Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Clonberne Central School
Clonberne, Ballinasloe, County Galway
Uimhir rolla: 19388K

Date of inspection: 11 November 2009
WHOLE-SCHOOL EVALUATION

A whole-school evaluation of Clonberne Central School was undertaken in November 2009. 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, Mathematics and History. 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.

INTRODUCTION – SCHOOL CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

Clonberne Central School is situated in the village of Clonberne, county Galway. The present school building was built in 1976. An extension, completed in 2008, has led to a significant improvement in the quality of facilities available in the school.

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
The school is under the patronage of the Catholic Archbishop of Tuam. The school’s mission statement emphasises the importance of its Catholic ethos. The spirit of the school is characterised by a commitment to foster the academic and social development of each pupil. Each member of the school staff strives to implement this vision. There is a strong community spirit in Clonberne and the school is seen as a focal point for the community.

1.2 Board of management
The board of management is constituted in accordance with agreed Department of Education of Skills regulations. The board meets at least once a term. Among the most commonly raised issues at recent meetings have been the school extension and general fund-raising matters. The chairperson of the board of management maintains close contact with the school, visiting daily.

Members of the board have been allocated specific tasks. The secretary of the board of management maintains minutes of the proceedings of each board meeting. The treasurer reports regularly on financial matters. School accounts are certified by an accountant annually.

Board members have been provided with training by the Catholic Primary School Managers’ Association (CPSMA). Among the challenges faced by the board of management are coping with
increasing unemployment in this rural area and the costs of transporting pupils to educational events in Galway city.

1.3 In-school management
The principal was appointed in 2007. He is to be commended for the work done in overseeing the recent extension to the school. The school building and grounds now provide an attractive basis for further developing the school. The principal has made a good start in implementing his vision for the school as a place where learning is both challenging and enjoyable. He is keen to maintain the school’s place at the centre of the local community. The principal has taken a leadership role in the development and implementation of a three-year plan to address the school’s needs in curricular, administrative, building and fund-raising matters. It is recommended that this work continue, with renewed emphasis on curricular planning and implementation.

The school’s in-school management team consists of the principal, deputy principal and one special-duties teacher. The deputy principal provides the principal with valuable support and deputises effectively in the principal’s absence. The duties attached to each post of responsibility are reviewed annually to help ensure that the work involved is based on the needs of the school. There are appropriate administrative, curricular and pastoral duties attached to each post of responsibility.

1.4 Management of resources
The teachers, special-needs assistants and secretary make a useful contribution to the running of the school. The school is well-stocked with educational resources. There is a commendably wide range of reading materials available in the school library. There is a need, however, to ensure that each class library is sufficiently well-stocked to enhance pupils’ reading and research opportunities.

Each classroom contains a selection of mathematical resources. A good start has been made in the development of a mathematics-rich environment in each classroom. It is recommended that more emphasis be placed on this work in the future to enhance the status of Mathematics in the school.

The resources available for the teaching of History include textbooks, artefacts and museum items gathered by the former principal. A good selection of history books has recently been purchased to enhance pupils’ appreciation of this curricular area. The school has a strong local heritage. There are some interesting local sites, for example the Brehon Law School, which provide a stimulating basis for historical study. A commemorative stone set in the school wall serves as a daily reminder to pupils of their heritage. There are several local historians in the Clonberne area. While some effective use is made of this valuable resource, there is a need to organise visits from historians more regularly.

Creditable use is made of information and communication technology (ICT) to enhance the teaching and learning process, especially in History, in some classrooms. This work should be expanded further throughout the school.

1.5 Management of relationships and communication with the school community
The school’s parents’ association was established three years ago. It is affiliated to the National Parents’ Council. An annual general meeting is held and other meetings are held occasionally throughout the year. Fund-raising for the school is one of the main activities in which the parents’ association is involved.
Parents are involved in a practical way in various aspects of school life. An evening meeting is held for new parents near the beginning of each school year. Parents are involved in organising the biennial Christmas concert. Parents also assist with the running of the school library and accompany teachers on school tours and excursions. Some parents are involved in providing interesting activities in the school, for example teaching pupils how to make St Brigid’s Crosses. Recently, parents have been involved in work on the 1911 census, as part of the school’s local history programme. Parents and grandparents were interviewed by pupils as part of this work.

