Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Scoil Náisiúnta Naomh Cábín
Aillébrack, Ballyconneely, County Galway.
Roll number: 17488E

Date of inspection: 5th March 2010
WHOLE-SCHOOL EVALUATION

A whole-school evaluation of SN Naomh Cáilín 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 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

This two-classroom school built in 1945 on a very restricted site is located on the Slyne Head peninsula some sixteen kilometres south-west of Clifden, the main market town of Connemara. The school building has hardly been altered in the intervening years and now requires refurbishment and upgrading. The original classrooms are small and bright with plenty of natural light and vibrant displays reflecting the broad and balanced curriculum being delivered to a high standard. Additional supports are available in Drama, Art, Music, Dance, Physical Education as well as supports under the DEIS programme.

The school grounds and environs, although small in size are well maintained, with shrubs and flower beds to the front of the school and a basketball court and lined playing areas on the tarmacadamed area to the rear of the school.

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pupils enrolled in the school</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainstream classes in the school</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers on the school staff</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainstream class teachers</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers working in support roles</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special needs assistants</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT

1.1 Characteristic spirit, mission and vision

This school is characterised by a strong Christian ethos with very positive working relationships among the whole-school community. There is a welcoming familial atmosphere, in the school and a stimulating personal learning environment is provided for the pupils. The schools mission statement outlines a commitment to providing a caring and happy learning environment for each child. It indicates an ambition to develop the full potential of all pupils and prepare them for further education and lifelong learning. To this end a developmental well-structured curriculum is offered by the teaching staff in an atmosphere of respect and courtesy, tailored to pupils’ interests and abilities, in partnership with parents and the wider school community. The principal and staff members are commended for focusing on raising the achievement standards of the pupils in literacy and numeracy as participants in the DEIS programme. This work has been greatly assisted by the three learning-support and resource teachers and progressed through the school’s three-year DEIS plan. The improvements achieved in literacy levels are commendable and the emphasis for the next three years is being placed on the development of numeracy skills.
1.2 Board of management
The board of management has been selected in accordance with the regulations of the Department of Education and Skills. Records are kept of all proceedings and the key decisions and actions to be taken are outlined. Officers of the board are formally allocated specific duties and careful management is kept of expenditure. It was confirmed that the chairperson of the board meets with the principal on a regular basis. Correspondence received is discussed and decisions are made through this process between meetings. The board raised the issue of school refurbishment and extension during the pre-evaluation meeting with the Inspector. The board indicated that the footprint of the school has remained the same since its construction some sixty years ago and therefore upgrading the school premises is a priority for their duration of office. The school is cleaned twice weekly and the caretaker ensures that the school environs are well maintained. The part-time secretary contributes significantly to the wellbeing of pupils and to the general administration and record keeping at the school. The school plan currently includes a health-and-safety statement, a code of conduct and policies on school ethos and philosophy, child protection, assessment and reporting, as well as a range of curricular aspects. The board is currently pro-active in reviewing the school plan: it facilitates discussion on the relevant issues and ratifies the agreed documents as a matter of procedure. It is recommended that the current review should include a building development programme, a plan on methodologies specifying the differentiated approach to teaching and learning to be used, a skills development plan for board members and staff, a review of the relationships and sexuality programme and an investment plan for mathematics and science equipment. The plan should also include strategies on increasing the broad stock of library books particularly in Irish. Discussions took place with the board regarding the various ways in which parents might be included in the ownership of the school plan as well as discussing practices in this regard.

1.3 In-school management
The two class teachers have posts of responsibility as principal and deputy principal. They are both competent responsible professionals and ensure that a well-structured curriculum with breadth and balance is made available to all the pupils in the school. The principal is a committed hard-working leader who promotes open communication with all the partners and has a clear coherent vision for the future development of the school. She is highly regarded by the board of management, by parents’ representatives and by staff and she displays professionalism and leadership in her promotion of school activities. She is professionally supported by all the members of the school staff and they all contribute to ensuring that there is a happy, convivial and safe learning environment in the school. The building is kept neat and tidy, both outside and inside and a structured maintenance plan is in operation. Credit is due to all the partners who care for the school in this exposed climate, particularly to the cleaner and caretaker who take an obvious pride in their work. An annual report on school progress is submitted to the board of management at the end of each year.

