Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Rathdowney Church of Ireland National School
Church Street,
Rathdowney, Co. Laois

Uimhir rolla: 18075H

Date of inspection: 19 November 2012
1. Introduction

Rathdowney National School is a two teacher co-educational primary school under Church of Ireland patronage. Forty five pupils are enrolled from infants to sixth class and attendance is very good. 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.

2. Summary of Findings and Recommendations for Further Development

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

- The school is supported by a conscientious board of management and enjoys the assistance of a committed parent body.
- A pleasant and respectful atmosphere is evident in all interactions within the school.
- Classrooms are well organised and pupils are confident and enthusiastic learners.
- The quality of overall teaching and learning in Mathematics and in Social, Personal and Health Education is very good.
- Provision for pupils with special educational needs is very good.

The following main recommendations are made:

- More formal engagement with parents in the planning process is recommended.
- The school's assessment policy should be used to ensure a systematic whole-school approach to the assessment and recording of pupils' progress.
- Moltar athbhreithniú a dhéanamh ar mhúineadh agus ar fhoghlaim na Gaeilge ar bhonn uile scoile agus a chinntiú go mbíonn cur chuige comhtháite agus comhsheasmhach de réir treoirínte an churaclaim in úsáid ag gach rang leibhéal. It is recommended that a review of whole-school provision for Irish takes place to ensure a consistent, cohesive approach throughout the school.

3. Quality of School Management

- The board of management is properly constituted. Regular meetings are held and detailed minutes are maintained. The board diligently undertakes its statutory obligations with regard to legislation, including the organisation of appropriate accounting procedures. The board liaises fully with teachers, and with parents to a lesser degree, in the formulation of the school plan, and all policies are ratified. More formal engagement with parents in the planning process is recommended. The board has developed a satisfactory action plan to ensure the cyclical progression of the school plan over time, in both organisational and curriculum areas. Board members avail of training provided by the Church of Ireland Diocesan Board of Education.
• The school principal capably manages all aspects of school life. She exhibits excellent organisational skills. She leads the whole-school planning process competently. She supports staff effectively and is highly committed to the pupils’ educational and pastoral welfare. A deputy principal will be appointed in the near future. The board has outlined duties for this post with a view to supporting the effective implementation of the principal’s role.

• There is an admirable range of resources available to enhance teaching and learning. Libraries are well-stocked with a wide range of reading materials. The interactive whiteboard is used as an effective tool and provides focussed learning opportunities for pupils.

• The management of relationships and communication is very good. The parents’ association supports the work of the school. Parents are involved in fundraising and in all school events and are a beneficial asset to the school. Communication between home and school is very effective. Parent questionnaires indicate that most parents agree that there is a good atmosphere in the school and that the school is welcoming of parents.

• Pupils are cared for and supported in a highly commendable fashion. A positive, inclusive atmosphere permeates all school interactions. In their questionnaire responses all pupils reported feeling safe in their classroom. Most agree that they are doing well at reading and Mathematics and most agree that the teacher explains things clearly.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

• The board is actively involved in the development of organisational policies and in the review of curriculum policies. There is a good standard of planning in relation to key organisational areas. The process of school self-evaluation is in the early stages of development. It is envisaged that the imminent appointment of the deputy principal will support the school in focussing on this process.

• Curriculum plans are reflective of the school context and of the individual needs of pupils, and are clearly structured. Agreed approaches for the implementation of each curriculum area, together with a summary of the work to be completed at every class level, are outlined consistently. A satisfactory assessment policy has been formulated. It is recommended that this assessment policy be used to ensure a systematic whole-school approach to the assessment and recording of pupils’ progress.

• Some good practice was observed in relation to individual classroom planning. This good practice addressed the needs of all pupils through highlighting specific objectives, relevant methodologies and particular skills development. The sharing of this good work among all teachers is recommended. As a further means of extending this good practice, common planning templates should be considered.

