Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Saint Theresa’s National School
Kilkelly, Co. Mayo
Uimhir rolla: 18154C

Date of inspection: 26 January 2010
WHOLE-SCHOOL EVALUATION

A whole-school evaluation of St. Theresa’s NS was undertaken in January 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 History. 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

St. Theresa’s NS is located in the village of Kilkeeny, and caters for boys and girls from infants to sixth class. The village houses a number of families under the rural resettlement programme and has a number of pupils from the international community. It also has a number of transient families who enrol their pupils for a short period of time and subsequently move to another town. The school is under the patronage of the Catholic Bishop of Achonry.

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pupils enrolled in the school</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainstream classes in the school</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers on the school staff</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainstream class teachers</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers working in support roles</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special needs assistants</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT

1.1 Characteristic spirit, mission or vision

The school’s mission statement supports the principles of equality. The staff strives to promote a caring, happy and secure atmosphere for its pupils. This was evident in the good quality relationships between teachers and their pupils observed during the course of the evaluation. The school has a welcoming and open atmosphere. While the school ethos promotes Catholic values, pupils of all religious denominations and no religious denomination are invited to enrol in the school.

1.2 Board of management

The board of management is effective in achieving its objectives regarding school accommodation and resources. It meets on a regular basis and attendance at meetings is very good. It has laid out clear objectives for its current term of office. Members of the board have availed of training. Minutes are maintained by the board’s secretary. The board is currently not properly constituted as it has failed to elect a treasurer. This matter has been brought to the attention of the patron. Finances are audited annually. The board is active in the maintenance of the school building and its grounds. The chairperson is a regular visitor to the school. It is
recommended that the board discusses the school timetable to ensure compliance with the Department of Education and Science circular 11/95 *Time in School*.

1.3 In-school management

The principal is hard-working and dedicated to the needs of the pupils. He values parental involvement and encourages open communication within the school community. He has established very good staff relations. He organises regular staff meetings to further the development and maintenance of school policy and to promote professional discussion among the staff. While the principal is efficient in the day-to-day running of the school, it is recommended that roll books and registers are maintained according to department guidelines. The principal is ably supported by a deputy principal and a special duties teacher who undertake a number of responsibilities. It is recommended that posts of responsibility are reviewed on a regular basis to reflect the changing needs of the school, in line with the Department of Education and Science circular 07/03.

1.4 Management of relationships and communication with the school community

The quality of relationships between the school staff and the parent body is very good. Parents are kept informed of developments in the school, including new policies and plans, through letters and newsletters. Annual parent-teacher meetings are organised to discuss pupil progress. Parents are encouraged to come into the school at any time should they have a concern. Written reports are issued to parents at the end of the school year. Attendance in the school is fair. It is recommended that the school community devise a number of strategies to actively promote a higher pupil attendance rate.

1.5 Management of pupils

The quality of pupil management is very good. Pupils are friendly and self-confident. They were managed effectively and sensitively throughout the school during the course of the evaluation. All teachers have established clear routines with their classes to promote positive behaviour. Teachers are encouraging of pupils’ behaviour and of their learning. Regular feedback is given to pupils. The school’s code of behaviour is currently being reviewed.

2. Quality of School Planning

2.1 Whole-school and classroom planning

The staff has devised a wide range of plans and policies on an on-going basis. They have liaised effectively with primary school support services when necessary. The quality of organisational planning is good. Organisational policies generally reflect the context of the school and adhere to appropriate Department of Education and Skills circulars and guidelines. It is recommended that each policy is dated, with a review date evident. The quality of curricular planning shows some scope for development. Curricular plans are generic in nature and do not inform classroom planning to a significant degree. Considering the successful approaches used by individual teachers in certain subjects, it is recommended that curricular plans be reviewed with a view to providing guidelines on teaching in the multi-grade classes and devising whole-school approaches in relevant areas. The school planning process could be furthered by including a development section in the school plan to incorporate a long-term plan, a planning diary and current action plans.
The quality of classroom planning is good. Teachers produce long-term and short-term schemes of work on a regular basis. Short-term plans give detail of the strand and strand unit to be covered, the methodologies and resources to be used and the approaches to differentiating work for pupils with different learning needs. It is recommended that teachers document differentiated learning outcomes for such pupils. Long-term plans outline the topics to be covered under each strand for each month. It is recommended that the content to be covered, in terms of learning outcomes for pupils, is included in each plan. Monthly progress reports are maintained by each teacher, submitted to the principal and stored centrally.

