Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Scoil Fhursa, Lyre, Banteer
Co. Cork
Uimhir rolla:18316D

Date of inspection: 24 March 2010
WHOLE-SCHOOL EVALUATION

A whole-school evaluation of Scoil Phursa, Lyre 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 History. The board of management of the school 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.

INTRODUCTION – SCHOOL CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

Lyre National School is a four teacher co-educational school situated on a large site in the village of Lyre, Banteer. It has a central role in the rural community it serves and caters for pupils from junior infants to sixth class. It is a vibrant school and enrolments have increased over the past number of years. The building has been upgraded to a high standard and it is apparent that the principal and teachers work conscientiously in close collaboration with all partners to successfully provide the pupils with a well-ordered, positive learning environment. Attendance levels are very good and are monitored carefully. The pupils’ learning experiences are enhanced through participation in some extracurricular activities such as quiz competitions and their success at national level is acknowledged.

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

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

1.1 Characteristic spirit, mission or vision

This is a Roman Catholic school under the patronage of the Apostolic Administrator of the Diocese of Cloyne. The school aims to promote the holistic development of all its pupils and in line with its ethos statement warm, caring relationships permeate its work.

1.2 Board of management

The board of management discharges its duties effectively. Meetings are convened regularly and it is evident that the members work assiduously on behalf of the school. The board has addressed successfully a wide range of accommodation issues and has upgraded the building to ensure high-quality facilities for teaching and learning. There is a clearly defined system in place for tracking income and expenditure and overall the school is well-resourced. The board is involved in the whole-school planning process and discusses and ratifies school policies. In order to further develop the important role of the board in promoting ongoing school self-evaluation it is recommended that its involvement in curricular policy development be extended and that policies be reviewed on a more systematic basis. Also, it is recommended that hard copies of all policies
be signed and dated. The board employs a secretary and caretaker on a part-time basis and their significant contribution to the work of the school is acknowledged.

1.3 In-school management
The principal combines his teaching, leadership and management roles effectively. He demonstrates a strong commitment to pupils and staff and has succeeded in creating a climate that is characterised by open communication and mutual respect. He sets high expectations for the work of the pupils and is clearly committed to promoting ongoing school improvement. The principal is ably supported by dedicated, highly motivated and talented teaching staff, including a deputy principal. They deserve much credit for the considerable work they undertake to progress the goals of the school.

1.4 Management of relationships and communication with the school community
This is a welcoming school where teachers maintain regular contact with parents. As a result of support from the principal and the National Parents’ Council a parents’ association was established successfully recently. The parent representatives on the board and the principal attend meetings of the association thus ensuring ongoing communication between all partners. The association is involved in a range of worthwhile projects and clearly contributes significantly to school life. The representatives report that parents greatly value the work of the school and are keen to play their role in ensuring the best possible education for the pupils. The school recognises that parental involvement in the development and review of policies could gainfully be developed further. Parents receive written reports about their children’s progress and formal parent-teacher meetings are organised. In the interest of further development it is recommended that consideration be given to the use of the National Council and Curriculum Assessment (NCCA) report card templates for reporting pupil progress and achievement. Also, it is advised that the school’s paired reading programme be extended to include more structured involvement of parents.

1.5 Management of pupils
The management of pupils is very good. The pupils exhibit pride and interest in their work. They are well-behaved and eager to display their learning. The school has a suitable code of behaviour. Anti-bullying and supervision policies are in place and pupils are managed with skill and care.

2. Quality of School Planning

2.1 Whole-school and classroom planning
The school has a comprehensive range of both organisational and curricular policies which have been formulated carefully over a number of years. Many of these policies provide sound guidelines for the development of effective practice, are presented clearly and are accessible to all partners. While there is evidence of collaboration and the considerable work in evidence is acknowledged, there is need for more ongoing whole-school monitoring and review of the implementation of the plans. Such a review should aim to promote further continuity in pupils’ learning and greater linkage between classroom practice and the curriculum. It is recommended that more use be made of the information arising from pupils’ assessments and monthly progress records to inform this process and to support the development of agreed action plans. In particular, it is advised that the plan for English be reviewed in order to provide clearer guidelines to build on existing best practice.

In relation to classroom planning all teachers prepare both long and short term programmes of work in a very conscientious manner. Where short-term planning is particularly effective the
learning intention is outlined clearly. It is recommended that this practice be extended in order to enhance progression in the development of pupils’ skills. A variety of approaches to the recording of the monthly progress records are in evidence. In the interest of enhancing the usefulness of these records, as tools for evaluating progress and promoting improvement in teaching and learning, it is recommended that staff review the manner in which they are recorded and that these documents be retained for whole-school purposes.