• 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 quality of overall teaching, learning and pupil achievement is good. Effective management skills are evident and teachers manage the multi-class setting competently.
They engage in whole-class teaching and provide pertinent opportunities for pair and group activities. Effective integration and linkage enhance lesson pace in many instances. In some instances differentiation is used well. The extension of this good practice to all classes is advised. Bright, print-rich classrooms provide supportive learning environments throughout. Teachers display an ability to support their lessons using a variety of resources including the interactive whiteboard.

- **Tá caighdeán an teagaisc agus na foghlaíma sa Ghaeilge go measartha. De gnáth, forbraítear scileanna labhartha na ndaltaí trí rangtheagasc agus trí ghníomhachtaí faoi theoir an oide. Cé go fregaíonn na daltaí ceisteannaainn a go muineach, ní tugtar ach roint bhéag deiseanna dóibh a gcuamas labhartha a fhorleathnú. Ba chóir go mbeadh ócaidí ar fáil do pháistí i ngach rang a scileanna teanga a leathnú. Ar an iomlán, soschúrtar caighdeán sásúil sa léitheoireacht. I roinnt ranganna, baintear úsáid as filíocht agus rannta chun an fhoghlaim a dhaingniú. Bunaítear an scribhneoireacht, ar an iomlán, ar na leabhraí shaothair. Níor mhiste aird a dhíriú anois ar dheiseanna a thabhairt do na daltaí, go háirithe sna hard ranganna, scribhneoireacht fheidhmíúil agus scribhneoireacht phearsanta a chleachtadh. Moltar athbhreithniú a dhéanamh ar mhúineadh agus ar fhoghlaim na Gaeilge ar bhonn uile scoile agus a chintiú go mbíonn cur chuige comhtháite agus comhcheartaí mora i úsáid ag gach rang lebhéal.**

- **The quality of learning and teaching in Irish is fair. In general, the pupils’ communication skills are developed through whole-class, teacher-directed activities. Pupils answer specific questions with competence but are afforded little opportunity to extend their capacity to communicate in the language. It is recommended that occasions be provided to extend the pupils’ language skills at each class level. In general, reading standards in Irish are satisfactory. Poetry and rhyme are used in some classes to consolidate learning. Written work is primarily based on the selected workbooks. Attention should now be given to the provision of functional and creative writing opportunities particularly for pupils in the senior classes. It is recommended that a review of whole-school provision for Irish takes place to ensure a consistent, cohesive approach at every class level.**

- **The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in English is good. In oral language, pupils participate well in class discussions; they talk confidently and discuss topics with increasing fluency. The teachers use poetry and rhyme consistently to develop the pupils’ oral language development. The teachers employ good questioning techniques to expand thinking skills. They make every effort to develop pupils’ listening skills. Due attention is given to the development of reading strategies. Most pupils read accurately and are developing appropriate comprehension skills. The writing process is well scaffolded and pupils write in a range of genres for a variety of audiences. Consideration should be given to extending the displays of written work in some classes to celebrate pupils’ writing achievements more fully.**

- **The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in Mathematics is very good. A wide range of teaching methodologies is successfully implemented and pupils experience a broad variety of work across the strands. Suitable emphasis is placed on oral work to extend pupils’ mathematical thinking. Emphasis is placed on practical experiences using hands-on discovery methods, co-operative learning and the development of mathematical language. Concepts taught are regularly revised and consolidated. Due attention is paid to developing problem-solving skills across the strands.**

- **The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) is very good. A secure and safe environment is organised, where pupils’ social, personal and co-operative skills are addressed. An ethos of mutual respect exists between teachers and pupils, and pupils are motivated to learn. It is evident that pupils respond positively to the interest that teachers show in their educational progress, their personal development and their good behaviour. Discrete SPHE lessons,**
incorporating effective Circle Time strategies and cross-curricular work, complement this whole-school approach.

6. Quality of Support for Pupils

- Very good practice is evident in the special education setting. Teachers engage in suitable planning. Detailed individual education plans are devised as appropriate, and learning targets are clear and are based on each pupil’s strengths and priority needs. Pupils’ progress is consistently recorded and reviewed at regular intervals during the school year. Lessons observed were well structured and included the provision of focussed, learning activities. The teachers facilitate positive, affirming interactions among the whole school community.

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