

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

**Whole School Evaluation
REPORT**

**Ardcrone National School
Nenagh, County Tipperary
Uimhir rolla: 17703F**

Date of inspection: 19 September 2013



1. Introduction

Ardcroney N.S. is a mainstream co-educational primary school under the patronage of the Catholic Bishop of Killaloe. There are 115 pupils enrolled, reflecting a modest increase in enrolment levels in recent years. Five mainstream class teachers, a fulltime learning support teacher and a fulltime resource teacher are based in the school. A shared resource teacher provides additional support for a small number of pupils. Attendance levels for pupils are very good and high attendance for all pupils is strongly promoted.

This whole-school evaluation focused on the quality of teaching and learning in Gaeilge, English, Mathematics and Social, Personal and Health Education. 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:

- Accommodation and resources in the school are of a very good standard.
- The principal is highly effective in leading the school's planning and developmental process and he is ably assisted by the deputy principal.
- Very good working relationships have been developed among the staff, the board of management, the parents and the pupils.
- The staff is committed to the provision of a high quality educational experience for all the pupils in the school.
- Pupil attainment in the subject areas evaluated varies from high to very high standards.
- The school's provision for pupils with special education needs is of a very good standard.
- The very positive relationships with pupils in the school are founded on a climate of mutual trust and self-respect.
- Parents and pupils, in their responses to questionnaires issued to them, express very high satisfaction with the school.

The following main recommendations are made:

- *Aistear, the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework*, should be considered to further enhance provision in the infant classroom.
- Consideration should be given to the organisation of in-class team and co-operative teaching methodologies involving the class teachers and the learning support teacher in the support of literacy and numeracy
- The collection, analysis and presentation of data from a wider range of sources for school self-evaluation purposes is recommended.
- It is recommended that teacher deployment and rotation be reviewed.

3. Quality of School Management

- The board is led effectively by the chairperson. Board members use their diverse skills to support the work of the school as required. Consistent records of board business are maintained. School funds are carefully managed. However, it is recommended that the board accounts be certified on a regular basis. The board is involved in the whole-school planning process and policies are discussed and ratified after due consideration. The present and previous boards are commended for upgrading the school building, developing the school grounds and providing parking facilities for parents and teachers.

- The principal provides committed and effective leadership to the school and he is ably assisted by the deputy principal and another post-holder. A culture of teamwork and collaborative decision-making is promoted. While members of the in-school management team (ISM) meet regularly on an informal basis, it is recommended that these meetings be formalised and that decisions be recorded in order that progress can be monitored effectively. The ISM undertakes a broad range of roles and responsibilities very effectively. Members of the ISM team have been instrumental in leading the development of high quality curricular and organisational plans. The willingness of all staff members to take responsibility for aspects of the work of the school and to share in leadership tasks is acknowledged.
- The school is very well maintained and resourced. The corridors and classrooms feature attractive displays of pupils' work. The recent addition of a wide range of resources for Mathematics is a welcome development. It is recommended that teacher deployment and rotation be reviewed with a view to ensuring that all teachers develop skills in a broad range of settings and that pupils' needs are accommodated accordingly.
- The management of relations and communication with the school community is reported to be very good. Parents are regularly informed of their children's progress and the school operates an open door policy for parents who wish to interact with the teachers or with the principal. While it is reported by the board that parents are very supportive of all school-related activities, to date, no parents' association has been formed in the school. Parents' responses to the questionnaires distributed during the evaluation process indicate high to very high levels of satisfaction with the school. They feel that the school is well run, welcoming of parents, and that the quality of teaching is good. It is recommended that the board facilitate the re-activation of the parents' association.
- The quality of pupil management is of a very good standard and is indicative of positive, affirming and nurturing relationships between teachers and pupils. Common expectations of behaviour are applied consistently across the school. Pupils are facilitated to participate in a wide range of extracurricular activities particularly in sport and music. Pupils, in their responses to questionnaires, express high levels of satisfaction with the school. They get on well with their peers and feel that theirs is a good school. They would, however, welcome increased opportunities to engage in group work and greater access to computers in school. The school is actively involved in the *Green School* programme. It is recommended that the school facilitates the setting up of a student council so that the children's voice is heard in an appropriate way.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- The whole-school planning process is good. In general, policy documents are detailed and reflect the context of the school. Good work has been carried out by the school staff in reviewing and formulating a comprehensive range of curriculum and organisational policies and plans. These policies should be shared with the wider school community through the development of a school website. The school self-evaluation process has been the focus for the staff over the last number of months. This work has involved good levels of consultation and collaboration. Curriculum review and development priorities in the last year have mostly centred on numeracy and good work has been done in relation to the review of the teaching of Mathematics in the school.
- The quality of individual teacher planning is good. All teachers devise long-term and short-term plans and monthly progress reports. Commendable efforts have been made to implement a consistent approach to planning that focuses on identifying key curriculum objectives. Learning programmes and relevant intervention initiatives are planned for the

future. The implementation of literacy and numeracy initiatives will require a greater level of collaboration and team-teaching in all classes throughout the school.

- 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*.

