Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Scoil Bhríde, Cooloo
Brierfield, County Galway
Uimhir rolla: 18309G

Date of inspection: 24 March 2010
**WHOLE-SCHOOL EVALUATION**

A whole-school evaluation of Scoil Bhríde, Cooloo was undertaken in March 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 Science. 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 Bhríde, Cooloo is situated in the parish of Moylough and Mountbellew in County Galway. The present school building was built in 1959. The school caters for pupils from Cooloo and the surrounding townlands.

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>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainstream classes in the school</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers on the school staff</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainstream class teachers</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers working in support roles</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special needs assistants</td>
<td>0</td>
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**1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT**

**1.1 Characteristic spirit, mission or vision**

The school is under the patronage of the Catholic Archbishop of Tuam. The school’s mission statement emphasises the dignity and uniqueness of each child. The school aims to develop pupils’ self-esteem and their consideration for others. There is a spirit of co-operation in the school and commendable efforts are made to create a happy learning environment.

**1.2 Board of management**

The board of management is constituted in accordance with agreed Department of Education and Skills regulations. Members of the board display praiseworthy commitment to their work and to school improvement. The board meets at least once a term, more often if necessary. Minutes are kept of the proceedings of each board meeting. The minutes of the most recent board meetings indicate that among the most commonly discussed issues are day-to-day school matters, the development of the exterior of the school and the school grounds, and the purchase of teaching resources.

The chairperson of the board of management visits the school regularly. The treasurer presents a financial report at each board meeting. It is recommended that school accounts be audited or certified by an accountant annually in accordance with Section 18 (1) of the Education Act, 1998.
Some members of the board of management have attended training sessions organised by the Catholic Primary School Managers’ Association (CPSMA). The board’s current priorities include the provision of improved sanitary facilities in the school and the further enhancement of the satellite broadband service available to the school. The board of management is particularly satisfied with the recent purchase of interactive whiteboards for each mainstream classroom.

1.3 In-school management
The in-school management team consists of the principal and the deputy principal. The principal was appointed in 2007. His vision for the school is to provide a wide range of experiences for each pupil, with an emphasis on the development of practical life skills. The principal hopes to further develop the use of information and communication technology (ICT) in the school. It is also intended to enhance class libraries through the purchase of new books, and to provide a general-purpose room.

The deputy principal carries out the duties attached to her post competently and diligently. There is a need to revise the contract for this post to ensure that the curricular, organisational and pastoral duties of the post are clearly set out. The revised contract should then be signed and dated by the post-holder and the chairperson of the board of management.

The staff meets informally to discuss issues as the need arises. It is recommended that formal staff meetings be held on a regular basis in future, to provide a forum for discussion on school improvement in all its aspects.

A secretary is employed on a part-time basis in the school. The work of the secretary makes an effective contribution to the smooth running of the school.

1.4 Management of relationships and communication with the school community
The school has an active parents’ association, although it is not affiliated to the National Parents’ Council. The parents’ association holds an annual general meeting, at which the officers are elected. Additional meetings are held as the need arises. The meetings are very well attended, as there is a strong local commitment to the school. Among the current priorities of the parents’ association is the refurbishment of the sanitary facilities in the school.

It was reported by the officers of the parents’ association during the whole-school evaluation that there is very good communication between parents and the school staff. Teachers are approachable and helpful. Regular notes are sent to parents from the school principal to keep them informed on school matters. Effective use is made of the text-a-parent service.

Parents participate in many aspects of school life. Parents are aware of the school-planning process. Parents have been consulted on the code of behaviour and on the school’s internet-usage policy. The voluntary work carried out by parents includes assisting with swimming, school tours and the end-of-year mass, as well as providing transport to sports and quiz competitions. Recently, parents have been very involved in the celebrations for the fiftieth anniversary of the building of the school.

Parent-teacher meetings are held annually during the first term. A written school report is sent home at the end of each school year. This report provides parents with information on their children’s achievement in the various curricular areas.
1.5 Management of pupils
The pupils are very well behaved. They have a positive and respectful relationship with their teachers and they are welcoming and courteous to visitors to the school. Pupils demonstrate a keen interest in the lessons and activities organised.

2. QUALITY OF SCHOOL PLANNING

2.1 Whole-school and classroom planning
Whole-school planning has some positive aspects but there is scope for development overall. The school staff acknowledges the assistance received from national support services in the work covered on whole-school planning to date. There is a need to continue this work, however, to develop a school plan which will assist in further improving curriculum implementation. It is recommended that a three-year action plan be devised as a matter of priority to provide a clear and focused framework for school development planning. The regular review of each school policy should be given due attention as part of this process.

