WHOLE-SCHOOL EVALUATION

A whole-school evaluation of Killygordon National School was undertaken in May 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 History. The board of management 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

Killygordon National School is a co-educational, primary school located in the village of Killygordan in north-east County Donegal. The school was originally built in 1964 and extended and refurbished in 2008. The pupils are taught in two multi-grade classes; the junior room accommodates pupils up to and including second class and the senior room accommodates pupils from third to sixth classes.

Enrolment figures have remained steady in recent years and projected enrolments for the next number of years are consistent. School attendance figures are very good.

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

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
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<tr>
<td>Pupils enrolled in the school</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mainstream classes in the school</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teachers on the school staff</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mainstream class teachers</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teachers working in support roles</td>
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<td>Special needs assistants</td>
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1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT

1.1 Characteristic spirit, mission or vision

This school is under the patronage of the Church of Ireland Bishop of Raphoe and Derry. The school fosters inclusivity and respectful interaction among pupils and staff and with the wider community. In accordance with its mission statement, the school is very successful in providing a happy, welcoming, organised and secure environment where learning and the holistic development of pupils are both prioritised. Regular opportunities are provided for pupils to participate in a variety of co-curricular and extracurricular activities which include swimming, inter-school sports, quizzes and liturgical celebrations. The school has recently achieved its fourth flag with the Green-Schools programme; a matter of some pride for pupils and staff.

1.2 Board of management

The board of management is properly constituted and operates very efficiently. The board is involved intrinsically in the school planning process. The chairperson guides and supports the
work of the board and the school effectively. He visits the school regularly and works closely with the school community. The board employs a school secretary, caretaker/cleaner and a wages clerk on a part-time basis and they provide valuable assistance to the school.

The board is commended for its work in upgrading the school building and grounds to such a high standard thereby ensuring very good facilities for teaching and learning. The school is resource-rich and information and communications technology (ICT) is prioritised. The accommodation is maintained very well and classrooms, support settings and office space are highly organised.

1.3 In-school management

Although unavoidably absent at the time of the evaluation, the principal had arranged ready access to all school records and planning documents. School plans and policies are clear and comprehensive and demonstrate ongoing commitment by the principal and staff. The staff and the board of management describe the principal as dedicated, reflective and professional in her work. It is clearly evident that school protocols are firmly established and that effective day-to-day routines are in place.

The assistant teacher has a special duties post; she supports the work of the principal positively and contributes beneficially to the overall management of the school. In the absence of the principal, she attends to her acting-up duties in a conscientious manner. The duties carried out by the post-holder include the co-ordination of the various initiatives for Green-Schools, the maintenance of the school rolls and the organisation of various school events. While all are attended to efficiently it is now recommended that curriculum responsibility be included as part of the special duties post.

1.4 Management of relationships and communication with the school community

The board of management and school staff recognise the support of parents to be one of the main strengths of the school. Home-school relationships and communication is very good. Regular communication is maintained with parents and a monthly newsletter is issued which contains samples of the pupils’ written work, art and poetry and a report on school activities. The parents organise fund-raising activities and participate fully in school events.

Parents’ representatives report that flexible arrangements are in place to meet with teachers and that good information is provided about their children’s progress. While parents are very supportive of the school it is recommended that they are facilitated to become more involved in supporting aspects of the curriculum, for example, through paired reading, Maths for Fun and Science for Fun initiatives. It is recommended that the current parents’ committee affiliates with the National Parents’ Council (Primary).

1.5 Management of pupils

The management of pupils is very good. Teachers use praise and affirmation judiciously to promote good behaviour. The pupils co-operate with their teachers and are keen to engage in discussion. They display interest, pride and enthusiasm in their work.
2. QUALITY OF SCHOOL PLANNING

2.1 Whole-school and classroom planning

The quality of whole-school planning is very good. Long-term action plans are in place for 2008-2011 and yearly action plans, relevant to the identified needs of the school, have been prepared. Policies and procedures for a wide range of administrative, pastoral and curricular areas are available. All policies have been ratified at board level and this process is ongoing. The policy on the code of behaviour is currently under review. Parents have been involved in working on key policies such as the code of behaviour, relationships and sexuality education and anti-bullying. A web site would be beneficial as another means of sharing school information and policies with the parent community.