5. Quality of Teaching, Learning and Pupil Achievement

- The lessons observed during the evaluation ranged from good to very good. The majority of lessons observed were well paced and well delivered and featured very good questioning by teachers and high levels of engagement by pupils. All teachers use the interactive white-boards very effectively to present their lessons. A wide range of teaching approaches and strategies was employed across all settings, to ensure the development of content, knowledge and skills and pupil engagement. Pupil learning is incrementally developed and individual support is provided for pupils experiencing difficulties. Currently, pupils in infant classes are provided with opportunities to engage in play activities. This good practice could be further enhanced through the introduction of a programme of structured play and in this context *Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework* should be considered.
- Tá moladh ar leith tuillte ag oidí na scoile as an dúthracht a chaitheann siad le teagasc na Gaeilge. Spreagtar na daltaí chun úsáid a bhaint as an teanga i gcomhthéascanna cumarsáideacha. Cuirtear béim cheart ar na snáitheanna éagsula den curaclam. Moltar anois, béim níos treise a chur ar 'éisteacht' mar shnáith den churaclam sna ranganna go léir. Déantar iarracht creidiúnach fonn léitheoireachta a chothú sna daltaí. De thoradh sin, is léir go bhfuil caighdeán maith bainte amach ag na daltaí i léitheoireacht líofa na Gaeilge. Is fiú machnamh a dhéanamh anois, áfach, ar éagsúlacht ábhar léitheoireachta a úsáid tríd an scoil, chun saibhreas foclóra agus léitheoireacht neamhspleách na ndaltaí a fhorbairt. Déantar cúram an-mhaith de mhúineadh na gramadaí sa scoil. Cláraíonn na daltaí cleachtaí sa scríbhneoireacht fheidhmiúil ina gcóipleabhair. Moltar anois béim níos mó a chur ar fhorbairt na scríbhneoireachta chruthaithigh freisin.

The teachers in the school are commended for the emphasis that they place on the teaching of Irish. The pupils are encouraged to use the language in communicative contexts. Appropriate emphasis is placed on the different strands of the curriculum, and it is now recommended that further emphasis be placed on developing the 'listening' strand of the curriculum in all classes. Credible efforts are made to encourage a love of reading in the pupils. As a result, it is evident that the pupils have gained a good standard in Irish reading. It is important also to consider the use of a variety of reading materials throughout the school in order to further develop a rich vocabulary and to develop independent reading in the pupils. Very good attention is placed on the teaching of grammar in the school. The pupils' complete formal writing exercises in their copybooks. It is now recommended that increased emphasis be placed on the development of creative writing also.

- The quality of pupil attainment in English is of a good to very good standard. Oral language is taught informally as part of the reading programme in the school, but the implementation of a discrete oral language programme should now be considered by the school. The intensive use of story as a strategy to support language development in the early years is recommended. A structured phonic programme is taught consistently throughout the school and a paired reading programme is implemented in collaboration with parents in the junior and middle standards. The formal reading lessons observed were of a good to very good standard. Class novels are used in middle and senior

classes and these activities are integrated effectively with other subject areas. A good range of books/reading materials is available. While some class teachers implement reading approaches with a wide range of reading materials rather than one class text, further investment in sets of levelled readers will be necessary in the future to enable all teachers adopt a differentiated approach to the teaching of reading throughout the school. The samples of pupils' writing observed during the evaluation indicated a good to very good standard. The introduction and use of a programme such as *First Steps Writing* would enable teachers to implement a very structured approach to the teaching of writing and would provide additional opportunities for children to write in different genres.

- The quality of teaching and learning in Mathematics is of a good to a very good standard. Each Mathematics lesson observed was logically structured and delivered with skill and clarity. Pupils utilise mathematical language appropriately and problem solving opportunities are regularly provided. It is clear from dialogue with the teachers that there is a heightened awareness of the need to provide pupils with opportunities to engage in problem solving. Very good use is made of concrete materials to introduce and develop mathematical concepts and appropriate emphasis is placed on linking new material with pupils' personal experiences and environment. The majority of pupils demonstrate good to very good standards of attainment in the various strands of the mathematics curriculum.
- The quality of teaching and learning in Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) is good. Pupils actively engage in purposefully organised activities. Talk and discussion, group work and circle time feature regularly in lessons. Resources are well utilised to support teaching and learning. A whole school approach to the teaching of discrete themes within the SPHE programme has been outlined and is currently being implemented.
- Standardised tests are administered annually to all pupils and these results are utilised to identify pupils who may be experiencing learning difficulties. A wide range of assessment modes is utilised systematically by all teachers. This enables class teachers to make and record progress judgements of curriculum targets that individual pupils are making. It is recommended that assessment data be used in a more strategic way to target cohorts of pupils and to implement interventions particularly in literacy and numeracy in the infant and junior classes.

6. Quality of Support for Pupils

- Overall, the provision for pupils with additional needs is very good. Two full-time support teachers who are based in the school and a shared resource teacher provide for pupils with additional learning needs. Pupils are primarily supported on a withdrawal basis. Teaching observed was particularly affirming, energetic, skilful and well-resourced, and featured a broad range of strategies. The learning support teacher uses a wide range of diagnostic tests to assess pupils' needs. Learning targets are devised based on the outcomes of diagnostic tests and reports from other professionals. Individual profile and learning programmes (IPLPs) are devised. Tasks and activities are selected to take account of pupils' individual learning needs and to assist them in overcoming difficulties they are experiencing with particular elements of the curriculum. It is evident that pupils are making good progress and benefiting from the supports provided. It is recommended that the learning support teacher implement appropriate intervention strategies, initially in literacy, in collaboration with the mainstream class teachers. These interventions could profitably be delivered on a co-teaching basis to facilitate the sharing of best practice.

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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

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 school has employed the services of a web designer and he is in the process of designing a school website in collaboration with the principal and the school staff. A computer application is currently being designed for Ardcroney N.S. to facilitate and enhance the communication between home and school.

The school has purchased a wide range of differentiated reading materials and these will be used to embark on the Literacy Lift-Off programme for all classes from senior infants to sixth class. The board of management is currently putting in shelving in the learning support room to accommodate these books.

The board of management is inviting the parents to an open night with a view to setting up a parents' association in Ardcroney N.S.