Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Monaleen National School
Castletroy, Co. Limerick
Uimhir rolla: 17937H

Date of inspection: 12 May 2011
1. **Introduction**

Monaleen National School is a co-educational, Catholic primary school under the patronage of the Diocese of Limerick. The school serves the needs of a diverse community including a significant number of pupils who have English as an additional language. There are 571 pupils enrolled in the school. The attendance of the majority of the pupils is good.

During the whole-school evaluation inspectors observed teaching and learning in twelve of the twenty mainstream class settings and six of the nine support teaching settings. The subjects evaluated were English, Mathematics, Irish and Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE). 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.

There has been a significant turnover of teaching staff, particularly over the last five years. For the past two years a single manager has been managing the school on behalf of the school patron. Long-standing industrial relations issues within the school have necessitated investigations and hearings, which are on-going. The school is at a critical juncture in its development. At present, issues beyond the scope of this evaluation are impacting on the school's capacity to reach its full potential.

2. **Summary of Findings and Recommendations for Further Development**

The following are the **main strengths** of the work of the school:

- The acting principal is working diligently and with effect to create a positive climate within the school, to foster links with parents and to establish open communication and collaborative decision-making processes in the school.
- Substantial progress has been made in reviewing organisational and curriculum plans and school policies within a very short timeframe.
- The staff is resilient, hard-working, and displays a genuine capacity to engage in school development and school improvement initiatives.
- Overall the quality of teaching in the subjects evaluated is good.
- The learning outcomes of the pupils in English reading and Mathematics are good.
- During the evaluation visits, the pupils’ behaviour was exemplary and their engagement in the learning activities organised was of a very high standard.
- The parents are highly supportive of the work of the school and display a willingness to support the development of the school.
- The parents are very high in their praise for the teachers.
- In general, the teachers deliver a broad and balanced curriculum to the pupils.

The following **main recommendations** are made:

- A board of management should be constituted as soon as current industrial relations matters within the school are resolved.
- A time-bound strategic plan should be developed by the manager/board of management to map out and guide the future development of the school.
- The curriculum leadership roles of in-school management personnel should be further developed to enable them to focus on school self-evaluation and improvement.
- A wider range of resources should be provided in each classroom and support setting to facilitate the development of pupils’ literacy and numeracy skills.
- There is a need to develop and implement an assessment policy which will provide for analyses of pupils’ attainment, including comparisons with national norms.
• A review of the current practices and provision for special education needs should be carried out to ensure more focused interventions particularly in infant and junior classes.

3. Quality of School Management

• There is significant scope for development in the quality of management in the school. The difficulties concerning the management of the school over the past number of years have led to a fragmented approach to strategic planning and school development at all levels. It is recommended that a board of management be constituted as soon as possible. This is necessary to enable urgent school improvement and development issues to be addressed. The school is in urgent need of a time-bound, strategic plan to act as a road map for its future development. It is recommended that this be devised.

• The day-to-day management of the school has been delegated to an acting principal since October 2010. The acting principal has made marked progress in developing a positive climate within the school, in fostering links with parents, and in establishing open communication and collaborative decision-making in the school.

• The post-holders carry out a range of organisational and curricular activities. Some post-holders’ roles have been formalised in recent years. However, a list of duties is not available for all post-holders. Their curriculum leadership roles are informal and limited. It is recommended that a review of posts of responsibilities be carried out in line with the identified needs of the school to ensure a more focussed and equitable distribution of duties. In doing this, it will be important to engage in consultation and to prioritise the development of a sense of team amongst post-holders.

• In general, the school is poorly resourced. There is an inadequate range of books and supportive teaching and learning materials. A major investment in information and communications technologies (ICTs) has taken place this year. Priority was placed on interactive white boards which are used to good effect by the teachers.

• While improvements to the school buildings have been carried out in recent years, they are not adequate to deal with the school’s needs. As well as shortages of teaching space, the buildings are in need of renovation, extension and modernisation. The facilities available to the school are underdeveloped, the recreational facilities are poor and there are inadequate hard-surfaced areas for pupils to play. These issues need to be addressed urgently by school management.