There are whole-school plans available for most curricular areas. These plans contain much useful information. Draft plans have been put together for the remaining curricular areas. These draft curricular plans need to be further developed. Some plans have been signed and dated by the chairperson of the board of management. It is recommended that each plan and policy be signed by the chairperson in future. This will provide a clear indication that the policies have been ratified by the board.

The quality of administrative policies is very good overall. These policies are clear and based on the specific needs of the school. A code of behaviour and anti-bullying policy, school attendance strategy, and health-and-safety statement are available. The board of management has ratified a school admissions policy. It is recommended that this policy be revised to include clearer information on the criteria that will be prioritised should the number of applications for enrolment exceed the number of places available in the school.

The quality of classroom planning at some class levels is highly commendable. There is scope for development in the quality of classroom planning on a school-wide basis, however. It is recommended that a whole-school approach to classroom planning be adopted to ensure greater consistency in curriculum planning and implementation. Appropriate monthly progress records are maintained on the work covered at each class level. Class timetables are provided by each teacher.

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 Department’s Child Protection Guidelines for Primary Schools (Published 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 cáilíocht na foghlama agus an teagaisc sa Ghaeilge go maith ar an iomlán. Tá cáilíocht an teagaisc i gcuid de na ranganna an-mhaith, le ranpháirtíocht agus gnóthachtáil inmholta ó na daltáí. Tá na daltáí ag gach leibhéal ranga in ann iad féin a chur in iúl go muiníneach as Gaeilge. Leanann an chuid is mó de na daltáí teoracha agus freagraíonn siad ceisteanna go soiléir. Is féidir leis na daltáí sna bunranganna labhairt ar ábhair éagsúla. Moltar go dtabharfaí deiseanna rialta do dhaltáí a scileanna labhartha a thabhairt a thuilleadh i gcuid de na ranganna. Ar an iomlán, baineann na hoidí úsáid éifeachtach as áiseanna léiriúta le linn na gceachtanna. Moltar, áfach, áiseanna teagaisc mar seo a úsáid níos minice chun an próiseas foghlama a fheabhsú. Baintear úsáid as aistriúchán díreach i gcuid de na ranganna ó am go céile chun focail agus frásaí a mhúineadh. Moltar Béarla a sheachaint sna ceachtanna Gaeilge. Aithrisíonn na daltáí i ngach rang an ainm agus dánta le brí oiriúnach.

Tá cáilíocht na léitheoireachta sa Ghaeilge go maith ó rang a dó go rang a sé. Léiríonn na daltáí sna ranganna seo dea-fhoghraíocht agus tuiscint ar an méid atá léithe acu. Forbraítear scileanna scríbhneoireachta sa Ghaeilge go héifeachtach, le s aothar inmholta leis in coinnealtanna.

**Irish**
The quality of learning and teaching in Irish is good overall. The quality of teaching in some classes is very good, with commendable pupil engagement and achievement. The pupils at each class level are able to introduce themselves confidently in Irish. The majority of pupils are able to follow instructions and answer questions clearly. Pupils in the junior classes can speak on a variety of topics. It is recommended that regular opportunities be provided for pupils in some classes to further develop their oral-language skills. On the whole, the teachers make effective use of visual aids during lessons. It is recommended, however, that teaching resources like these be used more often to enhance the learning process. Direct translation is occasionally used to teach words and phrases. It is recommended that English be avoided in Irish lessons from now on. The pupils in each class recite rhymes and poems with appropriate expression.

The quality of Irish reading from second class to sixth class is good. Pupils in these classes demonstrate good pronunciation and comprehension of what they have read. Writing skills in Irish are effectively developed, with commendable work evident in pupils’ copybooks.

**English**
The quality of learning and teaching in English is good overall, with elements of very good practice observed at each class level. Pupil’s oral language skills are developed effectively throughout the school. Pupils’ vocabulary is extended in a systematic and successful manner, often in preparation for impressive discussion, debate and drama activities. The study of poetry receives due attention, with pupils demonstrating good enunciation and recitation skills.

Pupils demonstrate good reading ability at each class level. Pupils’ interest in reading is carefully encouraged and fostered. The pupils are articulate in describing and discussing their favourite books. In the senior classes, pupils demonstrate creditable comprehension of complex reading material. In the junior classes, pre-reading activities are well structured. This includes the
effective development of pupils’ phonological awareness. While class libraries are well stocked, the books in the libraries in some classrooms should be presented in a more stimulating manner.

