An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Ayr Hill National School,
Ramelton, County Donegal
Uimhir rolla: 18251B

Date of inspection: 18 January 2012
1. Introduction

Ayr Hill is a mainstream, co-educational primary school under the patronage of the Presbyterian Church. The school currently caters for 56 pupils, seven of whom have enrolled since the beginning of the school year. Attendance patterns are very good. The school participates in the Modern Languages in Primary Schools initiative. Provision for English, Irish, Mathematics and Music was inspected. The board of management 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 school has a very supportive board of management.
- The teaching principal demonstrates very high levels of commitment, efficiency and effectiveness in her management and leadership of the school.
- The work of the deputy principal is highly commendable. She contributes very significantly to the school's wide range of co-curricular and extracurricular activities.
- Teaching is energetic and very creative and a very stimulating programme of learning is organised for the pupils.
- The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in English and Mathematics is very good.
- The pupils behave in a very pleasant, respectful manner and are very co-operative.

The following main recommendations are made:

- Learning-support provision should be reviewed to include in-class support and team-teaching in literacy and numeracy.
- Moltar muinín na ndaltaí a threisiú a thuilleadh i labhairt na Gaeilge trí gniomhálochtaí éagsúla cumarsáideach a thabhairt. It is recommended that the pupils’ confidence in speaking Irish should be strengthened by developing further communicative activities.

3. Quality of School Management

- The quality of school management is commendable. The board’s work in overseeing repairs to the school due to major flood damage in 2010/11 was very successful. Current concerns for the board include maintaining French tuition and the retention of the third classroom teacher. It is recommended that the board should assist and support parents in forming a parents’ association.
• The highly committed principal provides very efficient and professional leadership to the school community. She is dedicated to ensuring that all pupils achieve their academic potential. The principal issues very informative written annual reports to parents on the work of the school. There is very effective collaboration, consultation and shared responsibility with the deputy principal. The deputy principal’s contribution to the school’s co-curricular and extracurricular activities is highly commendable.

• The staff comprises three mainstream teachers and a shared learning-support/resource teacher. Teachers are praised for their highly commendable work ethic and their commitment to professional development and to school improvement. The board employs a cleaner whose work greatly enhances the day-to-day life of the school.

• School accommodation has some scope for development. While there are two optimal classrooms, the prefabricated accommodation is too small for its current use as a mainstream classroom. There is a need to develop the learning-support, administration and staff facilities as well as providing some further hard surface area for play and Physical Education.

• Excellent resources have been acquired to support literacy and numeracy and they are used to very good effect. The standard of display throughout the school, including displays of the pupils’ project work, creative writing and extracurricular activities, is highly praiseworthy.

• The management of relationships with the school community is good. Parents’ representatives indicate that they are given regular opportunities to be involved in the school through a variety of social, sporting and fundraising activities. Responses to questionnaires, administered as part of the evaluation, indicate that parents believe that their children like school, that they feel safe in school and that discipline is good.

• The overall management of pupils is very good. The pupils behave in a very pleasant, respectful manner and are very co-operative. Pupils’ questionnaire responses indicate that they enjoy very supportive relationships with their teachers and that they believe their school to be a good school.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

• The quality of whole-school administrative planning is excellent. Uploading relevant policies to the school web site as planned will be beneficial.

• Curriculum planning is very good. Setting out language targets for each class based on curriculum themes will enhance the current whole-school plan for Irish. Going forward, a developmental and integrated e-learning plan for pupils from junior infants to sixth class will be beneficial.

• Appropriate targets for developing literacy, numeracy and assessment practices have been clearly laid out in a three-year action plan. Very successful progress is being made with regard to the targets identified. Teachers meticulously track pupils’ attendance, reading and numeracy development.

