Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Dangan National School
Tulla, Co. Clare
Uimhir rolla: 18846J

Date of inspection: 05 April 2011
1. **Introduction**

Dangan National School is a co-educational primary school near the town of Tulla in County Clare. It operates under the patronage of the Catholic Bishop of Killaloe. The school population has increased steadily in recent years. At the time of evaluation, twenty-eight pupils were enrolled.

This report presents the findings of a whole-school evaluation undertaken in the school in March 2011, which focused on the quality of teaching and learning in English, Irish, Mathematics and Music. 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 dynamic parents’ association supports the school in many practical ways.
- Stimulating learning environments are maintained by the teachers. These are effective in supporting teaching and in consolidating pupils’ learning.
- In English, pupils achieve very good standards in creative writing.
- The quality of teaching in Music is very good.
- The school’s provision for pupils with special educational needs is very good.

The following **main recommendations** are made:

- To ensure that the current good literacy and numeracy standards are maintained, school management’s role in monitoring and promoting the quality of teaching and learning should be developed further.
- As a priority, the school should introduce and implement a range of strategies to address the development of pupils’ oral language skills.
- The school needs to further develop its practices around assessment of pupils’ progress and achievements.
3. **Quality of School Management**

- Overall, the board of management functions effectively. Specific duties have been assigned to board members and these are undertaken competently. School accounts are certified annually. The board has taken appropriate steps to improve the standard of the school accommodation by undertaking some maintenance projects and by submitting an application to the planning and building unit of the Department of Education and Skills for further work. The board should conduct an annual review of the roles of the special-duties post holder to ensure that these roles are in line with the priorities of the school. The board is advised to use objective criteria such as the results of standardised tests as a means of monitoring the standards of teaching and learning in the school.

- A dynamic parents’ association supports the school in many practical ways and parents are given good opportunities for involvement in the school. Responses received from parents through questionnaires indicate a high level of satisfaction with the school.

- The principal provides valuable leadership and her day-to-day management of the school is good. She has overseen some developments in whole-school planning and she facilitates the involvement of parents in this process. The special duties post-holder provides very good support to the principal and the school.

- The management of pupils is good. Overall, the pupils are well behaved and co-operative.

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

- The quality of school planning is good. Helpful organisational policies have been put in place and these are reviewed on an ongoing basis.

- The quality of whole-school planning in Irish, English and Music is good. When reviewing the school plan in Mathematics, the school should place additional emphasis on planning for the development of mathematical skills through content and through further use of estimation and problem-solving strategies.

- Good-quality long-term and short-term plans are compiled by the teachers. In some curriculum areas, teachers outline effective differentiation strategies to provide for the variation in pupils’ ability. Monthly progress reports (*cuntas mhíosula*) are devised. The learning-support teacher compiles highly-quality plans for the pupils who receive additional support.

- A number of appropriate strategies are used to assess pupils’ progress. The school should develop its assessment strategies with a view to generating a more comprehensive profile of pupils’ attainment. The teachers are advised to benchmark teacher-designed tasks and samples of pupils’ work against curriculum objectives to provide for more objective monitoring of pupils’ progress. Increased use of standardised tests and checklists to monitor and record pupils’ progress in the mainstream class is also recommended. This would help the school to implement a continuum of support for pupils in the mainstream class and to ensure that the pupils who present with the greatest level of needs receive learning support.
• The school’s practice in self-evaluation is adequate. In terms of further developing it, analysis of monthly progress reports would help the school to identify aspects of the curriculum which are in need of further attention and to achieve a better balance in curriculum implementation. The addition of success criteria to school policies and whole-school curriculum plans would assist in evaluating the effectiveness of their implementation in the school.

• School authorities provided evidence that, in compliance with Primary Circular 0061/2006, the board of management has formally adopted the Department’s Child Protection Guidelines for Primary Schools. Evidence was provided to show 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.

5. Quality of Teaching, Learning and Pupil Achievement

• Overall, the quality of teaching and learning is good. Many examples of effective practice were identified during the evaluation. The teachers are commended for maintaining stimulating learning environments which support teaching and the consolidation of pupils’ learning. Developing pupils’ confidence in communicating orally across the curriculum should be a key priority for the school. To this end, the school is advised to generate more opportunities for individual pupils and small groups of pupils to communicate and to make oral presentations to a range of audiences.

