taught. In the senior classes pupils are given regular opportunities to develop more extensive knowledge of topics, together with their research and communication skills, through engagement with project work. Pupils in the junior section confidently retell a wide range of stories. While pupils demonstrate a satisfactory knowledge of aspects of local history there is some scope for development in this area.

• Pupils use ICT to access information, produce documents and to consolidate skills and content. It is recommended that the teachers continue to build capacity to integrate ICT into teaching and learning. The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment’s ICT Framework would be useful in this regard.

6. Quality of Support for Pupils

• Support for pupils with special educational needs is well organised and its delivery is underpinned by the implementation of a comprehensive school policy. The school avails of the services of a shared learning support teacher and a shared resource teacher, both of whom are based in neighbouring schools. Collaboration between mainstream and support teachers is particularly effective. Commendable individual education plans (IEPs) and individual profile and learning programmes (IPLPs) are devised and implemented.

• Pupils’ needs are identified and catered for in accordance with the staged approach. Teaching is stimulating and well paced and delivered in a well-resourced and attractive environment.

• Careful monitoring and recording of pupils’ progress on an ongoing basis helps to ensure that they make satisfactory progress, particularly in literacy and numeracy. ICT is used appropriately as a teaching resource.

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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 is delighted with the findings of the report. The Board would like to thank the inspector for his encouragement and advice. We appreciate the respect which he showed to us during the evaluation process.

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 is implementing the recommendations of the inspection with regard to school self-evaluation practices. ICT infrastructure has been upgraded and ICT facilities within the school continue to be developed. Staff training in integrating ICT into teaching and learning has commenced.