Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Donagh National School
Carndonagh, County Donegal
Uimhir rolla: 18939Q

Date of inspection: 11 May 2010
WHOLE-SCHOOL EVALUATION

A whole-school evaluation of Donagh 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

Donagh National School is a co-educational, rural primary school located in Carndonagh, County Donegal. Enrolment figures have decreased significantly since the last school inspection in 2000 when there were 53 pupils on the school register. The school provides a comfortable, well-ordered, caring atmosphere for its pupils. Regular opportunities are provided for the pupils’ involvement in a variety of co-curricular and extracurricular activities. These include swimming, visits to the local library, interschool sports, carol services, work with the local carnival group and environmental awareness activities. The pupils’ attendance is consistently very good.

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>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pupils enrolled in the school</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainstream classes in the school</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers on the school staff</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainstream class teachers</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers working in support roles</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special needs assistants</td>
<td>0</td>
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</tbody>
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Two learning-support teachers, based in another school, attend for five hours each per week. A part-time secretary provides very efficient and effective support to the school.

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT

1.1 Characteristic spirit, mission or vision

Donagh National School is under the patronage of the Church of Ireland Bishop of Derry and Raphoe. While the school upholds the ethos of the Church of Ireland, the majority of pupils are currently from the Presbyterian Church. The ethos statement states that the work of the school is carried out in an atmosphere of tolerance and respect for religious difference. According to the vision statement, the school envisages that each child’s education should be happy, imaginative, stimulating and overall, cater for children to develop with confidence onto the next level of education and beyond. During the evaluation, a positive and very industrious atmosphere prevailed in which pupils interacted respectfully and patiently.
1.2 Board of management

The board of management meets three times per year, holding one meeting each term. The board members progress issues of school policy dutifully and endeavour to address any resource and infrastructural deficits as the need arises. The treasurer provides an annual written statement of accounts and a verbal, financial update at each meeting. It is recommended, however, that the accounts be externally audited periodically in accordance with section 18 of the Education Act 1998. The board is currently seeking to improve water conservation. It also intends to develop information and communications technologies (ICT) within the school in the near future.

It appears however that in a number of areas there is scope for development in how the board operates; particularly in terms of the regularity of meetings and in how it communicates with the school community. With the recent retirement of a long-serving principal, the school is in a period of transition. Therefore, it is recommended that the board convenes regular meetings; a minimum of five meetings per year is stipulated in the Constitution of Boards Rules of Procedure. At a pre-evaluation meeting the representatives of the parents’ association expressed dissatisfaction with how the board communicates with the association. It is recommended therefore that the board reviews how it communicates with the association so as to ensure effective working relationships in the best interests of the school. Supporting Each Other (Irish Primary Principals’ Network and the National Parents’ Council, 2010), should prove to be a useful document in helping to establish a more effective and mutually beneficial partnership with the parents’ association.

1.3 In-school management

The overall quality of in-school management is satisfactory. The recently appointed principal discharges her duties in an effective and professional manner. She has participated in appropriate training to assist her in her role as teaching principal. She is very committed to her work and has identified relevant priorities for curriculum, resource and administrative development. The principal aspires to have a happy school.

One teacher on the staff has a special duties post and attends to his assigned duties conscientiously. There is a need to review these duties periodically to ensure that they continue to accord with school priorities. While both teachers work very effectively on an individual basis, there is scope for development in terms of how they collaborate in order to share skills and expertise.

1.4 Management of relationships and communication with the school community

Parents are encouraged to visit the school by appointment in order to speak with teachers about their children’s progress. Other modes of communication include the homework diary, annual parent-teacher meetings, written end-of-year reports on pupils’ progress, newsletters and information notices about various school-related activities. The parents’ association works very hard to secure funding to provide additional resources for the school. Recent work in helping to fund the all-weather play facility is commendable.

1.5 Management of pupils

The management of pupils is very good and relationships between the pupils and their teachers are praiseworthy. The pupils display interest, pride and commendable enthusiasm in their work.
School assemblies are held periodically. Opportunity to record and celebrate individual pupil, class or school achievements through a school web site would be beneficial.

2. **QUALITY OF SCHOOL PLANNING**

2.1 Whole-school and classroom planning

The quality of whole-school planning is good. A comprehensive range of organisational policies is in place and there is careful compliance with legislative requirements. The board reviews, amends as appropriate and ratifies the organisational policies presented to it by the teachers. It facilitates the communication of some key policies to the parent body. The views of parents are sought from time-to-time through the use of questionnaires. This is commendable and should be developed further. Representation by the parents’ association on policy sub-committees would ensure an even more inclusive approach to policy formulation and review.

