

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**

**Department of Education and Skills**

**Whole School Evaluation  
REPORT**

**High Park National School  
Dromard, Co. Sligo  
Uimhir rolla: 18715R**

**Date of inspection: 26 September 2013**



## 1. Introduction

High Park National School, catering for 88 pupils in West County Sligo has four mainstream class teachers. A shared learning-support teacher and a shared resource teacher support the needs of pupils. Enrolment figures are steady. The school is under the patronage of the Catholic Bishop of Killala.

This whole-school evaluation focused on the quality of teaching and learning in Irish, English, Mathematics and Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE). 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.

## 2. Summary of Findings and Recommendations for Further Development

The following are the **main strengths** of the work of the school:

- A very committed board of management supports all school initiatives.
- The principal leads an enthusiastic and diligent staff.
- The school has a laudable involvement in a broad range of programmes and activities.
- The school is welcoming of parents. They in turn demonstrate strong commitment to the school.
- The school has very good facilities and resources including a wide range of interactive devices.
- The pupils' behaviour is exemplary and they engage enthusiastically with their work.
- The quality of teaching and learning in all subjects evaluated is of a very high standard.

The following **main recommendations** are made:

- Curriculum learning objectives should be referenced in short-term planning.
- Language experience charts could be used to further extend discrete language opportunities and vocabulary development in a whole-language approach.

## 3. Quality of School Management

- Effective governance is provided by a very committed and interested board of management. Meetings are convened regularly. The minutes confirm the breadth of topics discussed and a treasurer's report is presented at every meeting. Board members identify the well-being of the school as their key priority. They commended the diligence of the principal and the school staff to the school. Members expressed concerns about on-going funding for the provision of services for pupils.
- The principal demonstrates a deep commitment to the school. He promotes a collaborative learning community and has successfully fostered a positive school environment. He is ably supported by a deputy principal and a post-holder. This in-school

management team competently carries out a wide range of duties including curriculum leadership functions. Teachers are commended for creating a school climate that nurtures a sense of well-being in the pupils. Members of staff engage in regular continuing professional development to meet the needs of pupils. Staff meeting minutes are retained. The operation of a successful book rental scheme is highly praiseworthy.

- The school is well resourced and well maintained. The school building and grounds provide a stimulating learning environment. Recent refurbishment includes a general purpose room that adds an extra dimension to the educational experiences offered by the school. Interactive whiteboards, scanners and visualisers are competently used throughout the school and promote participation by pupils in all curricular areas. The special needs assistant, part-time secretary and part-time caretaker carry out their duties capably.
- Very good relationships pertain within the school community and with the local community. Local craft workers/artists are invited to the school on a frequent basis and share their artistic and creative skills and expertise with pupils. Regular newsletters, meetings and a comprehensive school website maintain communication structures. Parent information evenings, held at the beginning of the school year by all teachers, are very positively received by parents. A parent's section on the school website provides access to a variety of school policies.
- The parents' association and parents generally, are very supportive of the work of the school. They regularly organise fundraising events and supportive activities. Annual parent-teacher meetings are organised. Parents receive written end-of-year reports that include their child's attainment in standardised tests. All parents report in questionnaires that the school is welcoming of them and that the school is well run.
- Pupils are courteous, respectful and very well behaved. They are afforded many opportunities to participate in a broad range of co-curricular and extracurricular activities. The pupils are proud of their *Discover Primary Science "Award of Excellence"* and other various sporting, musical and drama awards.

#### **4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation**

- All school plans and administrative policies are appraised on a three year cyclical basis and submitted to the board for review and ratification. Policy development is enhanced through genuine consultation with parents.
- The implementation and impact of school planning and school self-evaluation (SSE) is effective. A number of approaches, intervention strategies and programmes have been introduced to very good effect following analysis of tests. Questionnaires have been issued to parents and pupils regarding attitudes to reading and will be distributed again at the end of the year following implementation of specific programmes. The school is commended for this work and for adopting a collaborative approach in pursuit of clearly identified targets and timeframes for improvement.
- Very detailed, long-term and short-term teacher planning reflects breadth and balance between the strands of the curriculum and the school development plan. Cross-curricular themes and differentiated approaches are outlined. A broad variety of resources is prepared to support teaching and learning across all subject areas. It is recommended that curriculum objectives be included in short-term planning on a whole-school basis and that monthly progress approaches be reviewed and shortened.

- Confirmation was provided that the board of management has formally adopted the *Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools* without modification and that the school is compliant with the requirements of the *Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools*.