• The management of pupils in the school is very good and pupils in all classes presented as courteous and respectful. Very high standards of pupil engagement and participation in class were observed. A future review of the code of behaviour should include a particular emphasis on the development of strategies which focus on the promotion of positive behaviours.

• While teachers are provided with opportunities to state their preferences for teaching specific classes/contexts, there is a need to devise and ratify a staff rotation policy.

• Parent-teacher meetings are held annually and individual teachers are available to meet parents when the need arises. School reports in respect of individual pupils are issued annually.

• During the evaluation, no supervision was in place in the school yard prior to the opening of the school or at the dismissal of pupils in the afternoon. It is recommended that appropriate
measures be put in place to ensure adequate supervision during the assembly and dismissal of pupils.

- Some pupils including those who have English as an Additional Language (EAL) are not being enrolled in age appropriate classes. Age appropriate placement of pupils should be implemented and the retention of pupils should only be considered in exceptional circumstances in accordance with the Circular 11/01.

- It is evident that roll books and school registers are not being maintained accurately and in accordance with Departmental requirements. It is recommended that all official school records be maintained in accordance with the Rules for National Schools.

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

- The quality of whole-school planning is satisfactory with some good plans in place. The quality of classroom planning is satisfactory with scope for development. A whole-school approach to the planning and delivery of the curriculum at whole-school and individual class level needs to be discussed, devised, agreed and implemented.

- A wide range of curricular plans and organisational policies was reviewed by the staff in the current year and these have been ratified by the school manager. All teachers have been provided with copies of key plans including the child protection policy, the code of behaviour and the homework policy. The school does not have a strategic plan and a culture of school self-evaluation has not been established to date. All plans require further consideration and whole-school discussion regarding their implementation.

- The quality of teachers’ short and long term planning varied from fair to good. In general, short-term plans are text-book based. There is evidence that textbooks overly influence the programmes implemented at each class level. Furthermore, the specific objectives of the curriculum do not adequately underpin the learning experiences provided and there is little breadth, progression and continuity in evidence when the objectives are outlined. There is very little evidence of differentiation strategies being implemented. Monthly progress records are maintained. However they are not used to monitor the implementation of the curriculum.

- School authorities provided evidence that, in compliance with Primary Circular 0061/2006, the school manager 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 and learning in this school is of a good standard. Teachers set high expectations and pupils are motivated and engaged in their learning. Teachers are diligent and hard-working and in general lessons are well structured and paced. Good classroom management skills and very good questioning skills were observed during the evaluation process. Available resources were well utilised and good use was made of information and communications technologies (ICTs) during lessons. However, in the questionnaires administered during the evaluation pupils indicated that they had little opportunity to engage
with ICTs during their learning. A good range of methodologies was observed. While opportunities were provided for pupils to ask questions and express their views there is a need to develop higher order and critical thinking skills in pupils. There is an over-emphasis on the use of the textbook and it is recommended that more challenging tasks be provided for pupils.

- Müintear na ceachtanna Gaeilge go héifeachtacht le linn na meastóireachta. Braithteann na hoidi go mórthóir ar na teacspleabhair chun an clár Gaeilge a chur i bhfeidhm, De dheasca sin, ní thugtar aird cheart ar na tréimshí cumarsáide i ranganna áirithe. Tá gá le forbairt i gcumas labharthach na ndaltaí. Cé go bhfuil pleann Ghaeilge ar fáil sa scoil, moltar anois straitéisí uile scoile a chur i bhfeidhm a dhírionn ar fhorbaírt scileanna éisteachta na ndaltaí. Tá caighdeán na léitheoireachta sásúil agus i gcuid de na ranganna bhi cumas na ndaltaí go maith. Tá caighdeán lag le sonrú i scribhneoireacht na ndaltaí tríd an scoil. Tá easpa taitní ag na páistí ar an scribhneoireacht chruthaitheach. Nil aon mheasúnú fhoirmiúil ar siúl sa Ghaeilge agus moltar béim níos treise a chur ar an ngné seo den teagasc.