Copybooks and the work samples on display provide evidence of a good standard in pupils’ creative and functional writing. Teachers regularly correct pupils’ written work. There is a need, however, to place more emphasis on the development of editing and presentation skills.

3.2 Mathematics
The quality of learning and teaching in Mathematics is good. Overall pupil achievement is commendable. Appropriate emphasis is placed on the development of pupils’ mathematical vocabulary. Early mathematical activities are very well taught in the infant classes, with pupils demonstrating creditable knowledge and ability. Group work is regularly organised, giving pupils the opportunity to work together to reinforce concepts and solve mathematical problems. Concrete materials are effectively used to enhance the teaching and learning process at each class level.

A good start has been made in the development of a mathematics-rich environment and there is a good range of mathematical posters and resources available in each classroom. Pupils’ copybooks are well presented and indicate a wide range of work covered across the various strands of the mathematics curriculum.

3.3 Science
The quality of learning and teaching in Science is good overall. Teachers are enthusiastic in providing a variety of learning experiences for their pupils in Science. Talk and discussion form part of science lessons at each class level. The quality of discussion in the middle and senior classes is particularly praiseworthy.

A very good range of scientific materials and resources is available in the school. These materials are effectively used to promote active learning. Science copybooks contain an impressive record of worthwhile experiments and project work. While there are interesting science displays in some classrooms, it is recommended that this work be expanded throughout the school.

3.4 Assessment
The modes of assessment most frequently used in the school include teacher observation, oral testing, problem-solving assignments, and correction of pupils’ work. There is scope for development in the quality of record keeping at some class levels, however. It is recommended that information on pupils’ progress be maintained in a more co-ordinated manner on a school-wide basis. This should assist in enhancing the impact of assessment on teaching and learning.

Standardised tests in English and Mathematics are administered annually to pupils from first class to sixth class. The Middle Infant Screening Test (MIST) is administered to senior infants each year to assist in identifying pupils’ learning needs in their early years in school.

4. QUALITY OF SUPPORT FOR PUPILS
4.1 Pupils with special educational needs
There are many positive aspects to the quality of provision for pupils with learning difficulties and special educational needs. The school’s learning-support and resource policy contains useful information about the school’s approach to supporting pupils with special educational needs.
There is a need, however, to provide more specific and up-to-date information on personnel, clustering arrangements, and diagnostic testing in the policy. This should assist in the implementation of a more co-ordinated and focused service.

Most of the teaching methods used in the learning-support and resource service are effective. There is a need, however, to place more emphasis on the development of pupils’ word attack skills to further enhance reading attainment. Pupils are on task during the lessons and activities organised. They are well motivated and the work completed indicates good learning outcomes overall.

Individual education plans (IEPs) are prepared for each pupil who receives resource teaching. Much appropriate information is provided in these plans. Parents are consulted on the development of the IEP for their child and on the setting of learning targets. They also receive a copy of their child’s IEP. There is scope for development in the preparation and presentation of these plans, however. More specific detail should be provided. For example, the results of pupils’ screening and diagnostic tests should be given more prominence. It is recommended that a more systematic approach be taken to the development of IEPs to enhance the teaching and learning process.

Two rooms in the school are used for learning-support and resource teaching. One of the rooms is a dedicated learning-support classroom. This classroom is attractively decorated to provide a stimulating learning environment. The other room used for learning-support teaching also serves as the staff room. Consideration should be given to adjusting the layout and presentation of this room to provide an improved setting for learning-support and resource work.

4.2 Other supports for pupils: disadvantaged, minority and other groups

The school has an open enrolment policy. At present, there are no pupils in the school who are identified as belonging to disadvantaged, minority or other groups.

5. Conclusion

The school has strengths in the following areas:

- The board of management provides commendable support for the school.
- There is a strong community spirit in the local area, of which the school is the focal point.
- The parents’ association is active in seeking to improve the facilities in the school.
- The teachers are committed to implementing improvements to enhance pupils’ learning experiences.
- Pupils’ oral-language skills in English are commendable. A good standard of pupil achievement is evident in English reading.
- Pupils’ achievement in Mathematics is good at each class level.
- Commendable experiments are conducted in Science.

The following key recommendations are made in order to further improve the quality of education provided by the school:
• It is recommended that a targeted action plan be put together to provide a co-ordinated and systematic strategy for the development and review of curricular and administrative policies.
• It is recommended that more emphasis be placed on developing pupils’ oral-language skills in Irish at some class levels.
• It is recommended that pupils’ written work at some class levels receive more attention, to ensure that it is neatly and clearly presented.
• It is recommended that the learning-support and resource service be reviewed to ensure that support is provided in a more co-ordinated and systematic manner.

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.