2.2 Child protection policy and procedures

Confirmation was provided that, in compliance with Department of Education and Skills Primary Circular 0061/2006, the board of management has formally adopted the Child Protection Guidelines for Primary Schools (Department of Education and Skills, 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*

Is inmholta an caighdeán Gaeilge labhartha atá bain te amach ag a lán daltaí sa scoil seo. Léiríonn siad tuiscint mhaith ar thopaicí atá á bplé sa rang agus baineann na hoidí úsáid as raon de mhodhanna éifeachtachta chun a gcumas éisteachta agus labhartha a fhorbairt ar bhonn taitneamhach. Ghabh éifeacht ar leith leis an teagasc nuair a tugadh deiseanna do na daltaí an teanga a bhí cleachtaithe agu a úsáid chun fiorchumarsáid a dhéanamh agus a gcuid scileanna machnaimh a fhorbairt trí chluichí teanga, grúpóibair, agus obair bheirtire. Ar mhaithe leis an liofacht na ndaltaí a fheabhsú a thuilleadh agus freastal níos mó ar a gcuid éagsúla ábhaltach b’fhíú anois an dea-chleachtais seo a fhorbairt ar bhonn scóile. B’innmholta chomh maith níos mó deiseanna a thabhairt do na daltaí chun Gaeilge a labhairt taobh amuigh den cheacht Gaeilge.

Leagtar bunchloch na léithéideachta agus na scribhneoireachta go héifeachtach sa tslí is go n-eiríonn leis na ndaltaí táéscanna oiriúnaacha bunaíthe ar a gcomhrá a chumadh agus a léamh. Sna meánranganna agus na hardranganna bunaítear cuid mhaithe de ghnómhaitheachta léithéideachta agus scribhneoireachta na ndaltaí ar shraith téacsleabhar. Cé go léann rointnt daltaí iad seo le liofacht agus le tuiscint chuirfeadh sé go mór le fòghlaim na ndaltaí dá gcuirfí raon nóis leithne de théacsanna ar fáil chun freastal ar na leibhéil chumais éagsúla. Díriodh aird ar leith le linn na cigireachta ar an tábhacht a bhaíneann le bhéim nóis treise a chur ar fhorbairt chumas na ndaltaí chun tabhairt faoin scribhneoireacht neamhspleách.

*Irish*

Many pupils in this school display good standards in oral Irish. They demonstrate a very good understanding of topics discussed in class and the teachers make use of a range of effective approaches to develop their listening and speaking skills in an enjoyable manner. Where particularly effective practice was noted opportunities were created for pupils, in which they used the language learned in a real communicative manner and developed their thinking skills, through language games, group and paired work. In order to improve pupils’ levels of fluency and respond further to their differentiated needs it is recommended that this good practice be
extended on a whole-school basis. Also, it is advised that pupils be given more opportunities to speak Irish outside the Irish lesson.

The fundamental reading and writing skills are taught in a very effective manner so that pupils are well-able to read and write a variety of suitable texts based on their oral work. In the middle and senior classes much of pupils’ reading and writing activities are based on class textbooks. While some pupils read these texts with fluency and understanding the provision of a greater range of differentiated reading material would significantly enhance their learning. The importance of placing more emphasis on developing pupils’ independent writing skills was particularly highlighted during the evaluation.

**English**

In the teaching of English good practice in the development of pupils’ oral language skills was observed. Many pupils speak confidently and participate with enthusiasm in oral interaction. At a variety of class levels pupils can recite suitable repertoires of rhymes and poems with expression and participate in praiseworthy dramatic activity with obvious enjoyment. Teachers make use of a range of effective questioning techniques to encourage the development of pupils’ thinking skills and expanded use of language. In the interest of progression more consistent emphasis on the development of specific oral language skills is advised.

Pupils’ reading skills are cultivated carefully throughout the school and many pupils attain high standards. At the emergent reading stage pupils’ skills are developed gainfully through the systematic use of a variety of effective methodologies which encourage pupils to become highly motivated and self-directed in their learning. The further integration of pupils’ learning in reading with their oral, aural and writing activities and a reduction in the use of commercial workbooks is recommended. As the pupils progress through the school the use of a graded reading scheme is appropriately supplemented by a variety of ancillary material, including class novels. Many of the pupils observed read aloud with fluency and discussed their texts with understanding. However, it is apparent that there is need to use a greater variety of differentiated material in the middle and senior classes and to extend the practice of targeted group reading and collaborative learning approaches.

In general, the standard of writing is high. At the emergent writing stage pupils’ letter formation and knowledge of the basic conventions of writing are developed methodically. As the pupils progress through the school, writing in a range of genres and for a variety of purposes is undertaken and corrected carefully. High quality print-rich materials which scaffold pupils’ developing skills were observed in many classrooms and the extension of this good practice is recommended. Many samples of good quality writing were noted throughout the school.

