Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Scoil an Chroí Ró-Naofa, The Swan,
Co. Laois
Uimhir rolla: 18014K

Date of inspection: 23 April 2010
WHOLE-SCHOOL EVALUATION

A whole-school evaluation of Scoil an Chroí Ró-Naofa, The Swan was undertaken in April 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 Physical Education. 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

Scoil an Chroí Ró-Naofa is a two-teacher vertical, co-educational school located in The Swan, Co. Laois. The school caters for pupils from the village and surrounding rural locality. The building has been recently refurbished and extended and provides ample accommodation for school activities. Enrolment patterns are stable and pupils’ attendance rates are good.

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Enrolment/Staffing</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pupils enrolled in the school</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainstream classes in the school</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers on the school staff</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainstream class teachers</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers working in support roles</td>
<td>1 (part time)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special needs assistants</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT

1.1 Characteristic spirit, mission or vision

Scoil an Chroí Ró-Naofa is a Catholic School under the patronage of the Catholic Bishop of Kildare and Leighlin. In line with its ethos, the school aims to provide a happy and safe environment and endeavours to work in close partnership with parents and families. Observation of daily school interactions and routines indicates that this ethos is being realised successfully. The full and harmonious development of each pupil is being developed through engagement with a broad range of co-curricular and extracurricular activities.

1.2 Board of management

The quality of management provided by the board of management is satisfactory. The board is properly constituted and it expresses a commitment to supporting the work of the school. Members have availed of training opportunities provided by the diocese. Minutes of board meetings are maintained, evidencing discussions relating to organisational, curricular, pastoral and practical matters. In order to comply with the requirements of the Constitution of Boards and Rules of Procedure (Department of Education and Science, 2007), the board should meet more regularly to conduct its work of managing the school. The board reports that school finances are in good order and the treasurer provides the balance in the school account at each meeting. This report should be extended to provide a more comprehensive outline of income and expenditure. The school account should be certified or audited on an annual basis in order to ensure compliance with Section 18 (1) of the Education Act (1998). Organisational and curriculum policies are discussed and ratified on an ongoing basis by the board. The board members,
teaching staff, parents, school secretary and cleaner are to be commended for working collaboratively to provide a safe and well resourced learning environment for the pupils. Commendably, the board espouses a child-centred vision for the school and places its primary focus on improving the educational experiences of the pupils.

1.3 In-school management
The in-school management team is comprised of the principal and a special duties teacher. Both teachers are to be commended for their commitment to the development of the school and to promoting a positive and welcoming atmosphere. The principal exhibits good interpersonal skills and has developed constructive relationships with the pupils and members of the school community. On an annual basis, the principal identifies a range of curricular, administrative and organisational priorities for development. The principal is assisted by a conscientious and capable special duties teacher who undertakes duties of an organisational and pastoral nature. Both teachers work very well together. Going forward, the in-school management team should place a greater emphasis on curriculum development by discussing, documenting and reviewing approaches to curriculum implementation within the school.

1.4 Management of relationships and communication with the school community
Some effective structures are in place to facilitate communication and foster relationships with the wider school community. Teachers meet informally on an ongoing basis and staff meetings are held each term. It is recommended that these meetings should have a stronger curriculum focus. Parent representatives expressed their satisfaction with the range and quality of information provided about school life and their children’s progress. Formal parent-teacher meetings are convened and a written report on all aspects of development and learning is provided annually. The school has developed a website and its potential to communicate with parents and to disseminate elements of the school plan should be further exploited. While the school has no formal parents’ association, parents are highly supportive of the work of the school and support both curricular and extracurricular activities. The school is encouraged to explore the possibility of re-establishing the parents’ association.

1.5 Management of pupils
The management of pupils is of a high quality and teachers are to be commended for the very positive learning atmosphere prevailing in the school. Pupils’ behaviour is very good and they engage willingly in their learning. Positive affirmation of pupils’ behaviour is used throughout the school and pupils present as courteous and respectful in their relationships with peers and teachers. Pupils are afforded opportunities to participate in decision-making activities through their involvement in the Green School’s Programme.

2. Quality of School Planning

2.1 Whole-school and classroom planning
The quality of whole-school organisational planning is good. The school has developed a number of high quality procedural and administrative policies that meet legislative requirements and their implementation ensures the smooth operation of the school. The quality of whole-school curriculum planning shows scope for development. Curriculum plans are in place for most subjects and these reflect the principles and generic structure of the curriculum. It is recommended that priority be given to developing a plan for the remaining four subjects. In their development and in the review of existing curriculum plans, an emphasis should be placed on contextualising them further to the specific needs of the school. This will ensure that whole-school approaches can be documented and that plans will support individual teacher planning
across the curriculum. The school is advised to plan for the cyclical review of policies and plans over a specified time frame and to include the review date upon ratification. A more collaborative approach, involving the board of management and parents, should be considered in the development and review of the school plan.