Meetings are held between the parents’ association and the principal, when the need arises, to discuss relevant issues. It was reported during the whole-school evaluation that parents feel they are kept well-informed on school matters through newsletters and other notes.

Parents’ views have been sought on some school policies, including the homework policy, the code of discipline and anti-bullying policy. Parents were also involved in the Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) committee.

Annual parent-teacher meetings are held and a written school report is sent to parents on the progress of their children at the end of each school year.

1.6 Management of pupils
The pupils at each class level in the school are well behaved. It is clear that they are interested in participating in the lessons and activities provided by their teachers. The pupils are appropriately supervised in the classroom and in the schoolyard. Because of the timetabling arrangements for school transport, teachers assist in the supervision of pupils after school before their bus arrives.

2. Quality of School Planning

2.1 Whole-school and classroom planning
The quality of whole-school planning is good overall. A great deal of work has been done in school planning in recent years. A well-laid-out school plan with many positive aspects has been put together over this period. Policies have been adopted on a range of relevant school matters. A three-year development plan for the school has been set out to provide direction and focus in the school planning process.

Among the administrative policies available are an enrolment policy, health and safety statement, code of behaviour and anti-bullying policy, and an equality policy.

Plans are available for each curricular area. These plans provide a good outline of the work to be covered in the school. Many of these plans are regularly reviewed to ensure that they remain relevant. The level of detail in some of the curricular plans needs to be further developed to provide more specific information.

The whole-school plan for History contains a good overview of the work to be covered at each class level. While much of the information provided is useful, overall the plan is not specific enough and there needs to be more detail on the content to be covered. A clear programme of work for each class level should be set out. This should include reference to the menu curriculum and the spiral nature of the history curriculum. The topics chosen for in-depth study should be clearly set out. It would also be worthwhile including an audit of history resources and contact names for local historians in the school plan.
The quality of classroom planning is good at most class levels. Regular long-term and short-term schemes of work are provided in most classrooms. There is a need for further detail in some cases on how lessons are differentiated to cater for the range of pupil abilities. Each teacher maintains a monthly record of the work covered in each curricular area. Class timetables indicate an additional recreation break in the afternoon of each school day. This break should be phased out.

Planning for learning-support and resource teaching contains many positive aspects. It is recommended, however, that individual planning documentation be made available for each pupil who receives resource teaching.

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 English
The quality of learning and teaching in English is good overall. Pupils’ oral-language development receives due attention at most class levels. Almost all of the pupils in these classes are articulate and confident in talking about themselves and their interests. There is a need to further emphasise oral language in some classrooms.

Some teachers use effective approaches and methods in the teaching of reading. Phonological awareness is appropriately developed in the junior classes, as part of pupils’ introduction to reading. It is recommended that the structure of reading lessons be revised in a number of classes, however. More attention should be given to a range of strategies such as teacher modelling, the exploration of new words and providing regular opportunities for individual pupils to read aloud in these classes. A print-rich environment has been developed in most classrooms. There is a need, however, to further expand this work in some classrooms.

There is a very good school library in the school. The development of this library, however, has led to less attention being given to the maintenance of class libraries. It is recommended that class libraries be redeveloped in each classroom to encourage pupils’ interest in reading and to provide more regular opportunities for pupils to read for pleasure.

Classroom displays throughout the school provide evidence of the good work completed by pupils in English writing. The writing process is appropriately emphasised and pupils are given regular opportunities to write in a variety of genres. In most classes, pupils’ written work is regularly monitored and corrected, although this work should receive more attention at some class levels.

3.2 Mathematics
The quality of learning and teaching of Mathematics is good at most class levels. Appropriate emphasis is placed on developing pupils’ mathematical vocabulary and most pupils demonstrate
good knowledge of a wide range of mathematical topics. Pupils at each class level demonstrate good mastery of number facts (tables). While some teachers have created stimulating Mathematics corners in their classrooms, there is a need to further develop a Mathematics-rich environment in most classrooms. This work should include improving the range of concrete materials available in each classroom and ensuring that these materials are effectively used to enhance the learning process.

Some teachers provide commendable opportunities for pupils to engage with each other collaboratively during mathematics activities. Mathematics games are regularly used in most classes to encourage pupils’ interest in Mathematics and to foster a positive attitude to this curricular area.