Curricular plans address the principles of the *Primary School Curriculum (1999)* appropriately and give good guidance to class teachers. An e-learning plan would be beneficial in ensuring that ICT are used effectively in both classrooms. This should include a developmental programme of ICT skills for pupils.

All teachers provide very effective long-term and short-term classroom planning. Support teachers plan collaboratively with mainstream teachers and individual programmes of learning have clear learning targets.

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**

Múineann na hoidí an Ghaeilge le díograis agus tugann siad go rialta faoi na snáitheanna Gaeilge. Cuireann siad raon acmhainní ar fáil agus baineann siad feidhm éifeachtaí astu. Tá feidhm fhínteach a bhaint ag na hoidí as rainn, dánta agus amhráin chun fuaim agus rithim na teanga a fhorbairt. Tá leathnú córasach a dhéanamh ar fhoclóirí na ndaltaí agus tá stór maith focail, idir ainmfhocail, aidhchtaí agus bhríathra ar eolas acu. Moltar forbairt a dhéanamh ar an gcumarsáid sa teanga trasna na scoile agus níos mó béime a thabhairt d’agallaimh bheirte, don rólimirt, don dramaíocht agus do straitéisí breise eile chun liofacht teanga a fhorbairt. Cothaíonn na hoidí dearadh dearfach i leith na teanga agus úsáideann siad an Ghaeilge go neamhfhóirmiúil i rith an lae go háirithe sna bunranganna. Moltar an cleachtas seo a thabhairt a thuilleadh sna hardranganna.

Irish

The teachers teach Irish enthusiastically and they address the various strands of the curriculum regularly. Teachers provide a range of suitable resources and use them effectively. They make good use of songs and rhymes to reinforce the sound and rhythm of the language. They broaden the pupils’ vocabulary systematically and the pupils have acquired a good store of nouns and adjectives. It is advised that communication in the language be developed further throughout the school and that additional priority be given to the use of peer-conversations, role play, drama and other strategies in order to develop the pupils’ fluency in the language. The teachers foster a positive attitude to the Irish language and use it informally throughout the day, particularly in the junior classroom. This practice should be developed further in the senior classes.

The standard of reading is satisfactory in the senior classes. It is recommended, however, that real books and large-format books be used to provide a wider reading experience. Writing activities are undertaken regularly across the school. Much writing activity is based on textbooks. Overall, however, there is scope for development in the provision for free writing. In order to strengthen progress in this area, more frequent free-writing opportunities should be provided to pupils. Pupils’ written work is corrected regularly. It would also be beneficial if more thorough whole-school assessment was conducted in the various strands of listening, speaking and reading from infants to sixth class.

English

The quality of teaching and learning in English is very good. Oral language development is emphasised in both classrooms and the pupils enjoy regular discussions and vocabulary enrichment opportunities. The teaching of poetry is very good in both classrooms. The teachers work diligently to promote the pupils’ reading skills and there is good use of peer tutoring and buddy-support systems. The acquisition of sets of class novels is recommended, however, in both classrooms. In the junior classes large-format books are used effectively to foster emergent reading. The junior pupils’ word-attack skills are age-appropriate and their phonological awareness is promoted successfully through the use of the Phonics First Programme. This programme should be continued in the senior classroom. In the senior classes the pupils’ reading skills are very good and their performance in standardised tests of reading is very satisfactory.

Very good attention is paid to pre-writing and early writing activities in the junior classes. In the senior classes, a commendable range of writing activities is undertaken and work in the pupils’ writing folders is good. Some very good cross-curricular project work is undertaken and there is some use of ICT. This use of ICT could be developed further to support process writing. The standard of the pupils’ handwriting is very good throughout the school. Pupils’ spelling is tested regularly. The use of dictation in the junior classes is commendable. This should be progressed in the senior classes.
3.2 Mathematics

The quality of teaching and learning in Mathematics is very good. Teachers promote the use of mathematical language consistently. There is a mathematics-rich environment; relevant number facts and charts are on display and there is a very satisfactory array of mathematical resources. Oral mathematics is an integral part of lessons in both classrooms. In the junior classes, there is highly commendable use of active learning approaches and peer and group activities. There is also very good use of number songs, rhymes and manipulatives and the junior pupils show a sound understanding of number. In-class support of the pupils’ learning in Mathematics is effective; its use should be extended throughout the school. In the senior classes, there is very effective use of group teaching methods and activities are differentiated appropriately to suit the needs of the pupils. The pupils have very good competency with regard to tables and mental computation and are confident in the four basic number operations. The pupils are enthusiastic about Mathematics and their written work is presented very neatly in both classrooms. More systematic development of pupils’ problem-solving skills across all strands of the mathematics curriculum is recommended.

