An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Scoil Náisiúnta Chnoc na Graí
Mallow, Co. Cork
Uimhir rolla: 18549D

Date of inspection: 22 October 2009
WHOLE-SCHOOL EVALUATION

A whole-school evaluation of Scoil Náisiúnta Chnoc na Graí was undertaken in October 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 Geography. As part of the evaluation the staff and board of management were given an opportunity to comment on the findings and recommendations of the report. 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

Scoil Náisiúnta Chnoc na Graí is a rural, co-educational school with a staff of four mainstream teachers under the patronage of the Catholic Bishop of Kerry. It is located in the historic region of Sliabh Luachra, an area renowned for its contribution to traditional music, song, dance, poetry and storytelling. The school was originally constructed in 1962 and important repair works have been carried out in the recent past. Accordingly, the accommodation both internal and external is now of a high standard. School enrolment figures have increased slightly in recent years and are likely to remain constant in the foreseeable future. Pupils’ attendance rates compare favourably with published figures nationally.

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>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainstream classes in the school</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers on the school staff</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainstream class teachers</td>
<td>4</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

Scoil Náisiúnta Chnoc na Graí is committed to enabling pupils to achieve their full potential in a caring environment that promotes respect and personal responsibility.

The staff express a clear commitment to the school and the pupils display a praiseworthy sense of belonging to their school community. They also display a keen interest in their work across a broad range of curricular and extra-curricular activities. The school is an important focal point for the local community and very good levels of parental support and participation were apparent during the course of this evaluation. The school’s work was strongly endorsed by the parents’ association and high levels of satisfaction were expressed about the quality of care and academic attainment in the school by both the parents and board members.
1.2 Board of management

The school board is properly constituted, meets regularly and provides significant assistance to the staff in their work and also provides wise direction and guidance to the school community. Minutes of meetings are maintained to a satisfactory level and agreed procedures are followed. School accounts are audited.

The board, led by its highly committed chairperson, has ensured that a range of important infrastructural improvements have recently been completed. In addition, its promotion of Information and Communication Technologies in the school in collaboration with the Parents’ Association is to be highly commended.

Together with an appropriate input from the parents the board has been involved in developing and reviewing policies in relation to a range of organisational, administrative and curricular areas. In this regard school plans for English and Social, Personal and Health Education have been reviewed recently while plans for Gaeilge and the Visual Arts have been identified as priorities for future development planning. These documents have been drawn up on a collaborative basis and inform school work in a very positive manner.

The challenges facing pupils transferring from a relatively small primary school to a large post-primary were discussed in a very positive manner with the board.

1.3 In-school management

The staff of Scoil Náisiúnta Chnoc na Graí work collaboratively in the best interests of their pupils. There is a collegial working atmosphere in the school and very good staff relationships are evident. The principal manages the daily operation of the school very successfully, acknowledges the support and professionalism of his colleagues as well as the commitment of the board, parents and the broader school community.

In addition to informal collaboration there are agreed formal responsibilities set out for post-holders in line with the Department’s procedures. These are clearly defined and each member of the in-school management team carries out her duties in a professional and conscientious manner. The team shares curricular, organisational and pastoral responsibilities and meets as required. Non-post holders and ancillary staff also make significant contributions to the effective functioning of the school.

1.4 Management of relationships and communication with the school community

The school has a parents’ association which is affiliated to the National Parents’ Council and very praiseworthy efforts are made to develop fruitful linkages with all interested parties. Information is shared effectively on a regular basis through homework journals, parent/teacher meetings, religious ceremonies and outings.

Parental input into the development of school policies is facilitated on a regular basis. The inspector met with representatives of the parents’ association as part of the evaluation process.
The parents expressed a strong sense of satisfaction with the school and its goals and felt valued by the approach of the board, the principal and the staff.

1.5 Management of pupils

Pupils in this school are well motivated and participate very positively in the learning process. The quality of relationships between teachers and pupils in and out of the classroom is highly commendable and they respond well to teaching approaches which are suitably focused. Their confidence and self-esteem are promoted effectively through an attractive range of high quality teaching practices. Visitors to the school are made feel welcome by management, staff and pupils and a strong sense of community is very apparent.

