An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Liscannor National School
Liscannor, Co. Clare
Uimhir rolla:18410S

Date of inspection: 19 April 2010
WHOLE-SCHOOL EVALUATION

A whole-school evaluation of Liscannor National School was undertaken in April 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 Drama. 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

Liscannor NS is a four-teacher national school which serves the pupils of the parish of Liscannor and Moymore. Enrolment has changed little in recent years and should remain at current levels for the foreseeable future. Figures for average attendance are quite high. The school is central to life in the community and is a focal point for many activities organised by local groups.

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pupils enrolled in the school</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainstream classes in the school</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers on the school staff</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainstream class teachers</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers working in support roles</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special needs assistants</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT

1.1 Characteristic spirit, mission or vision

This school operates under the patronage of the Catholic Bishop of Galway, Kilmacduagh and Kilfenora. In its mission statement Liscannor N.S. espouses a commitment to the provision of a well-ordered, caring, happy, safe and secure educational environment, where the multifaceted needs of pupils are identified and addressed in a holistic manner. The staff, board of management and parents work diligently to provide such an environment for the pupils.

1.2 Board of management

The board of management, which is properly constituted, operates in a cohesive and effective manner. Detailed records of the board’s affairs were made available for inspection and these records confirm the board’s commitment to adhere to proper procedures and guidelines. Planning and policy issues are dealt with in commendable fashion. Accounts are certified on an annual basis. All members of the board share tasks and responsibilities and have collectively availed of training. The chairperson collaborates effectively with the principal, takes an active part in school life and makes a valued contribution to provision for aspects of the Music curriculum. The board has overseen the building of four spacious classrooms and the refurbishment of the existing school building to provide a general purpose room and a computer room. The board has provided
a site for the recently completed childcare facility which has a pre-school and also provides care for pupils after school.

1.3 In-school management

The in-school management team (ISM) comprises the principal, an acting deputy principal and a special duties teacher. The principal gives highly effective leadership to the school. He has successfully prioritised the building of collaborative working relationships among staff members and with the partners in education. The principal oversees the planning process at all levels and prioritises regular reflection, review and improvement. High standards in teaching and learning, as well as a commitment to ensuring that pupils with special educational needs receive a high-quality educational provision, are at the core of his vision.

The principal is ably supported by the acting deputy and special-duties teacher. These post holders carry out their duties diligently and effectively. Formal meetings of the ISM are held in advance of staff and board meetings. Duties are regularly reviewed and while these duties encompass some curricular responsibilities, it is recommended that duties of post holders be reviewed to allow for greater sharing of responsibility for curricular leadership.

1.4 Management of relationships and communication with the school community

There are very positive relationships between staff members and parents. The school does not have a parents’ association which is associated to the National Parents’ Council. In the absence of such an association the inspector met with parents elected to the board of management. Good communication systems are in place to ensure that parents and teachers can co-operate efficiently in the best interests of pupils. Induction meetings, parent-teacher meetings and annual written reports on pupils serve to ensure that there is a consistent and comprehensive flow of information between the partners. School newsletters are issued on a regular basis and the practice of including a yearly review and forward plan to parents is commended.

Parents support the work of the school in a variety of ways. They contribute to policy formation in areas such as healthy eating and relationships and sexuality education. Parents are involved in shared reading and they provide transport to the many sporting and cultural activities in which pupils take part. The school’s new general purpose hall is used extensively by the community, for meetings, computer classes, choral activities and sports training.

1.5 Management of pupils

Mutually respectful relationships between staff and pupils, together with consistent implementation of relevant policies, underpin very good management of pupils. During the evaluation pupils behaved in an exemplary manner, worked enthusiastically, and were friendly, confident and outgoing. As pupils grow and develop they are encouraged to become increasingly independent and to take responsibility for their learning and behaviour.

