Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Drumgallagh N.S.
Ballycroy, Co. Mayo
Uimhir rolla: 18002D

Date of inspection: 24 November 2010
1. Introduction

Drumgallagh NS is located in the vicinity of Ballycroy National Park in west Mayo. The school caters for boys and girls from infants to sixth class. The school is under the patronage of the Catholic bishop of Killala. It receives funding and a co-ordinator under the Delivering Equality of Opportunities for Schools (DEIS) initiative. 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 board of management functions in a very effective, systematic and collaborative manner.
- The principal is a hardworking, informed and professional leader who encourages teamwork, shared vision and shared accountability among staff.
- Teachers use an effective blend of methodologies in their teaching. They make particularly good use of information and communication technologies (ICT) to stimulate learning.
- The quality of home-school communication is very good. The school's website and prospectus are effective means of sharing information with parents and the wider community.
- The school planning process which incorporates self-evaluation and the setting of targets over a three-year period is very effective.
- A number of very effective initiatives have been introduced throughout the school to support literacy which are yielding very encouraging results.
- The informal use of Irish is promoted in a commendable fashion by all members of staff.
- The supports for pupils with different learning needs are of the highest quality. Significant professional development of staff has been undertaken.

The following main recommendations are made:

- It is recommended that the staff devises a whole-school approach to problem-solving in Mathematics with a view to improving pupil achievement in this area.
- It is recommended that teachers clearly differentiate programmes of work, activities and resources for pupils with different learning needs.
- It is recommended that a greater variety of writing genres which promote higher-order thinking skills is presented to pupils in Irish and English.
3. Quality of School Management

- The quality of the board of management is very good. It functions in a very effective, systematic and collaborative manner. It plans strategically to ensure the consistent development of the school building and resources. It is actively involved in the formulation of school policy. School accounts are audited annually.

- The quality of in-school management is very good. The principal is an informed and professional leader. She is very dedicated, hard-working and efficient in carrying out her duties. She is supported by a dynamic and effective staff, many of whom carry out significant organisational and curricular duties without having a post of responsibility. Such team-work, shared vision and shared accountability among staff is highly commended. The deputy principal undertakes a number of duties. It is recommended that such duties are reviewed to reflect the current priorities of the school to further support the principal.

- The quality of management of resources is very good. The school has a wide range of resources to support the curriculum including significant information and communication technologies (ICT). All classrooms are attractive, stimulating learning environments. The special needs assistant contributes significantly to the full inclusion of pupils with different needs.

- The quality of home-school communication is very good. The school communicates regularly with the parent body. Annual parent-teacher meetings facilitate discussion on pupil progress. The school’s website, developed by a member of staff, is highly commended. A very impressive school prospectus is distributed among parents of newly enrolling pupils.

- According to their responses to the whole-school evaluation questionnaire, all parents consider the school to be well run. The parents report that all of their children like school. They are satisfied with the quality of teaching in the school.

- The quality of pupil management is very good in a majority of classrooms. In such classrooms pupils are very well mannered and have developed appropriate listening skills. Teachers have established effective strategies for engaging pupils in a variety of activities. Where pupils display difficulties with behaviour it is recommended that teachers devise specific interventions to address this and implement them consistently.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- The quality of the school planning process is very good. There are clear procedures for school self-evaluation. A long-term plan targets annual priorities. The school's wide selection of plans and policies undergo regular review. It is recommended that when reviewing curricular plans staff members engage in professional discussion around current practice and strive to devise whole-school approaches in targeted areas.

- The quality of classroom planning is generally good. Teachers plan in a consistent manner for each subject. It is recommended that teachers plan for the specific differentiation of curricular content for pupils with different learning needs as required.
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 overall teaching, learning and pupil achievement is good. Technology is used very effectively throughout the curriculum to enhance understanding. Most teachers make very regular use of active methodologies to ensure pupils engage with the topics presented. There is scope for the development of differentiation across the curriculum.

The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in Gaeilge is generally good. The very good practice observed in the development of pupils’ oral skills included the regular review of specific themes and the effective use of pair work and group-work. Pupils in the senior room could communicate very effectively using a broad vocabulary. Good practice was also observed in the senior classes regarding reading and writing, the use of a variety of texts, including newspapers and books, and an emphasis on independent writing. It is recommended that these good practices are promoted in the middle classes.

The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in English is good and in some cases is very good. A number of very effective initiatives have been introduced by the learning-support teacher to support literacy across the school. Such initiatives are highly praiseworthy and are yielding very encouraging results. There is significant use of class novels in some classrooms which greatly motivates pupils to read good quality literature. There is scope for the development of differentiated resources and activities for pupils in the areas of reading and writing.

The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in Mathematics is good and in some cases is very good. Teachers make regular use of concrete materials and Mathematics games to stimulate interest in the subject. Pupil comprehension is highest in classrooms where extensive use is made of active methodologies, visual aids and the local environment. It is recommended that the staff devise a whole-school approach to problem-solving and mathematical language. It is further recommended that work is clearly differentiated for individuals and groups with specific learning needs.

The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in Drama is generally very good although some teachers present a restricted curriculum. Pupils are exposed to a variety...
of activities which stimulate their thinking skills, and which deepen their understanding of topics encountered in other subject areas. A teacher is employed by the school to teach aspects of the Drama curriculum. The quality of skill development in these classes is very good.

- The quality of assessment is very good. The learning-support teacher graphs the results of standardised tests to present a whole-school picture of achievement in English and Mathematics. Areas of weakness are identified and prioritised for development. She also carries out a range of diagnostic tests on pupils to identify specific areas for development. Individual teachers record pupil attainment in different subject areas, but particularly in the areas of Mathematics and spelling.

6. Quality of Supports for Pupils

- The quality of supports for pupils is of the highest standard. The pupils receive the services of a full-time learning-support/resource teacher and a part-time resource teacher. Both teachers prepare conscientiously and assiduously for their pupils. Individual education plans are prepared for all pupils and shared with parents. These plans show continuity and progression in pupil learning from term to term.

- The staff, and in particular the learning-support teacher, has engaged in significant professional development to facilitate the effective use of in-class support. This is proving very successful. There is commendable collaboration between all staff members. A number of very successful initiatives such as peer-tutoring and early intervention are ongoing. The introduction of assessment for learning through such initiatives is laudable.

- The school avails of the services of a shared co-ordinator under the DEIS initiative. At the time of the evaluation a new co-ordinator had recently been appointed. Clear links between the school’s targets for literacy, numeracy, attendance and parental involvement and her long-term and short-term schemes of work had already been established at the time of this evaluation. Her work to date in the area of Mathematics is of a high quality.

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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 and Staff wish to thank the inspector for her courtesy, enthusiasm, advice, help and encouraging attitude while in the school. We are very pleased with the findings of the report and feel that the process was very worthwhile and constructive for the whole school community.

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

All recommendations have been implemented and are having a very positive effect on the teaching and learning process throughout the whole school.