## 5. Quality of Teaching, Learning and Pupil Achievement

- Direct teaching, discovery learning, active learning, whole-class, group, pair and individual learning opportunities are provided for pupils across all classes. Well-organised, bright classrooms with stimulating displays of pupils' work encourage engagement with learning. Positive interactions with pupils heighten their self-esteem and they apply themselves enthusiastically to assigned tasks. Almost all parents and pupils acknowledged in questionnaires that teaching is good in the school.
- Cothaítear dearcadh dearfach, spéis agus dúil i leith na Gaeilge tríd an scoil. Tá na h-oidí le moladh as a saothar chun an Ghaeilge a chur chun cinn mar theanga bheo. Baintear úsáid éifeachtach as cluichí cainte, puipéid, pictiúir agus póstaer chun cumas cainte na ndaltaí a fhorbairt. Úsáidtear an Ghaeilge mar ghnáth-theanga chumarsáide agus mhéan teagaisc i bhformhór na ranganna. Moltar deiseanna sa bhreis a thabhairt do na daltaí labhairt trí Ghaeilge chun a gcumas labhartha a threisiú. Baintear caighdeán líofa amach sa léitheoireacht agus déantar obair scríofa oiriúnacha sna seanraí éagsúla. Moltar úsáid úrscéalta mar dea-chleachtas. Aithrisítear agus cantar réimse leathan rainn agus amhráin go muiníneach i ngach rang. Moltar anois a thuilleadh drámaíocht agus rólghlacadh a chleachtadh chun an cur chuige cumarsáideach a leathnú.

*A positive disposition with interest and regard for the Irish language is cultivated throughout the school. The teachers are commended for their work in progressing Irish as a living language. Effective use is made of language games, puppets, pictures and posters to develop the oral language abilities of the pupils. Irish is used as the medium of communication and instruction in most classes. It is recommended that further opportunities be afforded pupils to speak the Irish language in order to strengthen their spoken competence. Fluency in Irish reading and appropriate written work in various genres is attained. The use of novels is commended as good practice. A very good range of poems and songs are recited and sung in every class. It is recommended that pupils be afforded drama and role-play practice in order to expand the communicative approach.*

- Very effective practice was observed in the teaching of English. Reading skills are well-developed. Station teaching and a variety of learning experiences are utilised systematically in very engaging and enthusiastic ways to support the learning experiences of pupils. A strong emphasis on poetry enhances vocabulary development and the oral language skills of pupils. Language experience charts could further extend the efforts in effecting discrete language opportunities. Writing skills are systematically developed from the pre-writing stage to activities in a wide variety of genres.
- The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in Mathematics is very good. Problem-solving abilities are developed, mathematical language is used effectively and understanding of mathematical concepts and processes is promoted across the school. Proficiency in fundamental mathematics skills is reinforced through recall of facts and oral and mental activities. Pupils demonstrated very good knowledge and understanding of number facts and concepts. A "problem of the week" initiative encourages pupil engagement in maths-rich learning environments. Concrete materials are used effectively with active and hands-on approaches widely used.
- A variety of teaching approaches is used in a safe environment to ensure very effective teaching and learning in SPHE. A two-year cyclical programme is implemented. A sense

of respect, care, value and community is fostered in the school and personal development, self-identity and self-esteem are nurtured. Pupils actively engage in purposefully organised cooperative and collaborative activities.

- Teachers have developed some very effective assessment procedures for literacy and Mathematics and the quality of assessment is very good. School-developed targets, various interventions and tracking systems based on analysis of evidence-based results are enhancing literacy and numeracy outcomes and overall school improvement. The practice of including these analyses to guide teachers' planning and in-class interventions is highly commendable.

## **6. Quality of Support for Pupils**

- The quality of support for pupils with special and additional educational needs is very good. A whole-school policy guides provision in this area. Support is provided to pupils with different learning needs following consideration of a range of standardised, diagnostic and screening tests. Targeted provision, clear planning and specific support is provided by two teachers on a shared basis. Lessons are structured appropriately and a variety of purposeful learning strategies is utilised. Pupil profiles are maintained. A combination of both withdrawal and in-class support teaching for literacy and numeracy is provided. This in-class support could be documented more fully to determine its overall impact and enhance school improvement and evaluation endeavours.
- Additional, purposeful support through the provision of a developmental programme is provided for a number of pupils for whom English is a second language.

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## **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 of High Park N.S. welcomes the recent WSE report and finds it to be affirming of the high quality of teaching and learning that takes place in our school. We also welcome the recommendations and their implementation will continue to be part of our on-going system of self-evaluation and continuous improvement.

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

Learning objectives have been introduced into the short term planning of all members of staff.

Additional language experiences, resources and methodologies have been implemented to further augment oral language and vocabulary development in a whole language experience approach throughout the school.