2. Quality of School Planning

2.1 Whole-school and classroom planning

The quality of whole-school planning, in terms of both process and outcomes is a commendable feature of practice in Liscannor NS. Policies required by legislation, as well as a range of other policies, have been developed, ratified and disseminated appropriately and policy review is ongoing. Planning and policy documents are comprehensive and specific to the needs of the school and made available to each teacher in electronic format. Whole-school curricular plans guide teachers individual planning and practice in a meaningful way. The school is midway through its current strategic plan, which identifies curricular, organisational and resource
priorities that merit attention by September 2011. This plan is reviewed on an annual basis and reflects the developing needs of the school. In order to build on very constructive planning practices, it is recommended that teachers extend their involvement in self-review to include the analysis of monthly progress reports in each area of learning.

Individual teachers plan carefully and conscientiously for their work. Common templates have been devised for fortnightly plans and monthly reports. It is proposed to adopt a common template for yearly schemes of work in the next academic year.

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
Pléitear gnéithe áirithe den phlean Gaeilge go minic. Sa phlean seo tá liosta na bhfeidhmeanna teanga ón gcuraclam curtha in oiriúint dá gcúinsí féin ag an bhfoireann. Moltar iarrachtaí na foirme soláthar faoi leith a dhéanamh do theagasc na gramadaí agus do na seifteanna atá curtha i bhfeidhm chun na daltaí a mhealladh chun fíor-chuma rsáide.

Múinteanna Ghaeilge go córasach sna ranganna éagsúla. Cuirtear béim le moladh ar rainn, dánta agus amhráin agus nuair a bhaineann gníomhaíochtaí leis an gné seo den obair is sásúil ar fad a bhíonn sé ó thaoibh siúd a mhúscailt de. Eagraítear cluichí teanga tarraingteacha agus úsáidtear an drámaíocht freisin chun eispéiris taitneamhacha a bheith ar fáil sna ranganna Gaeilge. Chomh maith le sin tugtar tuiscint agus taithí mhaithe do na daltaí, go háríthite sna hardranganna, ar an gceol mar gné dá rath n-oidhreacht chultúrtha.

Déantar an léithéoireacht agus an scribhneoireacht a theagasc ar bhonn inmholta tríd an scóil. Tá béim faoi leith sna meán ranganna ar fhíoileabhair agus na dearaí a dhuineachadh a chur ar fáil dona do na daltaí. D’fhéadfaí an cleachtas seo a theagasc agus tuiscint a bhaint as i gcónaí. Sna hardranganna léann na daltaí go lóch a chur i bhfeidhmiú a dhéanamh. Tá méid áirithe san scríbhneoireachta atá í d’fhéadfaí an cleachtas seo a thabhairt do hhorbaire a thuilleadh.

Irish
The Irish plan is reviewed very regularly. In this plan the staff has adapted the list of language functions in the curriculum to their particular circumstances. The teachers are commended for their efforts to make special provision for the teaching of grammar and to encourage pupils to engage in real communication.
Irish is taught effectively in the various classes. Praiseworthy emphasis is placed on rhymes, poems and songs, an aspect of the work that is all the more satisfactory from the point of view of generating interest, when activities are included. Engaging language games are organised and drama is also used to provide pleasant learning experiences in the Irish classes. Additionally pupils, particularly in the senior classes, are given a good understanding and experience of music as an aspect of our cultural heritage.

Reading and writing is taught in a praiseworthy fashion throughout the school. In the middle classes a particular emphasis is placed on providing real books for pupils. This practice merits extending throughout the school. Pupils in senior classes read fluently and accurately and with good understanding. Much effort is expended in the teaching of writing also and some fine samples, in various genres, were noted. Some free writing is in evidence and this aspect of practice could be developed further.

English

The quality of teaching and learning in English is of a very good standard. The whole-school plan for English impacts constructively and positively on classroom practice. All classrooms are well resourced for the promotion of literacy, featuring good supplies of attractive books and print rich displays.