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

Tá caighdeán na Gaeilge go maith i gcoitinne. Buineann struchtúr cinnte agus luas éifeachtach leis na ceachtanna. Baineann múinteoirí úsáid thorthúil as cluichí teanga agus ábhair níthiúla chun na daltaí a spreagadh. I ranganna áirithe úsáidtear an Ghaeilge neamhfhoirmiúil go han-éifeachtach. Moltar go hard na múinteoirí a múineann ábhair eile, Corpoideachas go háirithe, trí Ghaeilge. Cé go leagtar béim ar an snáithe éisteacht, moltar ceachtanna agus gníomhaíochtaí ar leith a eagrú chun í a threisiú de réir cuspóirí an chara. Tá foilsiú leathan ag na daltaí i ngach rang ach moltar an teanga a mhúineadh i gcomhtháis an cumarsáideachta, le béim ar obair bheire le mhodh móntú. Moltar chomh maith dul síar rialta a threóilte ar na teamaí cainte. Tá na daltaí in ann caint go leóntach faoi réimse d’ábhar le tacaíocht, ach bionn deacrachtaí suntasacha acu iad féin a chur in iúl i ngach teanga.

Múinteoirí le litéitheoireacht go neamhfhoirmiúil trí luachmharaí agus gnothaithe. Is iomaí focal agus frása atá le feiceáil i ngach seomra ranga. Úsáidtear leabhair bheaga leabharlannaí leis na daltaí sionsráiteach chun suim a mhúscailt sa litéitheoireacht Ghaeilge. Léann na daltaí go lófa a chéile is gá aird a dhírriú ar fhoghraíocht chun cruinneas na litéitheoireachta a fhorráiste, scríobhann na daltaí ar bhonn rialta. Tá caighdeán na scríbhneoireachta go maith. Leagtar béim ar phróiseáine na scríbhneoireachta agus baintear feidhm inmholta as riomhaíocht chun obair na ndaltaí a thaispeáint. Moltar, áfach, réimse nios leithne de thrácaanna scríbhneoireachta a chothú bunaithe ar feidhm na ndaltaí.

Irish

The standard of Irish is generally good. Lessons have a definite structure with effective pacing. Teachers use language games and concrete materials fruitfully to motivate the pupils. In some classrooms the informal use of Irish is very effective. The practice of using Irish as the language of instruction for other subjects such as Physical Education is highly commendable. While the
strand listening is emphasised by teachers, it is recommended that discrete lessons and activities are organised to develop this skill in line with the objectives of the curriculum. Pupils in all classes have a wide vocabulary but it is recommended that the language is always taught in a communicative context, with an emphasis on pair work as a methodology. It is further recommended that regular revision is undertaken on the different oral themes. Pupils can speak at length about a variety of topics with support but have significant difficulties expressing themselves in different tenses.

Reading is taught informally through the use of flashcards and posters in the environment. There are a lot of words and phrases on display in each classroom. Small library books are used effectively with the senior pupils to stimulate their interest in Irish reading. Pupils read fluently but it is recommended that attention is given to pronunciation to promote accuracy in reading. Pupils write on a regular basis. The standard of their writing is good. An emphasis is placed on the writing process and praiseworthy use is made of computers to present pupils’ work. However, it is recommended that a broader range of writing tasks are presented, based on pupils’ lives.

**English**
The quality of pupils’ oral English is good. Pupils speak competently and confidently when questioned. They discuss their personal news on a very regular basis. Considering their ability to do this effectively, it is recommended that teachers present other contexts and themes to pupils to develop a greater variety of skills and a wider vocabulary. Poetry is emphasised appropriately in most classrooms and pupils can recite a number of poems. Senior pupils explore and discuss poetry at an advanced level. In some cases, poetry is linked very advantageously with Drama to deepen pupils’ understanding.

The quality of pupils’ reading is good although there is a general lack of interest in reading among the pupils. All classrooms are rich in print. A shared-reading initiative is promoted within the school. Class novels are read in the senior classes. However, reading texts and tasks are not differentiated for pupils of different reading ability. It is recommended that teachers group by ability for reading, starting in the junior classes. It is further recommended that all teachers read books by renowned children’s authors to their pupils to stimulate an interest in books of different genres.

The quality of pupils’ handwriting shows scope for development. These skills are developed in the infant classes and are built on throughout the school. There is a need for a greater emphasis on the appropriate presentation of written work. It is recommended that all teachers implement the whole-school approach to handwriting documented in the school plan. Pupils enjoy expressing themselves through writing. The writing process is emphasised very effectively. Samples of pupils’ work are on display in classrooms or are made into attractive class books. It is recommended that teachers develop each genre of writing to a higher level, with a greater emphasis on creative writing. Pupils’ spelling skills are developing appropriately but there is a lack of differentiation for pupils who experience difficulty with literacy. It is recommended that the staff review their approach to the teaching of spelling.