• Classroom planning is very good. Teachers prepare thoroughly for lessons in terms of a wide range of materials to support learning. It is advised that monthly progress reports are used at a whole-school level to inform school self-evaluation and review.
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 overall quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement is very good. Teaching is energetic and very creative and a very stimulating programme of learning is organised for the pupils. The local environment features strongly in the middle and senior class programme. Active learning including play is prioritised in the junior classroom. All parents report that teaching is very good in the school. However, they appear unsure as to pupils’ weekly access to Physical Education. Pupils’ responses to questionnaires indicate that they find their lessons interesting, that teachers tell them how to improve their work but indicate scope for increased use of ICT in learning.

- The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in English is very good overall. Pupils communicate clearly and are confident readers displaying a keen enthusiasm for books and reading. They undertake a very good range of writing activities in the middle and senior classes. In the junior classroom the current use of workbooks should be reviewed and further emphasis placed on developing independent writing skills.

- The standard of teaching and learning in Irish is good in terms of listening, reading and writing skills. The pupils have learned a commendable range of appropriate poems by rote in the junior classes and this practice should be extended to other classrooms. It is recommended that the pupils’ confidence in speaking the language should be strengthened by developing further communicative activities. Progress is assessed. However, the Drumcondra Irish Test should now be used to assess learning standards.

- The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in Mathematics is highly commendable. Excellent use is made of the comprehensive mathematical resources to assist with conceptual development. Appropriate emphasis is placed on the acquisition of number facts and on mental arithmetic. Pupils are active in their learning, appear to enjoy mathematics, and results of standardised tests indicate that their overall attainment is very good.

- Teaching, learning and pupil achievement in Music are good. Lessons observed comprised of singing, listening and responding to music, composition and performance using a variety of tuned and percussion instruments. Some pupils display admirable talent for, and knowledge and understanding of musical concepts and literacy. A whole-school choir sings a commendable range of songs and hymns to a good standard. Tin whistle is taught to the middle and senior classes. It is recommended that teachers continue to build on the good work observed.

- The quality of assessment is very good. Screening and standardised tests are administered and shared with parents. Teachers keep very comprehensive assessment records and use a variety of assessment approaches including checklists and peer and
6. Quality of Support for Pupils

- The quality of support for pupils is good. A policy for special educational needs and learning support informs current practice. It is recommended that in light of a staged approach to intervention, it is now appropriate to review this policy involving all the teachers in the process. The NEPS Resource Pack for Teachers will be a useful guide.

- The learning-support/resource teacher spends 15 hours per week in the school. While planning and recording of work are appropriate, the inclusion of more specific targets in Individual Education Plans will enhance current practice. Further links with the Special Education Support Service (SESS), the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) and other relevant professionals are recommended in planning for priority learning needs.

- Currently most support involves the withdrawal of pupils from the mainstream classrooms. Teaching approaches are effective and the pupils benefit from small-group and one-to-one support. Systematic in-class support is recommended as part of the early intervention strategy. Team-teaching in support of numeracy is also recommended.

- The quality of home-school partnership is good. Informative end-of-year reports are issued to parents about their children's progress. Comprehensive records of meetings with parents are maintained. Parents actively support the pupils' work in the school garden and with the harvesting of crops.

- Pupils participate regularly and very successfully in a wide range of activities including the Junior Achievement Programme, local history competitions, science workshops and charity events. Highly commendable attention is given to environmental awareness and the school has received two green flags in the Green-Schools programme.

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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 of Ayr Hill N.S., Ramelton wish to extend our sincere thanks to the DES inspector for the courteous, constructive and professional manner in which she carried out the Whole School Evaluation. The Board of Management welcomes the positivity of the report and the affirmation of the high quality of teaching and learning in our school. We are delighted that the WSE report acknowledges: the effectiveness and dedication of the Board, Principal and staff as they deliver committed service to the school; the positive behaviour and engagement of our pupils in their learning; and the support of our parents.

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

The Board of Management, principal and staff are currently in the process of addressing the recommendations of the report.