An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
Management, Leadership and Learning

REPORT

O’Brien National School,
Kielduff, Tralee,
Co. Kerry
Uimhir rolla: 17646T

Date of inspection: 11 May 2015
Whole-School Evaluation – Management, Leadership and Learning Report

Introduction

A Whole-School Evaluation – Management, Leadership and Learning (WSE - MLL) was undertaken in O’Brennan National School in May 2015. This report is based on a selection of lessons observed in a range of learning settings in the school, interaction with pupils and review of their work, meetings with the principal and with board and parent representatives, completed parent and pupil questionnaires and a review of a representative sample of school documents. 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.

O’Brennan National School, which is under the patronage of the catholic Bishop of Kerry caters for 178 pupils. The school is characterised by its commitment to the holistic development of the pupils.

The school has strengths in the following areas:

- The school is efficiently and strategically managed by a very effective board.
- Leadership capacity in the school is very good.
- The standard of teaching and the overall learning achievements of the pupils are very good
- The board, principal and staff take their responsibility for the pastoral care of pupils very seriously and the well-being of all pupils is a key priority.

The following areas require improvement:

- D’fhéadfaí an cur chuige cumarsáideach i bhfoghlaim teangacha a thuilleadh sa Gaeilge. The communicative approach to language-learning should be further developed in Irish.
- Continuing professional development (CPD) should be co-ordinated with evolving school priorities so as to further develop leadership capacity.

Findings

1. The learning achievements of pupils

- The overall learning achievements of the pupils in O’Brennan National School are very good. In the majority of observed lessons, pupils were actively and enthusiastically involved in the learning process. Their endeavours were supported by good quality teacher-feedback.
- Literacy and numeracy attainment indicates very good overall levels of achievement and this provides a solid basis for learning across the curriculum. Good use is made of available quantitative data to track pupil attainment in English reading and in Mathematics and to identify those in need of sustained or periodic additional supports. Good standards are also apparent with respect to pupil attainment in Irish. There would be value in using the outcomes of standardised tests to support the development of initiatives in the communicative aspect in Irish.
- The learning achievements of pupils with specific educational needs and those who experience difficulty with aspects of learning, are capably supported by a dedicated team of teachers.
2. The quality of teaching

- The overall quality of teaching is very good. All lessons observed were well-structured and classroom routines are well-developed. The quality of classroom and corridor displays is very high.

- Many staff members have engaged in professional development. They are well-informed and reflective professionals who demonstrate a commitment to the school and to their pupils. Good use is routinely made of staff meetings to co-ordinate whole-school planning practices. In further developing the quality of teaching it is recommended that, the continuing professional development of teachers be co-ordinated with emerging needs and priorities of the school. At the time of the evaluation, a strong team spirit was evident and morale was high in the school.

- With respect to teaching in special education needs contexts, individual programmes of work have been developed to support the learning of individual pupils. Targets set are relevant, clear and measurable. Regular progress reviews take place and links between support initiatives, classroom programmes of work and the home are satisfactory.

- General school practice with respect to assessment is very good. Information related to the pupils’ learning needs, strengths and attainment is gathered and examined systematically. Notwithstanding this, more curricular objective-based assessment in all subject areas would further enhance teaching and learning.

3. How well pupils are cared for and supported

- The quality of relationships between all school partners and stakeholders is a significant factor in the effective provision of an inclusive and supportive school environment in which the well-being of all pupils is a key priority. A positive approach to behaviour management is implemented consistently. In addition, a wide variety of extra-curricular activities is made available which reflect the historical, cultural, sporting and religious traditions of the community. The pupils are highly motivated and keen to learn.

- Pupils with special educational needs are very well supported and play a full part in all aspects of school life. The quality of collaborative planning between mainstream and support teachers is very good and there is regular communication between the school and the parents of pupils with specific educational challenges.

- Confirmation was provided that the board of management has formally adopted the Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools without modification and that the school is compliant with the requirements of the Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools.

4. Leadership and management

- The Board of management plays an active role in the school. Members of the board are commended for providing excellent facilities and for overseeing administrative and financial affairs in an efficient manner. The board also plays a key role in the development of school policies and in monitoring educational standards. With respect to the educational attainments of pupils, the board expressed trust in the work of the principal and staff and is satisfied that the well-being and education of all pupils is being managed effectively. The quality of communication within the school community is very good.

- The principal exerts a significant and very positive influence on all aspects of school life. He inspires and motivates others in support of school aims and plays an important role in leading learning. He encourages teamwork and distributes
leadership efficiently in order to build capacity in others. In addition, he knows and understands the pupils’ needs and manages the interface between home and school very successfully. He is capably supported by an in-school management team who perform a wide range of tasks in support of agreed objectives. Many other staff members, not in formal leadership roles, are commended for their commitment and willingness to assume leadership positions in aspects of school life relevant to their interests, skills or expertise.

- Decisions are made collaboratively and there is a high level of co-operation between the board and the staff. In further developing leadership capacity in the school, a greater focus on instructional leadership and on the co-ordination of continuing professional development (CPD) with evolving school priorities is recommended.

- The school benefits from an active Parents’ Association which provides financial support and practical assistance to a number of co-curricular and extra-curricular activities. Completed parents’ questionnaires positively endorse the work of teachers in the school and a majority believe the school to be well run. Notwithstanding that, there is some scope for development with respect to broadening the collaborative basis for future policy development to include, where relevant, the voice of parents.

- Secretarial, caretaking and SNA support greatly assist in the day-to-day operation of the school.

5. School self-evaluation

- The process of school self-evaluation (SSE) has commenced and since 2014 a critical review of teaching practices and learning achievements in literacy and numeracy has been undertaken. Based on the evidence gathered, key targets have been set. Subsequent actions have impacted positively on teaching practices and the implementation phase of this project has resulted in better attainment levels and in more consistency of practice across the classes.

- The capacity of the school to further develop SSE as a means to review practice across the curriculum, is very good.
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 O’Brennan NS welcomes the report of the recent WSE-MLL and the acknowledgement of the quality of teaching and learning in our school. The report recognises the strengths of our school and affirms the dedication of staff. The report also acknowledges the support of the Board of Management and the parents.

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 of Management welcomes the recommendations set out in the report and have begun implementing them already.

As a first step we have arranged for a PDST facilitator to address the whole staff in regard to the use of Gaeilge as a communicative language.

The Board of Management is pleased that the staff are implementing the recommendations for the good of the whole school community.