Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

St. Joseph’s National School
Aglish, Roscrea, Co. Tipperary
Uimhir rolla:18443K

Date of inspection: 09 December 2009
**WHOLE-SCHOOL EVALUATION**

A whole-school evaluation of Aglish National School was undertaken in December 2009. 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 Physical Education. 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**

Aglish National School, Borrisokane, Co. Tipperary is a two-teacher, co-educational school, under the patronage of the Bishop of Killaloe which caters for pupils from infants to sixth class. The school is situated in the village of Aglish approximately five kilometres from Borrisokane town.

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>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainstream classes in the school</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers on the school staff</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainstream class teachers</td>
<td>2</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>
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1. **QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT**

1.1 **Characteristic spirit, mission or vision**

The mission statement of the school states that they are committed to “educating the pupils in a caring and respectful environment”. It was evident during the evaluation period through the interactions with the school community that the values outlined in the mission statement are shared by all and every attempt is made by the staff to ensure their attainment.

1.2 **Board of management**

The board of management is properly constituted and is supportive of all school-related activities. It convenes at least five times per year and more frequently when the need arises. The chairperson of the board visits the school on a regular basis. These features of good practice are commended. The principal is responsible for the daily operation of the school, while nominated individuals on the board address specific responsibilities in respect of decisions taken at board of management meetings.

The board perceives its role as engaging in matters relating to practical school-related issues, the continued maintenance and upgrading of the school building, grounds, school finances, the ratification of school planning policies and the employment and training of staff. Members of the board have received some training in their varied roles. In the past year the board has reviewed the following policies, Child Protection, Enrolment and the school’s Code of Behaviour.
The board plays a collaborative and constructive role in the formulation of school planning policies, through consultation, discussion and ratification of documentation. A two year action plan has been prepared outlining the targets of the board and the actions required to achieve these. Circulars from the Department of Education and Science are discussed at board of management meetings and copies of planning documentation are distributed at these meetings. The board reported that it was satisfied with the quality of the education provision in this school. The issue of attendance was discussed with the board and it was pointed out by the inspector that the attendance of a number of pupils gave cause for concern. It is recommended that the board make parents aware of the detrimental effect on educational progress that prolonged periods of absenteeism can cause.

### 1.3 In-school management

The principal carries out her teaching and administrative duties in a very professional manner. She has a long-standing relationship with the local community. She demonstrates a very caring and sensitive attitude towards the children in the school. She relates well to her teaching colleagues, members of the board of management and members of the school community. She displays very good qualities of leadership and this is exemplified through the comprehensive school plan that has been developed in collaboration with the other mainstream class teacher, the shared-learning support teacher and the board of management.

The principal is responsible for the daily operation of the school, while the main responsibilities of the special duties post-holder include deputising for the principal when she is absent. A range of curricular and administrative duties have been assigned to the special duties post-holder including responsibility for Physical Education. It is recommended that these duties be reviewed on a regular basis and that the duties assigned match the needs of the school.

The teachers avail of the services provided by the Primary Professional Development Service (PPDS) to support the development and implementation of curriculum policies. This work has focused on a wide range of curricular areas and methodologies. Designated planning days have been utilised effectively to formulate a range of curriculum plans. Informal communication is ongoing in respect of educational initiatives in the school and staff meetings are organised when necessary. It is recommended that formal staff meetings be convened on a regular basis, that a formal agenda be provided and that appropriate minutes, recording decisions and actions, be maintained.

### 1.4 Management of relationships and communication with the school community

The principal and members of the board of management reported that there is a very good relationship between the school community and the school staff. It is reported by the principal that parents are welcome to visit the school whenever the need arises. Formal parent-teacher meetings are organised on a yearly basis. The teachers are currently developing a reporting template which will be used from the end of the current school year to disseminate written school reports. The board has invited submissions from parents in respect of the Code of Discipline and the Relationships and Sexuality Education policy (RSE). A committee consisting of two members of the board, two teachers and two parents was formed to develop the RSE policy. The principal also reported that the parents’ are very supportive of the school and help in the organisation and running of swimming classes and school raffle, provide transport to sporting events, co-operate with the implementation of the Food Dudes programme, help with the School Fun Day and school tours, help to maintain the school garden and also provide IT support. Furthermore, an agreed report on the work of the board of management is sent to parents twice yearly. This practice is commended.
1.5 Management of pupils
There is a very welcoming and open atmosphere in this school. Pupils are very well mannered and were found to interact in an open and honest way with teachers, fellow students and visitors. Classroom rules have been established in consultation with the pupils which are focused on the responsibilities of pupils and it clearly evident that they are willing to co-operate with the teachers in implementing the school’s code of behaviour. The teachers work collaboratively and are committed to creating a learning environment that fosters pupils’ learning and self-esteem.