There is scope to enhance the quality of teacher’s individual planning. Teachers’ classroom timetables should be reviewed to ensure compliance with the suggested minimum weekly time framework outlined in the *Primary School Curriculum* (1999). Long-term plans vary in format and content and should provide a clearer overview of curriculum content. Teacher’s short-term planning is generally topic based and correlates closely to textbook content. A consistent approach to the development of long-term and short-term plans should now be agreed at a whole-school level. This should ensure that the structure and content objectives of the curriculum provide the basis for planning in each classroom. Information on methodologies, assessment strategies, differentiation and resources to be used should be included to support implementation. Teachers maintain monthly progress records by noting the content covered on their short-term planning.

### 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. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

#### 3.1 Language

*Gaeilge*

Ar an iomlán, múintear an Ghaeilge go sásúil sa scoil. Is léir go n-oibríonn na hoidí go díograiseach chun dearcadh dearfach a chur i leith na Gaeilge agus chun cumas na ndaltaí sa teanga a forbarúirt. Moltar mar a labhraíonn na hoidí Gaeilge i gcónaí le linn na gceachtanna a chuireann ina h-áit go féidir leis an bhfhorbairt a dhéanamh sa scoil freisin. Cruthaítear timpeallacht Ghaeilge sa scoil trí thostáil, líon de chuidí agus ábhar léirithe a thaispeáint sna seomraí ranga. Úsáideann na hoidí modhanna muintire éagsúla le linn na gceachtanna ar a n-áirítear cluchí, rólghlacadh, amhráin agus rannta. Cé go bhfuil raon maith foclóra ag na daltaí, moltar tuilleadh forbartha ar a scileanna cumarsáide trí bhéime sa bhreis a leagan ar threithmhshe chumasártha na gceachtanna agus a chinntíodh go mbíonn fhorfhorcumarsáide mar chuid dhúsáil de gach ceacht oibreachta. Léann formhór na daltaí go cruinn agus san iomlán, tugtar faoi deara go bhfuil tuiscint ar a bhfuil a léamh acu. Soláthraitheacht gniomhaimseachta oiriúnacha sa scribhneoireacht ó théascleabhair agus leabhair saothair na ndaltaí. Moltar béim sa bhreis a leagan ar an saorscribhneoireacht sa Ghaeilge chun tuilleadh leathnú a dhéanamh ar réimse scileanna cumarsáide na ndaltaí.

*Irish*

Overall Irish is taught satisfactorily in the school. It is evident that the teachers work diligently to cultivate a positive attitude towards Irish and to develop the pupils’ competence in the language. Teachers are commended for conducting lessons through Irish but a greater emphasis could be
placed on using Irish outside formal lessons. An environment which supports Irish is provided in
the school through the display of posters, labels and visual resources in the classrooms. Teachers
use a variety of methodologies during lessons including games, role play, songs and rhymes. While
the pupils have a good range of vocabulary, their communication skills require further
reinforcement by increasing the emphasis on the communicative stage of lessons and ensuring
that genuine conversational opportunities are an integral part of each oral lesson. Most pupils
read carefully and in the main, they demonstrate an understanding of the content. Suitable
writing activities are provided from the pupils’ textbooks and workbooks. It is important to place
an increased emphasis on independent writing in Irish so as to further broaden the pupils’ range
of communicative skills.

English
The overall quality of teaching and learning in English is good. Classrooms are productive and
print-rich environments that assist in consolidating learning and celebrating the written work of
pupils. Opportunities to develop literacy skills are provided during daily play activities in the
infant and junior classes. Oral language skills are developed on a cross-curricular basis. Discrete
opportunities for structured oral language interactions with the teacher and among pupils should
be planned with a view to developing pupils’ competence and confidence to share their opinions,
express their ideas and sustain conversations. Many pupils can recite a range of rhymes and
poems and an emphasis is placed on pupils composing their own poems throughout the school.

A structured approach to the fostering of phonological awareness is implemented in the infant and
junior classes. Pupils are making good progress with this programme and are developing good
word identification strategies and a growing sight vocabulary. Pupils exhibit good reading ability
throughout the school. A reduced emphasis on the class reading scheme as the main instructional
reading material and a greater emphasis on the parallel readers and novels available in the school
is recommended to provide for greater differentiation in the pupils’ learning experiences. A wider
range of approaches and methodologies should be used to respond to reading material and to
develop comprehension skills.

Pupils are given opportunities to write in a variety of genres and to write from different points of
view and for different audiences. This is commendable practice and should be extended further,
with a reduced emphasis on workbook writing activities. Information and communication
technology (ICT) is adeptly used in the writing process throughout the school. There is scope for
a more consistent application of the handwriting policy in the school. Pupils’ writing
demonstrates good age-appropriate mastery of grammar, punctuation and spellings.