The quality of classroom planning is very good. Teachers prepare effective long-term and short-term plans and monthly progress reports are maintained. While team-teaching approaches are used successfully in classrooms it is recommended that more focused planning for their use be undertaken. Classroom teachers collaborate very well with support teachers in the preparation of plans for pupils with special educational needs.

2.2 Child protection policy and procedures

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 (Published 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 caighdeán an teagaisc agus na foghlama sa Ghaeilge go maith. Chonacthas roinnt samplaí breátha de dheach-teagasc agus d'fhoghlaim na Gaeilge tríd an scoil. Díritear aird an-mhaith ar raimh agus ar an bhfilíocht. Baintear leas cumasach as raon de mhodhanna is d'áiseanna chun spriocthaenga a mhuíneadh agus rannpháirtíocht na ndaltaí a chur chun cinn ar bhonn fíorthorthúil. B'fhiú anois an cur chuige cumarsáideach i dtéagasc na Gaeilge a fhóraírth a thuileadh.

Is léir go mbainneann mórchuid dena daltaí taitneamh as foghlaim na Gaeilge agus go léiríonn siad meon dearfach i leith na teanga. Tá gá anois, áfach, le scileanna cumarsáide agus tuiscíonna na ndaltaí a fhóraírth a thuileadh. Aithnítear agus moltar an obair churúach atá ar siúl sna bunranganna chun scileanna léitheoireachta agus scribhneoireachta na ndaltaí a chothú. Bhí caighdeán na dtascanna scríofa a cuireadh i gcrích i gcrích sna hardranganna le linn na meastóireachta go maith.
**Irish**
The standard of teaching and learning in Irish is good. Some commendable examples of teaching and learning of Irish were observed throughout the school. Very good emphasis is placed on rhyme and poetry. A range of methodologies and resources is deployed ably in order to teach a targeted language input and engage the pupils productively. It is recommended that the communicative approach to teaching Irish be developed further.

It is apparent that the majority of pupils enjoy learning Irish and demonstrate positive attitudes to their learning. However, the development of pupils’ communication and comprehension skills requires further attention. The good practice in evidence in the junior classes in relation to the careful cultivation of the pupils’ reading and writing skills is acknowledged and commended. Writing tasks completed by the pupils in the senior classes during the evaluation were of a good standard.

**English**
Provision for English is very good across the school. Oral language is developed purposefully in the junior classes through approaches such as thematic discussion, language games and role-play. Pupils in the senior classes respond well to questioning in oral-language and their responses display confidence and fluency.

Reading skills are nurtured carefully throughout the school and the pupils’ exposure to environmental print, class libraries, large-format books and other attractive age-appropriate reading material fosters their impetus to read. Sight vocabulary is taught very well in the junior classes and pupils are equipped with appropriate skills in phonological awareness. Levels of reading attainment are very good in both classrooms and pupils demonstrate a very good understanding of their reading material.

Handwriting is taught well and pupils are encouraged to present their written work attractively. Evidence from pupils’ copies and writing folders show that pupils in the senior classes have been given many worthwhile opportunities to edit and redraft their stories. Final drafts are presented attractively, sometimes through the use of ICT, and celebrated through classroom displays. Poetry is taught regularly and the work in the junior classes is especially successful.

**3.2 Mathematics**
Provision for Mathematics is good throughout the school. Planning for Mathematics reflects an appropriate balance between skill and concept development. In both classrooms, there is a consistent approach to the use of mathematical language and operations. Both classrooms are mathematics-rich environments, containing discrete areas and relevant displays that reinforce pupils’ learning.

The lesson observed in the junior classes demonstrated appropriate questioning and explanation. It was well linked both to previous learning and to pupils’ everyday experiences and made very good use of concrete resources and ICT. Pupils’ abilities with number facts and numerical operations are fostered carefully. Active-learning methodologies are practised frequently and beneficial opportunities are afforded to pupils to participate in well-designed mathematics trails.

The senior pupils display a positive attitude to Mathematics. Their knowledge of tables is secure and they are adept at mental computation. They perform well in computational tasks. Their overall attainment, as reflected in standardised tests, is good. Throughout the school, there is good focus on problem-solving.
3.3 History

Provision for History is very good throughout the school and commendable practice was noted in relation to thematic classroom planning involving the integration of History topics with other subject areas. Work observed in the junior classes was purposeful and accorded well with the key emphases of the Primary School Curriculum (1999). The pupils explore personal history, chronology and story very effectively and they explain their findings articulately. They are encouraged to work as historians and have regular access to artefacts, photographs and documentary evidence. Timelines and family trees are used very well. Drama and role-play are used to awaken pupils’ empathy with historical characters and to develop their understanding.