1.4 Management of relationships and communication with the school community
At the pre-evaluation meetings the board of management and parents’ representatives acknowledged the professionalism and competence of the teachers. Both the parents’ representatives and the board of management members confirmed that they were satisfied with the way the school was operating. There is a tradition of parental involvement in this school since the issue of school amalgamation was raised in the latter part of the last century. This collaborative tradition is fostered by the current staff and both parents and past-pupils participate regularly in school activities. Parental skills are supported by the adult and second-chance education programmes organised through the efforts of DEIS co-ordinators and the community education services supported by the Vocational Education Committee. There has been a significant drop in population in this area over the preceding forty years with a consequent drop in school enrolment to the extent that only twenty-seven pupils are currently enrolled in the school. Parents are informed of pupils’ progress at least once a year and other informal contacts with parents are welcomed.
1.5 Management of pupils
The school practises a clear, well defined code of behaviour, which promotes a positive school approach with exemplary interpersonal relations between all the parties. This harmonious relationship pervades the school and is manifest in the schools’ positive and constructive ethos. A strong spirit of collaboration exists, relationships are open and well managed and every pupil feels cherished and held in high esteem. Although a code of behaviour and management plan is included in the school plan for a number of years, it has not been necessary to take recourse to its procedures. The classrooms, although restricted in space, are attractively decorated with samples of the pupils’ work and other project work. Regular use of co-operative planning, educational materials and information and communication technology (ICT) resources ensures that pupils are engaged and enthused with their learning programme and are well prepared for post-primary education in the senior classes. The pupils are divided between the two teachers with the senior classes the responsibility of the deputy principal and the junior classes the responsibility of the principal. They work well together. Pupils generally have a high level of attendance and a broad list of extra-curricular activities is available. It is intended to use ICT to extend pupil contact to other schools and pupils in the area. Participation in local competitions and community celebrations is a feature of school life.

2. QUALITY OF SCHOOL PLANNING

2.1 Whole-school and classroom planning
The school plan has been developed by the principal and staff over a number of years and it is recommended that aspects of the school plan should be amended. It is recommended that parents would be presented with these changes for their approval. The school plan currently includes organisational, pastoral and curricular elements and it is based on the current school context and on principles of good practice. Curricular elements are referenced to the strands and strand units of the curriculum and these also form part of individual teacher planning. Differentiated teaching and learning strategies are adopted in the delivery of the curriculum and a record is kept of the progress of pupils. The range of methodologies used in teaching and learning is stimulating and engaging for the pupils and the teachers make frequent use of material resources and ICT during activities.

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. THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

3.1 Language

Gaeilge
Cuirtear béim fhorásach ar mhúineadh na Gaeilge sa scoil seo agus éiríonn leis na daltaí a bheith in ann feidhm chumarsáide a bhaint as an teanga taobh istigh de chlár teoranta teanga roimh fhágáil na bunscoile dóibh. Cothaítear na scileanna machnaimh ard-ord go rialta sa chur chuige agus baíneann na daltaí caighdeáin maith amach a thagann lena n'inniuilacht nadúrtha. Tá sé soiliú go bhfuil na hoidh féin an-
Irish
Irish lessons are taught in an incremental fashion in this school and the pupils achieve functional communication levels in the language within a restricted register before leaving this primary school. Higher order thinking skills are regularly enhanced in the approach and the pupils achieve commendable standards commensurate with their abilities. It is obvious that the teachers are favourably disposed to teaching the language and this has a positive influence on the pupils’ motivation in learning the language. An effective programme in Irish literature including rhymes, poetry, stories and songs are presented to the junior section and the pupils enjoy reciting their pieces. Further investment in the library stock of books in Irish and on modern Irish text-books should also be included and the language programme ‘Séideán Sí’ could be used in the senior section to develop language competence. The writing programme is based on previous discussion and the pupils’ written work is practised in limited genres. It would be worthwhile to give the pupils access to a wider readership through the internet and school periodicals. The pupils’ participative spirit and satisfaction with the process is noticeable and their self-confidence and personalities are intrinsically developed through their experiences.