\[\text{The Irish lessons observed during the evaluation were taught effectively. Teachers rely heavily on textbooks to implement the Irish programme. As a result of this approach, an appropriate focus is not placed on the communicative phases in some classes. The children’s spoken language ability requires further development. Even through a plan for Irish is available in the school, it is recommended whole school strategies should be implemented that focus on the development of the pupils’ listening skills throughout the school. The standard of reading is satisfactory and in some classes the children’s reading ability is good. The standard of pupils’ writing is weak throughout the school. Children have very little experience of creative writing in Irish. No formal assessment is undertaken in Irish and this is an area for further development.}\]

- The quality of teaching and learning in English is good. The majority of the pupils demonstrate very good oral language abilities. A significant majority of pupils attain very high scores in the standardised tests which measure reading. The school community is highly commended in this regard. Future reviews of the teaching of reading and the implementation of approaches to reading should include a focus on differentiation strategies. The use of quality assessment data should also feature in the organisation of reading lessons. There is scope for development in the learning outcomes achieved by the pupils in writing. Considerable emphasis is placed on functional writing activities with some evidence of creative writing and writing in a range of genres. In general, pupils’ written work is satisfactory. However, presentation was weak in many cases. The correction of pupils’ written work and the quality of written feedback given to pupils ranged from poor to good.

- The quality of teaching and learning in Mathematics is good. The teachers place commendable emphasis on mathematical language. A variety of strategies is in use to support teaching and learning. These strategies included the use of concrete materials, whole class teaching, group work and pair-work. The lessons presented during the evaluation were well structured and paced. The pupil engagement was very good and the majority of pupils demonstrated very good knowledge and understanding of number facts and concepts. The further development of maths rich learning environments, the provision of additional resources and the de-emphasis of the textbook is recommended. A greater focus on the presentation, recording and monitoring of pupils’ written work should be developed. Increased emphasis should also be placed on the recording of work in copybooks in the infant classes. Greater use of computer work and the provision of challenging learning experiences for exceptionally able pupils are also recommended.
• 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 should be discussed and implemented.

• Targets for pupils, especially those who are underachieving, are not specifically outlined in measurable ways. Overall, the school’s approach to assessment is in need of urgent review.

• Pupils have some understanding of their progress in learning. Teachers provide some feedback on their work but pupils are unclear of their own learning needs, how well they are progressing or the actions they need to take to improve their achievements. This needs to be addressed.

6. Quality of Support for Pupils

• Both policy and practice in the area of special educational needs in this school have significant weaknesses. The school’s special educational needs policy has not been discussed at whole-school level and there is a lack of consistency of approach in the planning, delivery and assessment of pupils in these settings. The absence of team structures has resulted in an un-coordinated approach to provision for the needs of pupils with learning difficulties. The school needs to devise specific detailed arrangements for organising, delivering and evaluating supports for pupils with learning difficulties.

• Standardised test results are used to identify pupils in need of support. However, many pupils are withdrawn for support teaching who do not meet the criteria for inclusion in the learning support caseload. A limited range of diagnostic tests is in use. The staged approach to supporting pupils within the classroom as outlined in Circular SP ED 02/05 is not used sufficiently. Very little data on pupils’ learning is generated. On-going tracking of pupil’s progress has not received sufficient attention to date. A greater range of diagnostic tests is needed. Pupils in the early years should be prioritised for psychological assessment to facilitate early intervention.

• The quality of support teaching observed was overall of a good standard. However, in some settings, pupils presented with very diverse learning needs and attainment levels and poor recording of pupil progress was noted. In the absence of quality assessment data, it is not always possible to determine the progress pupils are making in these settings. In most cases, individual education plans (IEPs) are in need of further development. Learning targets are too general and are not directly based on pupil learning needs. IEPs should be informed by appropriate assessment information. The IEPs did indicate that parents had been consulted. This good practice is commended.

• The school is praised for recognising the benefits of early intervention initiatives. The role of the class teacher in the implementation of these interventions needs to be clarified.

• At some class levels support teachers assume responsibility for the delivery of the full curriculum in Mathematics and English. This practice should cease. All pupils should access all areas of the curriculum under the direction of the class teacher.
• Some pupils are receiving additional support from more than one teacher and some are out of class for long periods of time. Increased efforts should be made to ensure that pupils in receipt of additional support receive this intervention from one teacher only.