**3.2 Mathematics**

Many examples of very good practice in the teaching of Mathematics at whole-class level were observed throughout the school. Effective practices noted include, very good whole-class questioning, good use of concrete materials, carefully structured early mathematical activities, well-planned strategies to develop pupils' fluency in mental mathematics and ability to recall number facts. Teachers have high expectations for the pupils’ work and engage them in a broad range of purposeful learning activities in appropriate contexts. Some high-quality active learning methodologies and group teaching approaches were also observed. In order to provide pupils with more opportunities to think about their work, share their understanding with others and further develop their problem solving skills, it is recommended that the use of these methodologies be extended. It is also recommended that extra care be given to the development of the mathematical learning environment in classrooms. Appropriately, structured play is seen as central to learning
and a good range of open-ended materials is provided in the infant classroom. Many pupils are making very good progress in developing their mathematical competence and display a keen understanding of key mathematical concepts which are appropriate to their age. During the evaluation they readily engaged and sustained interest in suitably challenging mathematical tasks and clearly enjoyed their work. However, in order to further cater for pupils’ individual differences and special learning needs there is need to make more consistent use of the outcomes of formative assessment approaches to inform differentiated teaching methods. From an early age pupils are well-trained to record and present their work to a high standard and teachers correct their work carefully.

3.3 History
The quality of provision for History is very good. The school plan provides a sound basis for the development of effective practice and outlines clearly the allocation of the curriculum strand units to each class on a two-yearly basis. A key strength in provision is the emphasis placed on local history. During the evaluation the pupils spoke confidently and knowledgeably about their local environment. Field trips are organised to support the teaching and pupils are provided with valuable opportunities to study a range of artefacts and photographs. During the evaluation purposeful whole-class teaching with good use of questioning, discussion and well-told stories was observed. There was also evidence of valuable work in developing pupils’ skills as historians. High-quality project work which is integrated very effectively with other curricular areas is undertaken. The provision of further opportunities for pupils to research, work collaboratively and develop their skills as historians, in line with the intentions expressed in the school plan, are recommended. Pupils maintain many good quality records of their work.

3.4 Assessment
The teachers make use of a good range of assessment tools to monitor pupils’ progress especially in the areas of English and Mathematics. The practice of administering standardised tests is long-established and pupils’ results are recorded and stored carefully. Teachers discuss the results and use them to inform key decisions particularly in relation to the allocation of resources. However, it is advised that greater use be made of them to identify trends in pupils’ achievement levels and to inform differentiated teaching approaches. In all classrooms pupils’ copybooks are marked regularly. Where particularly effective marking was observed pupils were given positive feedback about where they achieved success and where they might improve. Also of note is the worthwhile use made in some instances of teacher-designed tests. In order to build on these good practices and promote the further development of assessment for learning it is recommended that staff review school policy in the context of the guidelines on assessment provided by the NCCA.

4. QUALITY OF SUPPORT FOR PUPILS

4.1 Pupils with special educational needs
Much good quality support is provided in both literacy and numeracy for pupils with special educational needs. The support teacher demonstrates a high level of commitment to the pupils and has established a positive, caring relationship with them. The teacher collaborates frequently with parents and class teachers regarding individual pupil progress and thoroughly prepared work is ongoing in the development and implementation of individual or group education plans, as appropriate. The teacher makes use of a wide range of carefully prepared resources, including ICT, and employs innovative teaching approaches to engage the pupils in their learning in an effective manner. As the main organisational approach used to support pupils with special educational needs is withdrawal from regular class there is need to review current policy and practice in the context of Circular 02/05. This circular outlines a staged approach to the
identification of pupils who require support teaching. In particular it is recommended that staff consider how to promote a more systematic approach to differentiation in mainstream classrooms so as to ensure that teaching and learning approaches are responsive to pupils’ special needs at all times in both mainstream and support contexts. Also, it is advised that models of in-class support such as peer-tutoring be considered for targeted periods of instruction.

4.2 Other supports for pupils: disadvantaged, minority and other groups
This school is not situated in a designated area of disadvantage and provision for minority groups is not currently required in the school.

5. CONCLUSION

The school has strengths in the following areas:

- The principal combines his teaching, leadership and management roles effectively and is ably supported by dedicated and talented staff.
- Many pupils achieve high standards in key areas of the curriculum.
- The pupils demonstrate pride and interest in their work and are keen to display their learning.
- Much effective practice in teaching and learning is in evidence throughout the school.
- The board of management discharges its duties effectively.
- Parental support contributes significantly to school life.
- Caring relationships exist throughout the school and a positive climate for learning is created.

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

- It is recommended that the implementation of whole-school plans be reviewed on a more systematic basis and that greater use be made of the monthly progress records and assessment data to inform this review.
- It is recommended that pupils be given further opportunities to develop their language and problem solving skills through more extensive use of active learning and collaborative teaching approaches.
- It is recommended that a greater emphasis be placed on assessment for learning and that a more structured approach to differentiation within mainstream classrooms be adopted.
- It is recommended that a staged approach to the identification of pupils for support teaching be implemented and that additional models of in-class support be developed.

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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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 welcomes the positive report received from the Department of Education & Skills. We would like to thank the Inspectorate for the efficient and fair manner in which they conducted the evaluation.

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

We welcome the recommendations in the report. We have discussed them at a Board of Management meeting and it is our intention to implement them over a period of time.