**3.2 Mathematics**
The quality of teaching and learning in Mathematics is very good. Teachers make very effective use of a range of methodologies and resources to stimulate pupils and to promote comprehension, despite limited space in classrooms. Pupils are very active in their learning and are highly motivated by Mathematics. Some commendable practices were observed in the teaching of Mathematics, such as teachers documenting key vocabulary on the board as they introduced new
topics, relating material to the pupils’ environment and experience, using pupils’ prior knowledge to advance new concepts, revision of previous mathematical facts and concepts, and getting the pupils to justify their answers to ensure they could discuss mathematical processes effectively. While all teachers emphasise problem-solving, it is recommended that they devise a whole-school approach to problem-solving to scaffold learning for pupils who experience difficulties.

3.3 History

History is taught skilfully in all classes using a wide range of pupil-centred methodologies. It is integrated very effectively with other subjects, particularly Geography, Science, Drama and Visual Arts. An appropriate programme of work is presented to a majority of classes to develop pupils’ knowledge and skills but it is recommended that all teachers make closer connections with the objectives of the Primary School Curriculum. Pupils are given regular opportunities to work as historians and to handle historical artefacts. They are brought on local history tours. Lesson content is often linked very effectively to pupils’ lives. Pupils would benefit from a whole-school approach to the teaching of the history of the immediate area.

3.4 Assessment

The quality of assessment is good. Standardised tests are used to confirm pupils’ progress in English and Mathematics. It is recommended that the standardised results are graphed and analysed annually to establish trends in attainment. The Middle Infants Screening Test (MIST) is used to assess early literacy skills in senior infants, and the Forward Together programme is implemented with pupils who display difficulties. Such practice is commendable. Pupils’ copybooks and written work are regularly monitored in a majority classes. All teachers use observation as their main method of assessment. It would be worthwhile, however, to record some of these observations and to keep a record of common errors and pupil difficulties, and to base lessons on such findings.

4. Quality of Support for Pupils

4.1 Pupils with special educational needs

The school avails of the services of two shared teachers to support pupils with special educational needs (SEN), one of whom is a substitute teacher and the other who had commenced in the post in September 2009. The school follows the staged approach to providing support for pupils with SEN as outlined in the Department of Education and Science circular 02/05. This good practice should be noted in the school plan. Teachers provide individual education plans (IEP) for all pupils in receipt of support. The support teachers plan cooperatively with the classroom teachers. IEPs are discussed with the parents of each pupil and parents receive a copy of the plan. Pupils’ progress is regularly reviewed. The principal allocates time each term for support teachers to meet with mainstream staff to discuss each pupil’s progress and needs. This practice is highly commended. The school implements a successful early-intervention programme for infants, which focuses on phonological awareness.

The quality of teaching for pupils with special educational needs is very good. Teachers ensure that bright and stimulating learning environments are created. Pupils’ work is attractively displayed on the walls. Methodologies are learner-centred with ample use of concrete materials and visual aids. Pupils experience high success rates and receive regular praise and affirmation.
4.2 Other supports for pupils: disadvantaged, minority and other groups

A part-time teacher of English as an additional language (EAL) provides support to the pupils from the international community. Very good relationships have been established between teachers and pupils. High quality resources are prepared to teach new vocabulary. It is recommended that additional use be made of games and songs to optimise learning for the young pupils.

5. Conclusion

The school has strengths in the following areas:

- The board of management is effective in achieving its objectives regarding school accommodation and resources.
- The teaching staff is hard-working.
- The quality of relationships within the staff and between the school staff and the parent body is very good.
- Pupils were managed effectively and sensitively throughout the school during the course of the evaluation.
- Teachers use a broad range of methodologies and resources in their teaching, despite limited space.
- The quality of teaching and learning in Mathematics is particularly good.
- The quality of consultation between class teachers and support teachers and of the teaching of pupils with special educational needs are very good.

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

- It is recommended that the board ensures that the school timetable complies with the Department of Education and Science circular 11/95.
- It is recommended that teachers provide explicit differentiation of learning outcomes for pupils with learning difficulties and group pupils by ability for literacy and Mathematics.
- It is recommended that teachers promote an interest in reading among the pupils and monitor achievement levels in this area.
- It is recommended that the staff review their school plan to include a development section and to ensure that the successful approaches to teaching in various curricular areas are clearly documented.

Post-evaluation meetings were held with the staff and the board of management where the draft findings and recommendations of the evaluation were presented and discussed.

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