3.3 History
The overall quality of learning and teaching in History is good. Particularly good work is done in the junior classes. Most pupils demonstrate good knowledge of the topics and eras they have studied. Improvements in the school-planning process for History should assist in providing pupils with a more structured whole-school programme. This work should enhance the good work already being done and ensure better breadth and balance.

The strand Story is covered very well. Pupils at each class level demonstrate very good knowledge of a wide range of historical stories and myths and legends. In the junior classes, the activities based on Myself and my family are commendable. In the middle and senior classes this work is effectively expanded as part of the emphasis placed on Local studies. Some very good work has been completed based on the 1911 census for the Clonberne area.

Pupils’ skills as historians are well developed at most class levels, with artefacts examined, interviews conducted and documentary evidence explored on a regular basis. Praiseworthy work has been done in the development of stimulating history displays in some classrooms. It is recommended that this work be further emphasised throughout the school, with History areas in each classrooms. Specifically, there should be a timeline in each classroom to enhance pupils’ understanding of time and chronology. The purchase of historical fiction and non-fiction books is recommended to enhance pupils’ enjoyment of History and to provide improved research opportunities.

3.4 Assessment
Useful assessment records are maintained at most class levels in the school. Teacher observation and teacher-designed tests, including some worthwhile oral and written tests, are regularly used to evaluate pupils’ progress. Checklists, work samples and project work are among the other main modes of assessment used in the school. Standardised tests are administered to pupils once a year from first to sixth class. A commendable school-level overview of standardised test results has been put together with graphs plotted to clearly illustrate pupil achievement. The Middle Infant Screening Test (MIST) is administered to senior infants each year as part of the school’s early intervention strategies. While most pupils present their written work clearly and neatly, there is a need for some teachers to place more emphasis on the monitoring and correction of pupils’ written activities and project work. Each pupil’s progress in History is discussed at parent-teacher meetings and noted in school reports.
4. QUALITY OF SUPPORT FOR PUPILS

4.1 Pupils with special educational needs

Overall the quality of support for pupils with special educational needs in this school is good. Learning-support and resource teaching take place in a variety of accommodation, some of which provides a stimulating learning environment. There is a need to reconsider the quality and suitability of the furniture and equipment in some of the support settings, with a view to enhancing the teaching and learning process.

While planning and preparation for learning-support and resource tuition has many positive aspects, it is recommended that individual planning documentation be provided for each pupil. These individual education plans should outline specific learning targets and contain a clear statement of pupils’ current strengths and competencies.

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

The school has an open enrolment policy. Pupils from all backgrounds are welcome to enrol and each pupil is given equal access to each area of the curriculum. At present there are no pupils in the school identified as belonging to disadvantaged, minority or other groups.

5. CONCLUSION

The school has strengths in the following areas:

- The board of management provides effective support for the school.
- There is a strong community involvement in the school.
- The school’s parent body is very committed to developing the school’s facilities.
- The principal has made a good start in developing the school plan.
- Pupils’ mastery of number facts in Mathematics is good.
- The development of pupils’ skills as historians is commendable.

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

- It is recommended that the class libraries in each classroom be redeveloped.
- It is recommended that reading lessons be restructured at most class levels.
- It is recommended that a Mathematics-rich environment be further developed in most classrooms.
- It is recommended that school planning for History receive more attention to ensure greater breadth and balance in the implementation of the school’s history programme.
- It is recommended that the monitoring and correcting of pupils’ work receive more attention in some classes.
- It is recommended that an individual education plan be provided for each pupil in receipt of resource hours.

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 school’s board of management would like to thank the inspectors involved in the inspection process. The process provides benefits for the school and has helped develop procedures and practices in the school. The school report broadly reflects the life and work of the school and the board is happy that the good work going on in the school is recognised.

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

Following the recommendations of the report the Board of Management wishes to report that:

1. Class libraries are being further developed in all classes. Three classes are now complete, with two more expected during this term. The school’s very good library was acknowledged by the report.
2. Support in the structure of reading lessons has been sought from PDST, but significant restructuring has already taken place internally.
3. Maths areas have been redeveloped in all classrooms.
4. School planning in History will form part of the focus of the school’s planning day in December 8th 2010.
5. The school will also be developing a monitoring and correcting policy this year. This has been discussed at staff meetings.
6. All children with resource hours have an IEP following IEP meetings in October 2010.