Pupils in the senior classes are very knowledgeable about the various projects which they have completed on relevant historical themes and characters. The programme presented to them is balanced and appropriate. The work in their copybooks is relevant and well presented in the main. History is integrated very well with the construction strand of the visual arts programme.

3.4 Assessment

The quality of assessment is good. The school has a relevant assessment policy and a range of informal and formal assessment strategies is used in both classrooms. There is evidence of regular correction, testing and monitoring of learning.

Standardised testing in English reading and Mathematics is administered annually and the resulting data are analysed carefully and used to identify pupils who need additional support in learning. The Middle Infant Screening Test is administered to senior-infant pupils in order to assess emergent reading development.

Assessment for learning strategies are outlined in the whole-school policy and there is evidence that these approaches are used to some degree in both classrooms. Self-assessment and peer-assessment techniques are used in the senior classroom.

End-of-year reports are issued to parents about their children’s progress across the curriculum. Results of standardised tests are discussed with parents at parent-teacher meetings.

4. Quality of Support for Pupils

4.1 Pupils with special educational needs

The quality of support for pupils with special educational needs is very good. Two teachers, both based elsewhere, provide specific support for pupils with additional and special educational needs. The resource teacher for pupils with assessed special education needs visits for one hour per day from Monday to Thursday. The learning-support teacher has an allocation of five hours per week for this school and currently visits on Mondays for three hours and on Tuesdays for two. It is recommended that the organisation of the learning-support provision be reviewed in consultation with the base school so that visits are spread more evenly throughout the week.

Both teachers offer dedicated and beneficial service to the school and its pupils. The quality of teaching observed was of a very high standard. Lessons were well presented and matched carefully to the needs of pupils. A structured approach is adopted to the development of pupils’
literacy skills and meaningful links are fostered between oral, reading and written work. Valuable opportunities are also provided to pupils to utilise their literacy skills in everyday contexts. The emphasis on the language of Mathematics, the use of concrete resources and the systematic approach to numeracy are all commendable features of the support provided in Mathematics. ICT is used very well to support pupils’ learning. There is a defined structure to facilitate close cooperation between the support teachers and their mainstream colleagues. There is good continuum of support and well-developed mechanisms to screen, monitor and support pupils. The learning-support teacher engages very successfully in a blend of in-class support and individual and group withdrawal. The in-class work focuses beneficially on early-intervention strategies and team teaching for Mathematics.

Both support teachers maintain regular communication with parents. The principal prioritises the area of additional and special education and meets with the support teachers on her administrative days in order to discuss progress. It is recommended that both support teachers attend formal staff meetings so as to contribute to the discussion about pupils’ progress in respect of specific learning targets and the development and review of support plans. The board employs a special needs assistant who makes a valuable contribution in the inclusion and care of pupils in the mainstream classroom.

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

Currently, there are no pupils availing of other supports in the school.

5. CONCLUSION

The school has strengths in the following areas:
- The chairperson of the board of management guides and supports the work of the board and the school effectively.
- The school and its environs are maintained and resourced to a high standard thereby ensuring very good facilities for teaching and learning.
- The principal and special duties teacher are conscientious, dedicated and professional in their work.
- Provision for English, Mathematics and History is very good throughout the school.
- The quality of teaching and learning for pupils with additional and special educational needs is very good.
- The parents are very supportive of the work of the school.

The following key recommendations are made in order to further improve the quality of education provided by the school:
- It is recommended that the communicative approach to teaching Irish be further developed. (Moltar an cur chuige cumarsáideach i dteagasc na Gaeilge a fhorbairt a thuilleadh).
- It is recommended that curriculum responsibility be included as part of the responsibilities attached to the special duties post in the school.
- It is recommended that the organisation of the learning-support provision be reviewed in consultation with the base school so that support is provided for pupils more evenly throughout the week.
• It is recommended that parents be further involved in supporting aspects of the curriculum, for example, paired reading, Maths for Fun and Science for Fun initiatives.

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.
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 felt that the Whole School Evaluation was affirming of the hard work and dedication made by the Board of Management, Staff, Parents and Pupils.
- The Inspector was very professional in her work, and was warm and courteous throughout the evaluation.
- The report accurately reflects the on-going and future work of the school.

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 are currently implementing the recommendations made by the inspector.