An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Abbeydorney National School
Abbeydorney, Co Kerry
Uimhir rolla: 18665F

Date of inspection: 5 February 2010
WHOLE-SCHOOL EVALUATION
A whole-school evaluation of Abbeydorney N.S. was undertaken in February 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 Geography. 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
Abbeidorney N.S. is a four teacher co-educational school situated in the village of Abbeydorney. It is one of three schools in the parish of Abbeidorney. Pupil enrolment is increasing steadily and it is expected that a fifth mainstream teacher will be appointed in September. Pupil attendance is of a very good standard.

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<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>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainstream class teachers</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers working in support roles</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special needs assistants</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT

1.1 Characteristic spirit, mission or vision
Abbeidorney N.S. is a Catholic school under the patronage of the Bishop of Kerry. The school’s mission statement is displayed in the main entrance. It reflects its Catholic ethos and the school’s endeavours to “provide a well ordered, happy and secure atmosphere where the self-esteem of each child will be enhanced and the educational, spiritual, moral and cultural needs of each child identified and developed with compassion, enthusiasm and due regard for the child’s individuality” The school works collaboratively to achieve this aspect of its mission statement.

1.2 Board of management
The board of management is properly constituted and is supportive of all school-related activities. Individually and collectively, board members work diligently in the interest of the school and its pupils. Regular board meetings are held and minutes are recorded. Finances are prudently managed and certified annually. The board plays a collaborative role in the formulation of school organisational policies which are discussed at meetings prior to ratification. These good practices are praised. The board reports high satisfaction with the quality of teaching and learning in the school. Board members commented positively on the readiness of pupils to enter post-primary school and on the engagement of pupils in school and community-based sporting events. The school building and its grounds are maintained to a very high standard. Current school accommodation is however in urgent need of development. Three of the four classrooms are of a size unsuited to the number of pupils which occupy them. There is no principal’s office and the room which acts as a staff room is unsuited to purpose. The board has submitted an application for a major capital works grant to the Department of Education and Skills for the building of a
1.3 In-school management
The in-school management team comprises a principal, deputy principal and a special duties teacher. The principal was appointed to the position in May 2009. He demonstrates a clear commitment to the welfare of all pupils in the school. He displays an in-depth familiarity with the community, with all aspects of the work of the school and with the educational needs of the pupils. He is highly conscientious in the discharging of his duties and ensures that the school is characterised by a welcoming atmosphere and a positive school climate. Each member of the in-school management team has a defined set of responsibilities which are fulfilled in a spirit of mutual support and of commitment to the school and its pupils. An increased focus might now be placed on the development of the curriculum leadership roles of the team. It is therefore recommended that the team devise a plan to address prioritised curriculum areas for development over a three to five year period.

1.4 Management of relationships and communication with the school community
It is evident that open communication and collaboration exists between this school and its parent body. Parent representatives expressed their very high satisfaction with the holistic curriculum taught in the school and with the achievement levels of the pupils. In addition to annual parent-teacher meetings, other means of maintaining regular contact between the parents and the school include the production of a brochure for the parents of new pupils and the maintenance of homework journals. Periodic newsletters are issued to parents informing them of upcoming school related events. Parents report that they feel welcome at all times to approach the class teachers with concerns relating to their children’s education. It is intended to begin the issuing of annual pupil progress reports at the end of this school year. Parents play a role in the drafting of some school plans and policies. It is recommended that this role be further developed and that a means of disseminating the present whole-school plan to parents be identified.

1.5 Management of pupils
The pupils in Abbeydorney N.S. present as very polite individuals who are happy and eager to learn. This is reflected in the very high quality of interactions between teachers and pupils and the pupils and their peers. They are afforded ample opportunities to partake in co-curricular and extra-curricular activities and as a result they demonstrate very high pride in their school and in their community. Members of the recently established Green Flag committee demonstrate a clear commitment to team work and a dedication to the procurement of a green flag for the school in the near future. It is evident that the pupils are valued members of the school community and are treated with fairness and respect.

2. Quality of School Planning

2.1 Whole-school and classroom planning
Whole-school planning is undertaken as a collaborative activity by members of the teaching staff. The quality of the organisational policies is of a high standard and these policies are implemented consistently by all staff members. It is recommended however that the current Relationship and Sexuality Education (RSE) policy be reviewed in order to provide teachers and parents with a clear outline of the content of RSE lessons to be addressed at each class level. Comprehensive curriculum plans have been devised by the staff and these act as a valuable resource in enabling the teachers to deliver a broad and balanced curriculum to the pupils. It is now recommended that a policy for the teaching of Drama be drafted. It is further recommended that in reviewing current
curriculum plans an increased emphasis be placed on the identification of a means through which their impact on pupil learning might be evaluated.

The quality of classroom planning is of a high standard. All teachers prepare comprehensive long and short term plans in preparation for their work and monthly progress reports are maintained. This good practice is praised. Future reviews of individual classroom planning should focus on how the curriculum is differentiated to meet the needs of pupils with learning difficulties. Consideration should also be given to the extension of the good practice observed whereby individual teachers utilise curriculum objectives in their short-term planning and to the use of teachers’ monthly progress reports as a means of monitoring curriculum implementation.