Pupils display commendable competence and confidence when prompted to engage in discussion over a wide range of topics. A particular emphasis is placed on developing higher order thinking skills and the listener-speaker relationship is well developed. Oral language is effectively taught in an integrated fashion, as a core driver of all learning experiences and through discrete language games and activities. Poetry is imaginatively explored at all levels and pupils recite poems individually and in groups with flair and enthusiasm.

Reading skills are systematically and comprehensively taught throughout the school. Early identification of reading difficulty and the resultant appropriate interventions ensure that the vast majority of pupils enjoy success in reading. Lessons are appropriately differentiated to meet the varying needs of pupils. Pupils’ knowledge of sound-letter relationships is established through the implementation of the Newell Literacy Programme and a culture of reading for pleasure is promoted by involving parents in regular shared reading with their children. Class novels, a weekly newspaper in senior classes and occasional visits by authors add impetus to the teaching of reading.

Pupils’ written work is neatly presented and regularly monitored by the teachers. The standard of penmanship is praiseworthy. A broad variety of writing genres is explored and samples of pupils’ writing are displayed in classrooms. Extensive and purposeful use of oral language normally precedes writing activities. Pupils are given opportunities to engage in free writing, and story planners are used to scaffold pupils’ efforts at creative writing. A greater emphasis on drafting and editing of written work should enhance existing good practice.

3.2 Mathematics

The quality of teaching and levels of achievement in Mathematics is very good at all class levels. Lessons observed were well-structured and appropriately paced and featured a balance between whole-class teaching and group work. All teachers have available a plentiful supply of resources which are consistently used for the teaching of mathematics and all classrooms feature mathematics displays. The language of Mathematics is prudently emphasised throughout the school. In the senior classes, particularly good practice was observed in the development and use of mental strategies for number calculations. There is some scope for extending this practice to all
class levels. Early concepts of number are taught and reinforced using activity rhymes and pupils are given frequent opportunities to handle concrete materials. Pupils in the junior and middle classes are taught subtraction using transition boards and they construct their own 3-D shapes and demonstrate a keen understanding of symmetry. Constructive use is made of a multimedia projector in the teaching of money, also, in the infants’ classroom. An early intervention programme, which focuses on measurement in the current year, is being implemented with first class pupils.

3.3 Drama
The teaching and learning of drama in drama lessons observed during the evaluation were of a very-high quality. Teachers are adept and comfortable in teaching Drama and pupils engage with the various activities in a positive and purposeful manner. Frequent recall of the drama contract is used to ensure pupils derive maximum benefit from drama classes.

Discrete drama time is well used to provide valuable opportunities for pupils to explore and make drama, reflect on drama and co-operate and communicate in making drama. Drama games are a common feature of the introductory phases of lessons and these games are used successfully to promote trust and confidence and to prepare pupils for the further exploration of themes as the lesson develops. Themes are explored and pupils are given opportunities to engage in collaborative problem solving in the junior and middle classes through the medium of familiar stories. In the senior classes drama is successfully used as a vehicle to explore, for example, substance abuse issues with pupils. Teachers adroitly maintain the pupils’ focus on themes and tasks through effective use of teacher-in-role. A range of strategies, including still image, thought tracking and hot seating, is employed in the exploration of content. Pupils co-operate very well in pairs and small groups in developing improvisations and they portray a marked facility for entering into character.

3.4 Assessment
Very good assessment practices have developed over time in this school and these practices are outlined clearly and succinctly in the school’s assessment policy. Policy in regard to both assessment of learning and for learning is detailed in the policy document, together with a clear delineation of roles and strategies to ensure effective recording and sharing of information. Teachers use a range of assessment strategies to monitor pupils’ progress. Teacher observation, teacher designed tasks and tests, work samples, portfolios and error analysis are among the strategies used. Pupils work is carefully examined and developmental feedback provided. Assessment practices in the infants’ classroom in both literacy and numeracy are particularly praiseworthy.