2. Quality of School Planning

2.1 Whole-school and classroom planning
The school plan outlines very comprehensive policies on organisational and administrative matters and also on curricular areas. It is evident that collaboration between staff and board of management has taken place in the formulation of this documentation and this practice is commended. The signature of the chairperson of the board is recorded on some school planning documentation. It is recommended that all policies ratified by the board should be signed and dated by the chairperson of the board. School planning policies are available to parents on request.

The teachers are commended on the planning documentation formulated and reviewed to date and also on its recognition of the developmental nature of the whole-school planning process. There is a record of the organisational and curricular planning carried out in the school since 2002. The contribution of the staff to the formulation of these comprehensive policy documents is acknowledged and the level of work completed to date in relation to school planning is highly commended.

Individual teacher planning is undertaken in the form of long-term and short-term preparation in accordance with Rule 126 of the Rules for National Schools. Yearly and fortnightly schemes are formulated and supported by the effective use of ICT and there is evidence of linkage between long-term and short-term planning and the principles and structure of Primary School Curriculum (1999). Individual teacher planning is very good and comprehensive preparation is also evident in relation to supplementary teaching and support provision.

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 ardmholadh tuillte ag na múinteoirí as an obair a dhéantar chun an Ghaeilge a chur chun cinn mar theanga bheo cheannaíte. Éiríonn leis na hoidí suim na ndaltaí i bhfoghlaim na Gaeilge a mhúscailt agus a bpáirtíocht sna ceachtanna a chothú trí úsáid cheardúil a bhaint as straitéisí éagsúla mar shampla drámaíocht, agallaimh beirte, amhráin, filíocht, rainn, rólghlacadh, puipéad agus cluichí. De thoradh na hoibre seo, bíonn sé a r chumas na ndaltaí an Ghaeilge a úsáid go muiníneach, líofa i ngnáthchumarsáid an lae. Is inmholta go háirithe an bhéim a leagtar ar an gcur chuige cumarsáideach.

Tá iarracht chreidiúnach déanta príonta i nGaeilge a chur ar taispeáint i dtimpeallacht na scoile. Éiríonn go stáilte le formhóir na bpáistí an t-ábhar léitheoireachta a léamh le brí agus le tuiscint. Tá iarracht inmholta déanta an t-ábhar léitheoireachta sa Ghaeilge a leathnú. Is léir go n-úllmhaoíonn na hoidí ábhar léitheoireachta neamhspleách bunaithe ar na téamaí atá á mhúineadh. Bunaitear cuid mhaith den leitheoireacht ar spéis n a páistí.

Éiríonn leis na daltaí scríbhneoireachta fheidhmiú de chaighdeán creidiúnach cruinnis a sholáthar. Déantar monatóireacht rialta ar an obair seo. Ní mór, áfach, próiseas na saor scríbhneoireachta a thabhairt do na daltaí smaointe a dhéanamh agus a dhréachtú chun cur lena gcumas cumarsáide scríofa.

Irish
The teachers are praised highly for the effort they have made in promoting Irish as a living communicative language. The use of a variety of strategies such as drama, pair work, songs, rhymes, role play, puppets and games enable teachers to awaken pupils’ interest in Irish and promote their involvement in lessons. As a result, pupils’ are capable of using the language confidently and fluently in everyday interactions. The emphasis placed on the communicative approach is praiseworthy.

A conscientious effort is made to ensure that a print rich environment is evident in the school environment. The majority of pupils are able to read with expression and understanding. A praiseworthy effort has been made to extend the range of reading material throughout the school. It is evident that the teachers prepare independent reading materials based on the themes that are being taught

Pupils are provided with opportunities to engage in functional writing which is of a good standard. Pupils’ work is regularly monitored. However, it would be worthwhile to develop the creative writing process in a systematic manner throughout the school in order to provide opportunities for pupils to express their own thoughts and to practice their skills in order to develop their own personal writing styles.