3.3 History

Teaching and learning in History are very good. Personal and family history, local history, legends, feasts and festivals, wars and conflicts and the study of ancient civilisations are covered effectively. Oral evidence and documentary evidence are used successfully across the school. The display of timelines in both classrooms is supportive of the pupils’ understanding of chronology. ICT is used very effectively in the junior classroom to support the teaching of History. The development of the pupils’ skills to work as historians is advanced through their collaborative involvement in well-structured, project-based activity in both classrooms. This is especially praiseworthy. There is evidence of effective integration of History across the curriculum.

3.4 Assessment

The quality of assessment is very good. There is evidence of consistent correction, monitoring and appraisal of the pupils’ learning in both classrooms. Both teachers keep satisfactory records of the pupils’ achievements. These include observational records, test scores, reading records, checklists for aspects of English and samples of the pupils’ written work. More regular use of checklists to record pupils’ progress is recommended in Mathematics in the junior classes.

Standardised tests in English reading and Mathematics are administered from first to sixth classes and satisfactory systems are in place to facilitate teachers in tracking and monitoring the pupils’ progress. Effective screening tests are administered to the infant pupils in order to facilitate the early identification of learning difficulties. It is recommended that end-of-year reports issued to parents should include results of standardised tests as envisaged in Circular Letter 0138/2006.

4. Quality of Support for Pupils

4.1 Pupils with special educational needs

Provision for pupils with additional learning needs is good. Two visiting learning-support teachers attend for five hours each per week. While both offer good support to the school, it would be more efficient if learning support was provided by one teacher from the base school as
has been the case in the past. The board should review this arrangement in consultation with the base school for the teachers who provide the service.

Planning and recording are purposeful and the quality of teaching is good. Both teachers interact with pupils in a kind and supportive manner. Learning is effective and lessons are implemented in an efficient manner. Pupils receive support in literacy and numeracy as appropriate. The pupils’ progress is monitored through the administration of diagnostic tests and a variety of teacher-designed tasks.

As mentioned earlier, in-class support in Mathematics is effective in the junior classes. It is now advised that team-teaching approaches are developed further. The provision of paired-reading support is effective in the senior classes. To progress learning-support provision in the school, it is recommended that the outcomes of assessments in Mathematics be used in a diagnostic manner to determine specific areas of weakness. Additional meetings with parents to support the review of individual pupil learning profiles are advised and these should focus on pupils’ progress in respect of specific learning targets.

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

Teachers are sensitive to any instances of disadvantage which manifest and endeavour to be as supportive as possible of pupils who may need additional support.

5. CONCLUSION

The school has strengths in the following areas:

- The overall quality of teaching and learning in English, Mathematics and History is very good.
- The classroom teachers work in a skilful and diligent manner and present interesting programmes of learning to their pupils.
- The pupils’ school attendance is consistently very good. Pupils display interest, pride and high levels of enthusiasm in their work.
- The early identification of learning difficulties and the supports offered to pupils with learning difficulties are commendable.
- There is ongoing assessment, monitoring and tracking of the pupils’ progress in literacy and numeracy.
- The newly appointed principal is very committed to her work and has identified relevant priorities for curriculum, resource and administrative development.
- The board of management works hard in ensuring the school is well maintained and resourced.
- The parents’ association works enthusiastically to secure funding to provide additional resources for the school. Its recent work in helping to fund the all-weather play facility deserves particular acknowledgement

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

- It is recommended that board of management meetings are conducted more regularly.
- It is recommended that, in the best interests of the school, the board of management works to ensure more effective working relationships with the parents’ association.
• It is recommended that there is further collaboration and sharing of expertise between members of the teaching staff.
• Moltar fíor-leabhair agus leabhair mhóra a úsáid chun taithí níos leithné léitheoirí a chur ar fáil sa Ghaeilge. It is recommended that real books and large-format books are used to provide wider reading experience in Irish.
• Teachers should incorporate more use of information and communications technologies in teaching and learning. A programme for the pupils’ e-learning should be drawn up.
• Current learning-support arrangements should be reviewed in consultation with the base school for the teachers who provide the service.

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 wishes to thank the Inspector for the time and energy devoted to the evaluation.

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