2. Quality of school planning

2.1 Whole-school and classroom planning

A wide range of school policies on organisational, administrative and curricular areas has been developed by the staff and with assistance from the support services. These documents have been ratified by the board.

The planning sets out realistic objectives for teaching and learning within the context of the Primary School Curriculum and important skills and concepts are developed through the use of enlightened methodologies. Appropriate levels of differentiation ensure that all pupils are challenged and are assisted towards achieving success. The school authorities are to be commended for the provision of an attractive selection of resources to assist with overall curriculum implementation.

High quality practice was noted in relation to classroom planning at various levels throughout the school. Useful long-term and short-term schemes of work are prepared and are informed by the contents of the school plan while each staff member provides monthly progress records as a means of recording progress in teaching and learning. The importance of these monthly records was discussed during the evaluation.

2.2 Child protection policy and procedure

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

Caitheann an fhoireann dícheall inmholta le teagasc na Gaeilge aníos tríd an scoil. Moltar go speisialta an bhéim a leagtar ag leibhéil éagsúla ar theagasc an chomhrá ar bhonn an-aidhmúil agus an-taitneamhach. Baintear úsáid inmholta as an drámaíocht uaireanta mar mheán a thacaíonn go mór leis an saibhriú teanga. Moltar anois aire bhreise a dhírhíú ar chaint chumarsáideach na ndaltaí in áiteanna agus cuireadh comhairle ar fáil ina leith seo, go háirithe chomh fada is a bhaineann sé le h- Ionchur cuí teanga a sholáthar. Múintear an fhilíocht go torthúil agus is léir go mbaineann na daltaí an-tairbhe as.

Dirítear go cúramach ar theagasc na léitheoireachta ar fud na scoile. Moltar go spéisialta an cúram a dhéantar maidir le clár don litearthacht agus maidir le prionta sa timpallacht ach moltar anois aire bhreise a dhírhíú ar shaghasanna éagsúla teacsá. B’fhiú an dea-chleachtas seo a forbairt nuair a bheidh athbhreithniú á dhéanamh ar polsaí na scoile don Ghaeilge. Dirítear go sciluíú ar ghnéithe den scríbhneoireacht sa scoil agus is léir go bhfuil dul chun cinn suntasach á dhéanamh in áiteanna. Cuireadh comhairle ar fáil faoi bhealaí breise chun an scríbhneoireacht neamhspleách agus pearsanta a forbairt.

Irish

The teaching staff approach the teaching of Irish in a very diligent manner. In this regard their approach to oral language development is both purposeful and enjoyable. Drama is also used as a very effective means at certain levels to allow for significant language enrichment. However, greater emphasis should now be placed on communicative language in some instances and advice was provided in this regard and also regarding appropriate language input during the evaluation. Poetry is taught imaginatively throughout the school and the pupils clearly benefit from the experience.

The teaching of reading is carefully organised. The preparatory programme for literacy is commendable as is the attention devoted to the creation of an effective print-rich environment. The further development of these practices, including greater emphasis on a variety of text material, should be considered when the school’s Irish policy is being reviewed. The relevant writing skills are fruitfully developed throughout the school and significant progress is noted at various levels. Additional means of promoting the pupils’ independent and personal writing were discussed during the evaluation.

English

English is taught very effectively throughout the school. Oral language development is commendably emphasised at all levels and is frequently promoted across the curriculum. Most pupils respond confidently and the quality of their responses indicates that the whole-school emphasis on language enrichment is very successful.
The pupils’ reading skills are fruitfully nurtured while the results of standardised tests indicate good progress at all class levels. The teachers are keenly aware of the progress made by individual students and adapt a variety of methodologies in accordance with individual needs. Due emphasis is placed on the consolidation of work already done. The mastery of key reading skills is promoted incrementally and pupils read widely for pleasure and for information from carefully organised class libraries. The principal skills of writing are also successfully promoted on a whole school basis. There is ample evidence to suggest that the pupils are afforded a variety of opportunities to write in the recommended genres and that due emphasis is placed on editing and publishing their work which is attractively displayed at all class levels.