English
The standard of literacy in the school is good with the majority of pupils engaging in oral, reading and writing activities in a very competent manner in all classes. Very good lessons were observed in all classes. Planning is carried out effectively in respect of the teaching of English. There is evidence of direct linkage between the school plan and individual teacher’s preparation and
practice. Children express themselves confidently and fluently in English in all classes. In all classes children engage in a wide range of oral language activities. This very good practice is commended.

A very good programme in reading is organised throughout the school from the emergent reading stage to the senior levels. Emergent reading skills are developed and basic reading skills are established in infant and junior classes through the development of phonological and phonemic awareness. This programme is effectively supported by the learning-support teacher who provides early intervention for all pupils in infants and first class. Very good use is made of books in promoting an interest in reading and a very effective shared reading programme is organised in collaboration with the parents in the infant and junior classes. All children in the infant and junior classes are reading at their ability levels. The teacher maintains a comprehensive record of the books read by the children and he monitors their progress very regularly. A wide variety of reading material is used including the classroom textbooks. A novel is used to supplement the reading materials in the middle and senior classes and to engage with pupils at a deeper emotional and cognitive level. The pupils are given opportunities to respond to characters, situations and story details and in general are given broad experiences in terms of articulating a shared response to poetry and fiction. A wide repertoire of poems is explored and the pupils are encouraged to respond in different ways through dramatising, writing and comparing poems.

There is a good balance achieved between functional and creative writing at all class levels. The quality of writing in the children’s copies is of a good standard. Personal and creative writing commences in the junior classes. Pupils write short personal accounts and undertake book reviews. In general, the teachers are cognisant of the importance of the writing process. This skill is further developed and emphasised in middle and senior classes. Children also write their own poetry and the pupils are encouraged to write in varying formats. Some teachers use computers skilfully to support and present the work undertaken by the children. There is evidence of effective integration across a range of curriculum areas. The further development of the pupils’ creative writing skills through the use of the process approach to writing is recommended. Teachers use a range of assessment strategies including teacher observation, teacher designed tests, consistent monitoring of oral and written activities and standardised test results.

3.2 Mathematics

Whole-school planning documentation, which aims to inform classroom practice in the area of Mathematics, has been formulated in a very comprehensive manner. The teaching of Mathematics is undertaken very effectively throughout the school and all of the pupils’ attainment is at a level appropriate to their age and ability. Overall the standard of teaching and learning in this school in Mathematics is very good. Very good teacher-pupil and pupil-pupil interactions were in evidence during the evaluation period. In general, a wide range of methodologies is utilised and the pupils are provided with opportunities to become active in their own learning. Group teaching was in use in all classes and effective management of pupil application was observed while pupils were engaged in tasks and activities during lessons. Concrete and structured materials and experiential learning approaches are used productively in all classes. A range of concrete materials is available at all class levels and all the teachers use a range of resources to support their work including textbooks, charts, number lines and mathematical equipment. The teachers are commended for the use of strategies such as mathematical games and local mathematics’ trails in their teaching. Activity-based learning, skills and problem solving in Mathematics are developed in all classes. Emphasis is placed on the development of mathematical language in an incremental fashion from junior infants onwards. Regular revision is undertaken and the children record their work neatly and appropriately in copybooks.
In general, pupils solve problems satisfactorily and continued emphasis on oral problem solving and the development of investigation areas is recommended. It is evident from the children’s oral responses and written work observed that they are achieving a very satisfactory standard in this area of the curriculum.

3.3 Physical Education
The school has developed good physical education facilities and pupils have access to a hard surface area, a green area, and a basketball court.

The pupils are facilitated to experience a wide range of physical education activities. The teachers share their expertise in the areas of Physical Education and Music, with the senior class teacher teaching Music to all classes and the infant and junior class teacher teaching Physical Education to all classes. A wide ranging programme is taught ensuring that the input is balanced through the development of the strands of aquatics, dance, outdoor and adventure activities, gymnastics, athletics and games.