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 árd-chaighdéan ag na ndaltaí sa Ghaeilge. Tá sé soiléir ón teagasc sná ranganna go bhuíl tuiscint mhaith ag na hoidí ar bhunphrionsabal an churaclaim. Cloítear leis an Gaeilge mar theanga theagaisc le linn na gceachtanna. Baintear feidhm as modhanna éagsúla agus baineann gach oide feidhm rialta as ábhair chorpartha chun scóip an cheachta a leathnú agus chun suim na ndaltaí a mhúscailt. Oileann siad na ndaltaí chun ceisteanna a chur ar a chéile agus diríonn siad aire ar struchtúr na teanga ionas go scoicheann na páistí dea-chaighdeán liofachta agus cruinnis. Baintear dea-usáid as cluichí, rainn, obair bhearte, amhráin agus as acmhainní oiriúnaacha chun cumas cainte na bpáistí sa teanga labhartha a fhorbairt. Dirítear aird ar chruinneas sa léitheoireacht Ghaeilge. Léann na ndaltaí go cruinn, go lófa agus le tuiscint. Forbrútear na scileanna scríbhneoireachta go cúramach agus tá na daltaí sna h-árdranganna abhálta altanna beaga suimiúla a scriobh. Moltar anois, úsáid a bhaint as fiorleabhair, úrscéalta agus as an scealaíocht chun scileanna éisteachta na ndaltaí a fhorbairt. Moltar freisin bheim níos mó a chur ar fhorbairt na scríbhneoireachta cruthaitheach na meanranganna agus sna h-árdranganna.

Irish
Pupil achievement in Irish is of a high standard. It is evident from in-class teaching that the teachers’ possess a good understanding of the principles of the Irish curriculum. Irish is used as the language of instruction throughout the Irish lessons. A variety of teaching methodologies is employed and each teacher regularly utilises concrete materials to broaden the scope of the lesson and to awaken the interest of the pupils. Pupils are taught to ask questions of each other and attention is paid to the structure of the language enabling the pupils to attain high standards of fluency and accuracy. Excellent use is made of games, rhymes, paired work, songs and resources to develop the oral language of the pupils. Attention is paid to accuracy in Irish reading. The pupils read accurately, fluently and with understanding. Writing skills are carefully developed and the pupils in the senior classes are able to write simple interesting passages. It is recommended now,
that real books, novels and story telling are used to develop the listening skills of the pupils. It is also recommended that increased emphasis be placed on the development of creative writing in the middle and senior classes.

**English**

The quality of teaching and learning in English is of a good standard. The pupils were observed to gain pleasure and fulfilment from language activities organised and they have acquired the ability to understand the conventions of oral language interaction and to use oral language in a variety of social situations. Very good listener-speaker relationships have been established and vocabulary extension is systematically addressed in discrete lessons and through integration with other curriculum areas. This good practice is praised. The oral language skills of the pupils in the infant and junior classes however are in need of development. An increased emphasis should be placed on the development of opportunities for pupils to meaningfully and purposefully engage in a wider range of opportunities to use language so that they become more fluent and explicit in communicating ideas and experiences. In the middle and senior classes a focus should be placed on enabling the pupils to organise, clarify, interpret and extend their experiences through oral language activity. It is therefore recommended that current provision in the area of oral language skills development be reviewed and that a focused language development programme be devised which has the explicit purpose of enhancing the pupils’ ability to use language as a speaker.

All pupils are making very good progress in the development of reading skills. Great care is taken to ensure that pupils develop a range of reading skills and abilities which include phonemic awareness, word identification strategies and a growing sight vocabulary. In tandem with the class reader, pupils from senior infants upwards engage in the reading of books from a graded reading scheme. This good practice is highly commended. The further development of pupils’ reading skills, especially their cognitive, emotional and imaginative development would be further developed through their engagement in a wider variety of collaborative and experiential reading activities in the infant and junior classes and through the exploration of a wider range of expository and diagrammatic texts, including forms, menus, recipes, timetables, newspapers and magazines in the middle and senior classes.

The standard of the presentation of pupils’ written tasks is of a very high quality. This high standard is evident in samples of pupils’ written work observed during the evaluation period. It is apparent that all pupils take pride in the presentation of their work and that they are familiar with the conventions of print, punctuation, syntax and grammar rules. They are afforded the opportunity to write for different purposes and audiences in a variety of genres. It is recommended that the use of information and communication technology (ICT) features more prominently in the development of the writing process and that samples of pupils’ writing be displayed to greater effect in the classroom and school environs.