English
The key principles of the English curriculum are presented in a structured sequential manner. The school plan identifies the curricular framework and methodologies to be used, as well as identifying the programmes of work and listing various resources. Early language activities are linked to the development of pupils’ skills in reading and emphasis is placed on developing phonic and phonemic awareness in this approach. Cloze-procedure activities and flashcard games are used to foster the development of comprehension skills and large-format books promote the pupils’ enjoyment of story in the junior classes. The novel is used to support the reading programme in the senior classes and the buddy system enhances competence and fluency. Overall the pupils achieve good standards in reading and standardised assessment results indicate a continual improvement in standards over the last three years. Practical experience is provided for the pupils in the process of drafting, editing and rewriting in a range of genres and examples of pupils work is on display in both classrooms and public areas. Their written pieces could be circulated to a larger reading public using a school newsletter or local publication. Drama, circle time and discussion are used to develop the communicative approach and an excellent anthology of poetry and rhyme is offered. Local authors and poets should now form part of the literature curriculum for the senior classes.

3.2 Mathematics
A well-structured Mathematics programme is organised in this school. It is based primarily on the school plan and on textbooks. Mental arithmetic as well as memorisation of basic facts are emphasised in classroom activities. Pupils’ understanding of concepts is enhanced through the use of practical workshops, materials and activities undertaken in conjunction with the DEIS co-ordinator. Pupils also gain regular experience of problem solving, both individually and in group work and their analytical skills as well as skills in estimation and prediction are well developed. Understanding the terminology of Mathematics is emphasised in classroom work and the themes used in Mathematics are related to other
aspects of the curriculum. Standardised assessment tools are used, as well as in-school examinations to assess pupils’ progress, and the results indicate that the pupils are achieving good standards. The results are also analysed and used to guide the work plan. Further investment in mathematical resources to support the additional use of workshops is recommended.

3.3 Science
A structured programme in Science is outlined in the school plan and in individual teacher preparation. Life elements are studied as well as energy and forces, materials and knowledge and care of the environment. The programme should be extended to include local marine, climatic and ecological aspects pertinent to living in this coastal region. Pupils work proactively in experimentation and the manner in which the pupils work co-operatively to refine their skills is commendable. Research work and investigative opportunities are utilised to examine items of interest and practical workshops develop the pupils’ experience of a collective scientific approach to problem solving. Advice and support should be sought from the curriculum support services in developing the Science programme as part of the development plan.

3.4 Assessment
Standardised tests are used to monitor the progress of pupils. Other strategies such as teacher observation, checklists, compilations of work samples, projects as well as teacher designed tests are also used and analysed at staff meetings. The results of standardised and criterion referenced tests are recorded on an ongoing basis and the scores should now be collated sequentially for all class groups. The results should be reviewed regularly to update appropriate learning targets for the individual pupils. Current practice and use of assessment should be reviewed and added to the school plan.

4. Quality of Support for Pupils

4.1 Pupils with special educational needs
The part-time teacher on the staff is responsible for general-allocation learning-support hours as well as low-incidence resource hours. A well thought out scaffolded programme of support is offered, directed at identified pupils’ needs and delivered in an effective, coordinated manner. The shared learning-support teachers provide additional support in English and Mathematics for pupils individually or in groups and also provide whole-class interventions in language support. Pupils benefit greatly from this intervention.

4.2 Other supports for pupils: disadvantaged, minority or other groups
The DEIS programme provides support of a sensitive and developmental nature to pupils with identified needs as well as organising second chance education opportunities in conjunction with other schools in the area. The level of co-operation among the schools both at first and second level in this north-west Connemara area is commendable and ensures a broad education programme through the DEIS initiative is delivered to parents.

5. Conclusions
The school has strengths in the following areas:
- The good behaviour and co-operation of pupils is commendable.
- The attitude, effectiveness and diligence of the teachers in regard to their work are commendable.
- A positive learning environment has been created in the school.
- Good provision is made for pupils with learning difficulties.
The following recommendations are made in order to further improve the quality of education provided by the school:

- The planned development of the school building should be included in the school plan and the school plan should be reviewed and upgraded.
- Further planned investment in ICT, school resources and library is recommended.
- Current practices in regard to pupil assessment should be reviewed.

Post-evaluation meetings were held with the staff and board of management where the draft findings and recommendations of the evaluation were presented and discussed.

*Published, December 2010*