3.2 Mathematics
On the whole, the quality of teaching and learning in Mathematics is good. Teachers prepare a
mathematics-rich environment to reinforce learning and structured morning play routines include
numeracy-related activities in the infant and junior classes. Mental mathematical activities should
become an integral feature of lessons. Pupils at all levels are engaging with a broad and balanced
curriculum and display a good understanding of previous learning. Some good engagement with
concrete materials, purposeful group work and a focus on developing the pupils’ estimation skills
was observed during the course of the evaluation. In the delivery of the mathematics curriculum,
teachers are advised to place less emphasis on computational work in textbooks and workbooks
and to place a greater emphasis on concept and skills development through engagement with
concrete materials and an increased emphasis on talk and discussion. The grouping of pupils for
activities and the undertaking of work across related curriculum strands with all classes, followed
by differentiated learning activities, should be explored.
3.3 Physical Education
Teaching and learning in Physical Education is of a high standard. Teacher planning indicates that a broad and balanced curriculum is being implemented. Good use is made of the school’s outdoor facilities and the adjoining hall and pitch in the delivery of the curriculum. Provision is made for the implementation of the aquatics strand in a local swimming pool. All lessons include appropriate emphasis on safe participation, skills’ development, active pupil engagement and teamwork. Warming-up and cool-down exercises are features of all lessons. Talk and discussion could be further used to enhance pupils’ understanding and appreciation of the various physical activities in which they engage. Pupils’ range of experiences is enhanced by participation in an array of in-school, inter-school and community sports competitions annually.

3.4 Assessment
Assessment of learning in the school is good. Standardised tests are administered annually and the results are analysed and tracked on an individual pupil basis. Results are communicated to parents orally and the school should explore ways of providing these results in a written format. The school should consider administering a non-reading intelligence test to complement the data garnered from standardised tests. Screening tests are undertaken in senior infants and diagnostic tests are administered by the learning-support teacher as needs arise. Good procedures are in place for the maintenance of pupils’ records. Reading records, work samples, results of teacher-designed tests and some observations on pupils are maintained by teachers. On the whole, written work across the curriculum is well monitored and corrected. However, there is scope to develop formative assessment strategies within the school in order to document pupils’ progress across the curriculum. The data generated should be used to inform teacher planning and the differentiation of teaching and learning for pupils.

4. Quality of Support for Pupils

4.1 Pupils with special educational needs
The quality of support for pupils with special educational needs is good. The part-time learning-support teacher attends the school for one hour daily and delivers support to a small number of pupils on a withdrawal basis. The overall quality of planning for pupils in learning support is good. Individual pupil learning profiles (IPLPs) have been developed on a collaborative basis for all pupils in receipt of support and these are reviewed regularly. Copies of these profiles should be shared with teachers and parents to ensure that each partner can support the pupils’ programme. Results of testing, work samples and monthly progress records are maintained for pupils with special educational needs. A greater focus on recording pupils’ progress on short-term planning should now be considered. Teaching and learning is well structured and is focussed on the targets within the IPLPs. A good range of resources is used to support reading and writing activities. A further focus on the development of oral language skills is advised during support sessions. It is evident that pupils are making good progress in the attainment of their targets. It is recommended that the existing model of withdrawal be replaced by a more balanced provision of withdrawal and in-class support, based on the needs of individual pupils. This will ensure benefit to a maximum number of pupils and could assist classroom teachers in the delivery of programmes in the multi-class context.

4.2 Other supports for pupils: disadvantaged, minority and other groups
At present, there are no pupils with particular needs arising from their membership of the above groups. Support is provided for all pupils in accordance with their individual needs based on the supportive and inclusive school culture.
5. CONCLUSION

The school has strengths in the following areas:

- The board of management, staff and parents are to be commended for the provision of a bright, productive and well-resourced learning environment.
- There is a good level of communication with parents and in turn, parents are highly supportive of the work of the school.
- The principal and staff work effectively as a team and they share their talents enthusiastically for the benefit of the pupils.
- A warm, caring and affirming school atmosphere exists and this creates a nurturing and supportive learning environment.
- Pupils’ behaviour is managed successfully and interactions observed among pupils were characterised by respect, consideration and courtesy.

The following key recommendations are made in order to further improve the quality of education provided by the school:

- It is recommended that the remaining curriculum policies required within the whole-school plan should be completed. Existing curriculum policies should be contextualised to meet the needs of the school when reviewed. The approach to teacher planning should be revised to ensure it is more closely aligned to the curriculum structure and content.
- It is recommended that a wider blend of approaches and methodologies as advocated by the curriculum should be implemented to involve pupils to a greater degree as active agents in the learning process. This would reduce the dependency on textbooks, improve pupils’ engagement in their learning and impact positively on pupils’ communication and expression skills.
- It is recommended that further assessment strategies should be implemented to document pupils’ learning across the curriculum. The data generated should be analysed and distilled to inform the cycle of planning, teaching and learning within each classroom.

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.

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