An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Scoil Phádraig
Moylough, Ballinasloe, Co. Galway
Uimhir rolla: 18332B

Date of inspection: 19 March 2010
WHOLE-SCHOOL EVALUATION

A whole-school evaluation of Scoil Phádraig, Moylough 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 Phádraig is situated in the centre of Moylough, county Galway, on the main Galway to Roscommon road. The present school building dates from 1961. An extension was added recently which provided two new mainstream classrooms. There is a prefabricated building to the rear of the school. At present this is used as the learning-support classroom. There is no general-purposes room or hall in the school. Architectural plans have been drawn up for a substantial extension to the school. The board of management hopes that this extension will be built in the near future.

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>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainstream classes in the school</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers on the school staff</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainstream class teachers</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers working in support roles</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special needs assistants</td>
<td>0</td>
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</tbody>
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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 a child-centred approach to education. The school aims to enable each pupil to live a full and happy life as a child, to develop pupils’ participation in the local community and to develop qualities such as honesty and truthfulness.

1.2 Board of management
The board of management is constituted in accordance with Department of Education and Skills regulations. The board meets at least once a term, more often if necessary. The minutes of the most recent board meetings indicate that day-to-day school matters, health-and-safety issues and fund-raising are among the most commonly discussed items. The chairperson of the board of management maintains regular contact with the school principal. The treasurer gives a financial report at each board meeting. It is recommended that the board of management have school accounts certified or audited annually in accordance with section 18 (1) of the Education Act, 1998. Members of the board have attended training events organised by the Catholic Primary School Managers’ Association (CPSMA).
The board of management’s current priorities include the further development of the school building and the further enhancement of the positive relationship between the board of management, teachers and parents. The board’s recent achievements include the construction of the new classrooms and the provision of pedestrian lights on the busy road in front of the school.

1.3 In-school management
The in-school management team consists of the principal, deputy principal and one special-duties teacher. The school principal was appointed in 1998. He is committed and diligent in his work as a classroom teacher. His administrative and management duties as principal are carried out effectively. His vision is to expand and develop the school building to improve the quality of educational experiences provided in the school. In particular, he would like to provide a school library and a general purpose room in the school.

The work of the deputy principal and special-duties teacher makes a useful contribution to the running of the school. There is need to revise the contracts for these posts of responsibility, however, to clearly set out the curricular, organisational and pastoral aspects of each post. These contracts should be signed and dated by the post holder and the chairperson of the board of management. The contracts should be regularly reviewed to ensure that the posts reflect the current needs of the school.

1.4 Management of relationships and communication with the school community
There is an active parents’ association in the school, affiliated to the National Parents’ Council. The principal attends the annual general meeting, at which parents’ concerns are discussed and the officers of the association are elected. The parents’ association committee meets every two months.

Parents are involved in many school activities and events. A rota of parents who are available to assist with after-school activities has been organised. The parents’ association played a central role, along with the board of management, in the provision of the pedestrian lights on the road outside the school.

Parents are involved in a variety of fund-raising activities. The school is one of the beneficiaries of a locally-organised lottery. Many of the parents are involved in this work. A social function is organised for parents in the school each Christmas.

Regular communication is maintained between parents and the school through the use of the text-a-parent service and regular notes from the principal. It was reported during the whole-school evaluation that the teachers are approachable and always available to discuss parents’ concerns. Formal parent-teacher meetings are held each year in February. A written report is sent to parents on their children’s progress at the end of each school year.

1.5 Management of pupils
The pupils in this school are well behaved. They are enthusiastic in participating in the lessons and activities organised and in demonstrating the knowledge and skills they have acquired.

2. Quality of school planning

2.1 Whole-school and classroom planning
The quality of whole-school planning is good in several respects. There are plans available for each curricular area. Some of the curricular plans need to be revised, however. The school plan
for English, for example, consists of separate reading and writing policies. This plan should be revised to provide one co-ordinated policy covering each strand of the English curriculum. Textbooks are mentioned in some plans, for example in Mathematics. It is recommended that where textbooks and reading schemes are in use, these should be listed in the resources section of the curricular plans. Some of the school’s policies are signed and dated by the chairperson of the board of management. It is recommended that all school policies be signed and dated by the chairperson of the board in future, to indicate when each policy is formally ratified.