Very good lessons were observed in which optimal use was made of resources thereby enabling all pupils to participate actively in the development of specific physical education skills. Very good attention is paid to warming up and cooling down exercises. Positive personal qualities of fair play and co-operation are actively encouraged in the pupils and a good balance is struck between competitive and non-competitive activities. Pupils are encouraged to engage in a range of extra-curricular activities, in the school sports day and in school teams. The success of the school in addressing the principles of the Physical Education programme has resulted in the promotion of positive attitudes towards physical activity and its contribution to lifelong health-related fitness thus preparing the pupil for the active and purposeful use of leisure time. The school is commended in this regard.

3.4 Assessment
A policy on classroom assessment has been identified as one of the areas for development in the 2009/2010 school year. Currently, the teachers use a range of assessment strategies including monitoring of children’s work, teacher observation, teacher designed tasks and tests and also the monitoring of oral and written activities. The Belfield Infant Assessment Profile, The Middle Infant Screening Test (Mist), Sigma T and Micra T are administered annually. The Dyslexia Screening Test and The Diagnostic Reading Programme are also used when appropriate. The data gathered from standardised tests is used to focus the teaching and learning throughout the school.

4. Quality of Support for Pupils

4.1 Pupils with special educational needs
A very comprehensive learning-support policy has been formulated and is included in school planning documentation. A collaborative approach to the provision of support for pupils is in evidence among the principal, mainstream class teachers and learning-support teacher. This school has the services of a shared learning-support teacher for five hours per week, who provides supplementary teaching for nine pupils. The learning-support teacher is based in Terryglass NS and is shared between three schools. A part-time learning-support/resource teacher also provides support for six and a half hours per week.
An early intervention programme is provided by the learning-support teacher in collaboration with the mainstream class teacher in the infant and junior classes. This programme is implemented in the infant classes on a daily basis. It focuses on early literacy development and is delivered in a very structured format.

The learning-support and resource teaching sessions observed were well paced, the targets in the group Individual Pupil Learning Profiles (IPLPs) were appropriate for the children and were delivered effectively. The integration of support teaching in mainstream classes, through the provision of early intervention activities with pupils at infant level, is commended. Support is currently provided in literacy and numeracy.

The learning-support environment is organised in an attractive and stimulating way. A range of appropriate teaching strategies and methodologies is also implemented. Pupils are withdrawn for support provision from mainstream classes, both individually and in groups. Effective use is made of information and communication technology (ICT) and a wide range of educational software is employed to enhance the pupils’ learning experiences.

The programmes of learning formulated for pupils for whom supplementary and support teaching are provided focus primarily on literacy and numeracy. The planning is clearly documented through the formulation of individual or group IPLPs as the situation merits. Weekly plans, daily planning sheets, records of parental meetings, progress reports, daily records of work and timetables are maintained in a methodical manner. Pupil records are neatly maintained and organised. There is evidence of effective collaboration and consultation among the principal, mainstream class teachers and learning-support and resource teacher in the formulation and development of pupils' IPLPs.

Feedback regarding pupil progress is provided to parents at annual parent-teacher meetings. An end of year report is prepared by the learning support teacher and a copy is made available to the principal.

5. **CONCLUSION**

The school has strengths in the following areas:

- The school has a board of management which is committed to the development of the school as an organisation which will provide the best possible education for the children in the community.
- The school has a staff of competent and committed teachers who are innovative and open to change.
- The school plan outlines very comprehensive policies on organisational, administrative and curricular areas. It is evident that collaboration between staff and board of management has taken place in the formulation of this documentation and this practice is commended.
- The teachers use a very wide range of teaching strategies to deliver a broad and balanced curriculum.
- The children in the school are interested in engaging fully with the teaching and learning process in the school.
- A comprehensive range of resources is available for use in the school.

The following key recommendations are made in order to further improve the quality of education provided by the school:
• The development of investigation areas in Mathematics is recommended.
• The development of an assessment policy which would incorporate strategies for assessment for learning and assessment of learning would enhance the ability of the school to focus on areas requiring greater input.
• The further development of the pupils’ creative writing skills through the use of a process approach to writing is recommended.
• The further use of ICT as a mediation tool to present pupils’ project work to their peers and wider audiences is recommended.
• It is recommended that the board should remind parents of their responsibilities under the Education and Welfare Act in respect of children’s attendance at school.

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.