• Breathnaíodh dea-chleachtais i dteagasc na Gaeilge. Tá foclóir cuí ag na daltaí agus tá sé ar chumas cuit diobh cumarsáid d bhéal a dhéanamh sa teanga. Chun a gcumas labhartha a mhéadú tá gá le deiseanna níos rialta a sholáthar chun úsáid a bhaint as an teanga i gcomhthéacsanna cumarsáideacha trí rólghla cadh, obair bheirte agus drámaí. Léann formhór na ndaltaí le líofacht agus leagtar béim mhaith ar tuiscint agus foghraíocht na teanga. Is móir is fiú an obair atá ar siúl i dteagasc na scribhneoirechta. Sonraithear caighdeán an-mhaith sna samplaí scribhneoireachta a rinne na daltaí sna hardranganna le linn na meastóireachta.

Good practice was observed in the teaching of Irish. The pupils have an appropriate range of vocabulary and some of them can communicate orally in the language. To strengthen their speaking ability, there is a need to generate regular opportunities for use of the language in communicative contexts, through role-play, pair work and dramas. The majority of pupils read with fluency and a good emphasis is placed on comprehension and pronunciation of the language. Very worthwhile work is undertaken in the teaching of writing. A very good standard was in evidence in the samples of written work completed by pupils during the evaluation.

• English is well taught. Early-reading skills are well developed through exploration of rhymes and stories. In the senior classes, reading strategies and word-attack skills are well taught. The majority of pupils read to a good standard. A local author teaches creative writing lessons in a range of genres. The quality of the outcomes achieved in this work is highly creditable. Pupils’ work is neatly presented and their handwriting is of a very good standard. While pupils’ vocabulary is well extended during oral language lessons, there is a need to place additional emphasis on the strand unit Competence and Confidence in Using Language. The use of the Drumcondra English Language Profiles is suggested as a way of helping teachers monitor pupils’ progress in oral language.
• The quality of teaching and of pupil achievement in Mathematics is good. During the evaluation, well-structured lessons were observed in both classes and guided discovery was competently facilitated by the teachers. The teachers and pupils use concrete materials effectively when exploring concepts. A strong emphasis is placed on the number strand. The teachers should be mindful of the need to plan for an appropriate balance between the strands of the curriculum. Regular mental mathematics sessions should be undertaken. This would facilitate revision of topics as well as the development of pupils’ ability to compute answers mentally and to respond to questions orally.

• Overall, the quality of teaching and learning in Music is very good. While the programme of work in the junior classes is dominated by song-singing, in the senior classes a very broad range of activities is undertaken. As a result, the pupils read music confidently from the stave and their understanding of music literacy is highly commendable. They sing songs and play the recorder impressively in harmony parts. Work undertaken in composing is of a very good standard. Pupils listen to and discuss music in various genres using appropriate terminology.

6. Quality of Support for Pupils

• The learning-support teacher provides five hours of support to pupils. The quality of this support is very good.

• The school uses appropriate means to identify the pupils who would benefit from learning support. At the time of the evaluation, the total five hours was allocated to pupils in the infant and junior classes. Programmes of work are compiled for pupils where specific, measurable targets are outlined. The teacher is highly commended for the thorough manner in which she undertakes this work. There is evidence of valuable collaboration with the mainstream class teacher and the pupils’ parents in compiling these plans. Diagnostic and screening tests are used in determining pupils’ needs.

• Support is provided in a small room to which groups of pupils are withdrawn from the mainstream classroom. A print-rich environment is provided and many of the resources used have been designed by the teacher to meet the pupils’ specific needs. Information and communication technologies (ICTs) are used to very good effect during the sessions.

• During the evaluation, the quality of support teaching observed was very good. Support sessions are well structured and organised. Clear learning objectives are addressed and learning is well consolidated. Particularly good emphasis is placed on developing and extending pupils’ comprehension of texts. There is evidence that the pupils make good progress in their work.

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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 would like to acknowledge the work of the inspector in carrying out this evaluation and compiling this report. We welcome its observations and findings as it reflects the commitment and dedication of the school’s community to the welfare and education of the children.

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 is committed to the implementation of the recommendations of the report.
A whole school programme for the teaching of oral language skills in the English Curriculum plan has been revisited and is currently being developed and extended to all subject areas.
The practice of administering standardised tests at the end of 1st and 4th class has now been extended to include all classes and the Board of Management are invited to participate in the evaluation of the results.