The school’s learning-support and resource policy provides a useful overview of learning-support and resource provision. There is an additional and separate policy for pupils with learning difficulties and special educational needs. It is recommended that these two policies be combined to ensure a more co-ordinated approach to this work. The revised policy should include the teaching hours allocated to the school. Reference should be made to the staged approach to intervention and more specific information should be provided on the use of diagnostic testing for pupils availing of these services.

A wide range of administrative policies has been developed. These include a code of behaviour and anti-bullying policy, a school attendance strategy and a health-and-safety statement. An enrolment policy has also been developed for the school. It is recommended, however, that more specific detail be provided in this policy on the priority criteria for enrolment. Parents are involved in some aspects of school planning, for example in the formulation of the code of behaviour.

The quality of classroom planning is good overall. Each teacher provides long-term and short-term schemes of work. Monthly progress records are maintained by each teacher. It is recommended, however, that more detailed information on assessment be included in some teacher’s planning documentation. An individual education plans (IEP) is provided for each pupil who receives learning-support or resource teaching. It is recommended that pupils’ test results be included in each IEP. Class timetables have recently been revised to ensure that the times for lessons and recreation periods are set out in a similar manner at each class level.

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 cáilíocht na foghlama agus an teagaise sa Ghaeilge go maith ag gach leibhéal ranga agus tá caighdeán an-ard sroichte i bhformhór na ranganna. Tá ranpháirtíochtaí, inniúlacht agus gnóthachtáil inmholta na ndaltaí le sonrú ó naonáin go rang a sé. Tá na bunhbúnlaí ar eolas ag na daltaí i ngach rang agus tá siad in ann labhairt fúthu féin go muiníneach. Tá na daltaí in ann
Irish
The quality of learning and teaching in Irish is good at each class level and a very high standard is reached in the majority of classes. Commendable pupil participation, ability and achievement are noted from infants to sixth class. Pupils in every class know basic phrases in Irish and they can talk about themselves confidently. The pupils are able to answer questions on various topics fluently and their wide vocabulary is noted in this work. Most of the teachers make effective use of games, paired work, free conversation and role play to provide pupils with opportunities to speak to each other. It is recommended that opportunities such as these be provided more regularly for pupils in all classes to raise oral Irish standards even further across the school. Pupils at each class level recite rhymes and poems, many with actions.

Reading lessons are directed effectively from second to sixth class. The pupils in these classes read with appropriate pronunciation, expression and understanding. Pupils’ writing in Irish is good. Samples of pupils’ commendable written work are to be seen in copybooks and on display in the classrooms.

English
The quality of learning and teaching in English is good at each class level. The quality of work covered in English in some classes is highly commendable. Pupils’ oral-language development is fostered effectively throughout the school. In particular, pupils’ vocabulary is extended commendably in the junior classes. The study of poetry receives due attention at each class level.

Pupil engagement and achievement in reading is very good at most class levels. Pupils demonstrate good comprehension in reading and they enjoy talking about books they have read. The pre-reading activities organised in the infant classes are effective. Appropriate emphasis is placed on the development of pupils’ phonological awareness and word-attack skills. Very good group-teaching methods are used in English reading lessons throughout the school. While there is an effective structure to reading lessons in most classes, there is a need for more regular teacher modelling in some classes. There is also a need for further emphasis on word exploration and discussion in some classes. Class libraries are very well stocked overall, although some class libraries should be more attractively and more effectively presented to further encourage reluctant readers.

Pupils’ written work is of a very high standard at most class levels. The assignments completed by pupils in a variety of genres in these classes are very impressive. These include highly commendable book reviews, essays and letters. In striving for excellence in English writing throughout the school, it is suggested that there should be a better balance between functional and creative writing in some classes. Pupils’ written work is regularly monitored, with useful feedback provided by teachers. The standard of handwriting and presentation of written work is
very good overall, although there is a need to place more emphasis on this work in some classrooms.