3.2 Mathematics

The mathematics programme is implemented imaginatively throughout the school. The lessons are well structured and the pupils are clearly motivated to participate meaningfully in class work. Their achievements in teacher-designed and standardised tests are in line with age and ability and indicate significant progress over a period of time. A comprehensive range of concrete materials and other suitable resources is available to facilitate their progress.

Activity work is suitably challenging throughout the school and provides regular opportunities in relation to skill and concept development. The work is suitably differentiated to accommodate varying levels of ability and purposeful individual support is provided as required. The attention paid to the language of mathematics, to problem solving together with the use of a mathematics buddy system is particularly commendable. The pupils record their work neatly and this is carefully monitored by each teacher.

3.3 Geography

The Geography lessons are carefully structured. They provide the pupils with a clear sense of challenge and are frequently integrated with other curriculum areas. A good balance is achieved between the various strands of the curriculum particularly in relation to developing a sense of place and space. A comprehensive range of carefully selected resources is available at all class levels which ensure that very good emphasis is placed on the local, national and international aspects of the Geography programme. The attention paid to the pupils’ general knowledge is highly commendable.

3.4 Assessment

Assessment forms an important part of planning for teaching and learning in this school and a variety of approaches is used effectively. The pupils’ written work is regularly monitored in a manner that highlights strengths and sets out areas for development. Pupil attainments influence the use of teaching methods on a whole school basis.

Existing practice includes a range of approaches including monitoring and correction of work, teacher-devised tests and tasks and standardised tests in English and Mathematics. The standardised tests currently in use include RAIN, Aston Index, Belfield Infant Assessment Profile, M.I.S.T., Sigma-T and Micra-T. The results of Micra-T and Sigma-T tests indicate significant progress regarding the majority of pupils. The results from these and other diagnostic tests are used effectively on a collaborative basis to address the learning needs of weaker pupils.
The school demonstrates best practice in its effective use of detailed data on individual pupil progress to guide teaching and to meet pupils’ learning needs as fully as possible.

4. Quality of Support for Pupils

4.1 Pupils with special educational needs

Pupils with special educational needs receive additional support from a full-time learning-support teacher. Following a staged approach pupils are withdrawn individually or in groups for supplementary instruction in literacy and numeracy by the learning-support teacher. This additional assistance is used very effectively in support of classroom teaching. High quality collaborative planning underpins this work to very good effect.

Individualised support for literacy and numeracy is provided based on the results of formal assessment.

Effective collaboration between mainstream class teachers, support teachers and parents was noted regarding the development of very useful individual education plans. These plans set out specific learning targets and pupil progress is monitored in a very effective manner. Teachers, parents and other relevant professionals meet to discuss progress and planning as required.

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

Specific additional supports were not required for pupils from disadvantaged, minority or other groups at the time of this external evaluation.

5. Conclusion

The school has strengths in the following areas:

- The quality of management and leadership is highly effective at all levels within the school. The principal’s contribution in this regard is highly commendable.
- The quality of teaching and learning throughout the school is very good.
- The staff work collaboratively and achieve high standards generally.
- Excellent relations are fostered with the school community.

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

- It is recommended that additional emphasis be placed on communicative language when the school’s plan for Irish is reviewed.

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, December 2010
Appendix

School Response to the Report

Submitted by the Board of Management
Area 1  Observations on the content of the inspection report

Board of Management and Teaching staff following the evaluation felt valued and affirmed. The recommendations and advice given, it was felt was valuable and would enhance the quality of learning in the school when implemented.

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

- To aid and assist pupils with the transition from Primary to Secondary School, a speaker has been organised to speak to the parents/pupils in February 2011.
- Focus will be placed on communicative language when reviewing our Irish Policy.