Progress in Mathematics is measured throughout the school using a variety of assessment modes, including standardised assessment tests. Assessment data are used purposefully in the planning of future work. In the infants section checklists are used in impressive fashion to record pupils’ mastery of early mathematical activities. In order to build on existing good practice in assessment it is recommended that test results be analysed by strand with a view to identifying the strengths and weaknesses of particular groups of pupils.

Assessment in Drama is effected through teacher observation, circle-time and good questioning techniques. Pupils are encouraged to use thinking methods to reflect on their work such as what worked well (WWW) and what could be even better if (EBI). The use of an assessment checklist for drama in one class setting merits consideration at all class levels.
Standardised tests such as the Micra-T and Sigma-T tests are administered in all classes from first to fifth each year in the month of June. Test results are analysed at individual, class and whole school levels. Pupils’ individual test scores are recorded on tracker cards and there is an agreed format for reporting test scores to parents.

A range of diagnostic tests is administered by the learning support teacher. The Middle Infant Screening Test is used to identify early literacy difficulties and where such difficulties arise appropriate interventions are put in place. Other tests used include the Belfield Infant Assessment Profile, Quest, Neale Analysis and Maths Tracker. A variety of checklists is also used.

4. QUALITY OF SUPPORT FOR PUPILS

4.1 Pupils with special educational needs

Very good provision is made for pupils with special educational needs (SEN). Both members of the SEN team work in neighbouring schools as part of clustering arrangements. It is recommended that the board investigates the possibility of re-organising present clustering arrangements with a view to bringing greater cohesion to the provision for special educational needs. The teachers are commended for their commitment to continuous professional development in the area of special needs.

The school policy for SEN outlines clearly how pupils are assessed and supported according to the staged approach advocated in Circular Letter 02/05. Well-established planning systems for SEN pupils are in place. Individual education plans (IEPs) and individual profile and learning programmes (IPLPs) are drawn up, as appropriate, in September and reviewed at the end of January. Parents are involved in this process and receive copies of plans. Targets in these plans are very specific. Good co-operation between class teachers and SEN teachers ensures that the needs of pupils are well served.

The teachers aim to ensure that SEN pupils are included in all aspects of school life. Class teachers make commendable efforts to differentiate learning experiences to accommodate the needs of SEN pupils. Teaching in SEN settings is well structured and well resourced and pupils engage positively with their teachers. Support is provided to both individuals and groups in both literacy and numeracy, as dictated by the needs of pupils. A highly structured programme of early intervention in literacy is provided by the learning-support teacher for senior infants.

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

Pupils receive support in English as an additional language (EAL) as appropriate. EAL teaching observed was well planned and delivered using a variety of attractive resources, including Integrate Ireland Language and Training (IILT) materials. An appropriate emphasis is placed on the acquisition of communicative skills and cognitive academic language.

5. CONCLUSION

The school has strengths in the following areas:

- The principal leads the school with great energy and commitment.
- Teachers demonstrate a sense of genuine care for the holistic development of the pupils.
The board of management, parents and the community support the school admirably.

Standards in literacy and numeracy are highly commended.

The school building has been developed and is maintained to a high standard.

A successful culture of planning and review contributes significantly to the success of the school.

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

- It is recommended that teachers extend their involvement in self-review to include analysis of monthly reports in each area of the curriculum.
- It is recommended that duties of post-holders be reviewed to ensure that each post holder has responsibility for areas of the curriculum.
- It is recommended that the board investigates the possibility of re-organising present clustering arrangements with a view to bringing greater cohesion to the provision for special educational needs.

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.

Published, November 2010
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 Liscannor National School, thank the Department of Education and Skills inspector for the courteous and professional manner in which he carried out the Whole School Evaluation. We are particularly pleased that the report acknowledges the warm, inclusive and collaborative school culture; the dedication and commitment of the staff, board and parents to the educational and holistic development of every pupil; the positive and rewarding engagement with the wider community.

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 will facilitate the recommendations outlined in our Whole School Evaluation report and will endeavour to implement them as effectively as is possible.