• The provision of support for pupils whose first language is not English is of a good standard. Lessons observed were well structured and clear learning outcomes were identified. Pupil progress is regularly monitored and recorded against stated criteria. Pupils are making good progress in acquiring English literacy skills. The provision of in-class support, more effective differentiation within the class and focused whole-school integration initiatives is advised. Parents of children whose first language is not English should be provided with greater opportunities to meet the class teacher and the English as an Additional Language teacher (EAL).

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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 Monaleen National School welcomes the clear recognition in the report that at the time of the inspection in May 2011 there were long-standing issues beyond the scope of the evaluation that were seriously impeding the school’s capacity to achieve its full potential. It is the Board’s view that some of the items mentioned in the WSE report were connected, directly or indirectly, with these issues.

Since the WSE took place, there have been a number of developments. In late September 2011 the long-lasting industrial relations issues were brought to resolution by the single manager. Thereafter, a new principal was appointed and a Board of Management reconstituted. The school has begun a new stage in its development and the school community now looks to the future with confidence.

The Board devoted an evening to discussing in detail how the school is responding to the report’s recommendations. In short, the Board welcomes the very positive assessment of the teachers’ work found in the report, and is developing a strategic plan for the future of the school, including the modernisation and expansion of buildings/facilities to cope with population growth in the area and the concomitant demand for places in the school. The Board has already received an architect’s report in this regard.

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

In-School Management

Discussions are currently underway in relation to the curriculum leadership roles of in-school management personnel. When this review is complete, further consideration and whole-school discussion regarding the review of all curriculum plans will take place. School roll books and registers are now accurately maintained in accordance with Departmental requirements.

Resources

The school has made a significant investment in extra books for the lower half of the school. Extra readers are on order for the senior side. Additional resources for Mathematics have also been purchased and more resources are on order. The school is mindful of the fact that a de-emphasis of text books is recommended. To this end, the school has reduced and will continue to reduce the number of workbooks in use.

English

In-service training has been provided in the area of English writing. Workshops have been delivered based on the First Steps approach to writing. The teachers are implementing this approach in their classrooms.

Gaeilge

Tá leabhair leabharlanna (leabhairíní a bhaineann leis an scéim Séideán Si) ceannaithe ag gach rang ó rang 2 ar aghaidh. Chomh maith leis sin cheannaigh an scoil leabhair mhóra atá oiriúnach d’aosighrúpaí difríula ar fud na scoile. Tá súil againn go mbeidh na leabhair mhóra seo úsáideach dúinn chun scil na héisteachta a thorbairt. Tá an scoil chun measúnú fhoirmiúil sa
Ghaeilge a thabhairt to na leanai ó rang 2 ar aghaidh sa tríú téarma. Tá sé mar aidhm again béim speisialta a chur ar an scribhneoireacht chruthaitheach an bhliain seo chugainn.

Assessment

A number of copies of the *NCCA Guidelines on Assessment in the Primary School* have been acquired. Work on drawing up a new assessment policy will begin after Easter. It is hoped that the new policy will be in place by September 2012. The special education needs policy will be reviewed in conjunction with the assessment policy. Since the WSE the school has acquired a number of new screening and diagnostic tests. Pupils receiving learning support are being given additional tests throughout the year to track their progress.

Learning Support

The duties of learning support teachers have changed so that one learning support teacher is concentrating on infant classes, while another is dealing with middle classes, etc. This has ensured that there is closer co-operation between class teachers and learning support teachers. Learning support/resource pupils are dealing with only one additional teacher. In-class support is now taking place in some of the middle and senior classes. This has facilitated more focused differentiation of work. All pupils now access all areas of the curriculum under the direction of the class teacher. Every effort is made to place all children in age-appropriate classes.

One teacher is currently being trained in Reading Recovery. This is benefiting the infant classes. A second teacher will be trained in the coming academic year. A review of the special educational needs of the school is carried out each year after the standardised testing in May. Every effort is made to focus support in the infant and junior classes. However, occasionally the needs of students at the upper end of the school are great, and the learning support team make every effort to facilitate these pupils also.

Supervision

A teacher is now on duty in the yard at 8.45 each morning. On wet mornings at least one teacher is on duty in the hall. A rota is being established for the supervision of pupils as they are being dismissed.