3.2 Mathematics
The quality of learning and teaching in Mathematics is good. A commendable variety of work is covered, with pupils engaged and interested in the lessons and activities provided. Oral Mathematics receives due attention at each class level and pupils’ mathematical vocabulary is good. Number facts (tables) are well covered throughout the school. Early mathematical activities are well organised in the infant classes with pupils demonstrating commendable knowledge and ability. Commendable emphasis is placed on the development of pupils’ estimation and problem-solving skills. Praiseworthy group work is organised in most classes, although there is a need to differentiate activities more effectively in some classrooms to cater for the range of pupil abilities.

Concrete materials are used beneficially in most classrooms. There is a wide range of mathematical posters and resources available in the school, although it is recommended that a Mathematics-rich environment be further developed to enhance the teaching and learning process in some classrooms. Some of the mathematical resources used at various class levels contain small print and are difficult for some pupils to see. Further emphasis should be placed on ensuring that resources are suitable to perform their function effectively.

3.3 Science
The quality of learning and teaching in Science is good. Commendable emphasis is placed on studying the work of famous scientists in the middle and senior classes. The work covered on Materials in these classes is praiseworthy. Pupils engage enthusiastically in talk and discussion on the properties and characteristics of materials. Pupils’ scientific vocabulary is impressively extended as part of this work. Pupils are given regular opportunities to engage in active learning, with worthwhile experiments conducted at each class level. Pupils’ science copybooks provide evidence of the worthwhile experiments and group project work completed on scientific topics.

There are attractive and stimulating discovery, science and nature displays in most classrooms. It is recommended, however, that the science displays in some classrooms be further developed as a teaching aid and to further enhance pupils’ interest in Science.

3.4 Assessment
A range of assessment modes is used in the school. Teacher observation, teacher-designed tests, checklists and work samples are among the most frequently used modes of assessment. While each teacher maintains records of pupils’ progress, there is scope for development in the quality of record keeping at most class levels. A school-wide approach to the collation and presentation of information on pupils’ progress should be formulated to ensure more effective co-ordination in this work. It is recommended also that standardised test results be included in each teacher’s planning documentation, along with a clear indication of how these results are used to inform the teaching process.

4. QUALITY OF SUPPORT FOR PUPILS

4.1 Pupils with special educational needs
The quality of provision for pupils with special educational needs in this school has many positive aspects. The learning-support and resource teachers use a range of effective teaching strategies.
Learning-support and resource teaching takes place in two rooms in the school. These rooms are attractively decorated to provide a stimulating learning environment in English and Mathematics.

An individual education plan (IEP) is available for each pupil who attends learning support or receives resource teaching. There are two different templates for IEPs in use in the school at present. It is recommended that the same format be used for all IEPs in future.

A range of diagnostic tests is used to identify pupils’ learning needs. There needs to be a more co-ordinated approach to how the results of diagnostic tests are used, however. This should ensure that the work covered is clearly based on assessment information and data. Where pupils are in receipt of resource hours, the learning targets set and the support provided should always be specifically based on the recommendations contained in the relevant psychological reports.

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

The school has an open enrolment policy. There are a small number of newcomer children enrolled in the school. These pupils are well integrated into all aspects of school life. They receive support in English where appropriate.

5. CONCLUSION

The school has strengths in the following areas:

- The board of management is to be commended for its support for the school and for its efforts to improve the facilities available for pupils.
- The teachers form a competent team. They are diligent in their work and committed to implementing improved teaching strategies to enhance the learning process for pupils.
- The teachers use a variety of effective teaching methods. They regularly monitor pupils’ work and they provide useful feedback to pupils to help them improve their performance.
- The standard of pupil achievement in Irish is very good throughout the school.
- Pupils’ reading and writing skills are highly commendable at most class levels.
- Pupils demonstrate good problem-solving skills in Mathematics and they demonstrate commendable mastery of number facts (tables) at each class level.
- Commendable experiments and practical work have been carried out 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 the school plan be reviewed to ensure that it is specific to the needs of the school. Each policy and curricular plan should contain relevant up-to-date information and should be signed and ratified by the board of management.
- It is recommended that the learning-support and resource policy be reviewed to ensure the service provided is better co-ordinated and implemented in a more systematic manner.
- It is recommended that more emphasis be placed on aspects of the teaching of reading at some class levels, for example teacher modelling and the exploration and discussion of new vocabulary.
- It is recommended that the development of science and nature tables receive more attention in some classrooms, to further enhance the status of Science in the school, and of the strand Living things in particular.
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.