3.2 Mathematics

Mathematics is very well taught in the school and pupils are making discernable progress in their learning of mathematical concepts and processes. Lessons observed were of a very high quality. Concrete materials were skilfully utilised to support pupil learning. In all classes good attention is paid to the acquisition and consolidation of mathematical language. Most teachers have created a supportive and mathematics’ rich learning environment. Teachers give clear explanations and have realistically high expectations for the pupils. Very good attention is placed on consolidating and reinforcing the content, concepts and skills developed during the lessons. As a consequence, the quality of pupil learning outcomes is very good. Teaching and learning in Mathematics would be further improved by the provision of opportunities for all pupils to construct and apply their mathematical understanding in contexts drawn from everyday life and from the pupils’ immediate
environment. Increased attention should also be paid to problem solving as a means of developing higher-order thinking skills and to provide more challenging material for pupils with exceptional ability.

3.3 Geography
Teachers are to be commended for the balanced implementation of the three strands of the Geography curriculum and their efforts to develop pupils’ sense of place and space. Very effective geography lessons enable the pupils to develop an understanding and appreciation of the world in which they live. Very good learning activities are organised which enable the pupils to explore and learn about features in the natural and human environments. The use of maps, graphs, charts and atlases enables the pupils to obtain and present geographical information effectively and to acquire a sense of locational knowledge and spatial awareness. Attention is also focused on environmental awareness and care, supported by the engagement of the school in the Green Flag project. Attractive displays in the corridor and classrooms feature maps of the local area and sites of interest. Some valuable opportunities are provided for pupils to observe and record weather patterns at infant and junior level. Pupils in the middle and senior classes display a good knowledge of the natural and physical features of Ireland. Good project work was also observed in many of the classrooms. There is some scope for development in the written work of the pupils. It is recommended that illustrations, maps and diagrams, summaries and brief descriptions feature more regularly in the pupils’ recording of topics covered. Increased use of the local environment in Geography, where appropriate, should be given further consideration, along with the wider application of active learning methodologies.

3.4 Assessment
The school utilises a range of assessment modes. At whole-school level, standardised tests in literacy and numeracy are administered from first to sixth class. The Middle Infant Screening Test (MIST) is administered to pupils in senior infants to assist in determining pupil progress in literacy. Teachers design their own tasks and tests in other curriculum areas and they maintain a record of pupils’ results. Some teachers maintain pupil profiles and portfolios. Teachers speak knowledgeably in relation to the progress and learning needs of individual pupils. A wide range of effective diagnostic tests are administered by the learning-support team to determine the learning needs of pupils selected for support and careful records of pupil progress are retained. It is now recommended that teachers explore and devise a systematic means of assessing pupil progress across the curriculum areas and that assessment data compiled is used to provide differentiated activities and learning outcomes, as appropriate at a whole-school level.

4. Quality of Support for Pupils

4.1 Pupils with special educational needs
The quality of support for pupils with special educational needs is of a high standard. Using available assessment data and in collaboration with parents and teachers, individual educational plans (IEPs) are drafted which successfully outline the learning needs of the pupils in receipt of support and in which a wide range of effective learning activities are outlined. Daily and weekly records of lesson content addressed are maintained. Pupil progress is recorded on a weekly and termly basis. The quality of the lessons observed was of a very high standard and it is evident that the support team are aware of and responsive to the learning needs and styles of individual pupils. Teachers are advised to be even more specific in relation to learning targets identified and to report on the progress of individual pupils to parents at the end of each instructional term. Consideration should also be given to providing parents with a copy of the IEP pertaining to their child. It is recommended that the current learning-support policy be reviewed in line with
recommendations and guidelines contained in the *Learning-Support Guidelines* (1999) and circular 02/05. In this review consideration should be given to the regular reassessment of pupils with special educational needs in collaboration with relevant support agencies in order to provide teachers with an up-to-date outline of pupils’ needs. The criteria for selection of pupils in need of learning support should also be revisited with a view to placing increased focus on early intervention in the infant and junior classes.

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

A part-time teacher provides three hours and forty five minutes support to pupils whose first language is not English. As a result of the high quality of teaching, pupils in receipt of support are making very good progress in the acquisition of English as a second language. The school, in keeping with its characteristic spirit and mission, commendably encourages, facilitates and supports the participation of all pupils in the life of the school.

5. Conclusion

The school has strengths in the following areas:

- The school benefits from a very supportive board of management and parent body.
- The quality of teaching and learning is of a high standard across each of the curriculum areas evaluated.
- All members of staff, including ancillary staff, work as a team which is dedicated to the provision of quality learning experiences for the pupils and the creation of a school atmosphere characterised by openness, trust and mutual respect.
- Pupils are well motivated and kind and caring towards each other and they display a keen interest in learning.
- Pupils with special educational needs and difficulties are skilfully integrated into all aspects of school life

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

- It is recommended that the board, as a priority, draft a strategic plan to address the general accommodation needs of the school into the future.
- It is recommended that current provision in the area of oral language skills development in English be reviewed and that a focused language development programme be devised which has the explicit purpose of enhancing the pupils’ ability to use language as a speaker.
- It is recommended that teachers explore and devise a systematic means of assessing pupil progress across the curriculum areas and that assessment data compiled is used to provide differentiated activities and learning outcomes, as appropriate at a whole-school level.
- It is recommended that the current learning-support policy be reviewed in line with recommendations and guidelines contained in the *Learning Support Guidelines* (1999) and circular 02/05.

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*