An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Saint Paul’s National School
Collooney, County Sligo
Uimhir rolla: 19416M

Date of inspection: 18 May 2010
WHOLE-SCHOOL EVALUATION

A whole-school evaluation of Saint Paul’s 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; a response was not received from the board.

INTRODUCTION – SCHOOL CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

Saint Paul’s National School is a co-educational, primary school situated in Collooney, County Sligo. Its pupils are allocated equitably across three mainstream classrooms. The pupils’ overall attendance levels are very good. The school principal is currently on extended leave.

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>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainstream classes in the school</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers on the school staff</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainstream class teachers</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers working in support roles</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(one part-time and one based elsewhere)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special needs assistants</td>
<td>0</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Using ancillary staff grants provided by the Department of Education and Skills, the board of management employs a cleaner on a daily basis and a caretaker as the need arises. The board does not employ a school secretary currently.

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT

1.1 Characteristic spirit, mission or vision

This is a Church of Ireland primary school under the patronage of the Bishop of Tuam, Killala and Achonry. At the time of the evaluation, the atmosphere was very welcoming and purposeful. The pupils behaved in a courteous and co-operative manner. The care shown by senior pupils towards younger pupils was commendable. School assemblies are conducted regularly on relevant themes and are used to celebrate achievements and to encourage good behaviour and personal responsibility. The pupils are encouraged to develop a positive attitude towards the environment by participating in initiatives such as the Green-Schools Programme and those organised by Agri Aware.

1.2 Board of management

The work of the board of management is carried out with care and commitment. The board is properly constituted and its members have attended training for their management roles. Ordinarily, board meetings are convened five times per year but additional board meetings are organised as the need arises. Minutes of meetings are maintained. A financial update is presented...
at meetings. The chairperson, recently appointed, has long experience in education and is committed to school improvement.

Currently, the board is prioritising policy development and is also seeking to resolve a number of parental complaints about discipline-related issues. During discussion as part of the evaluation process, the board expressed its intention to improve communication with the wider school community. This would be beneficial and, amongst other things, a school website and an annual report might be considered in this regard. Improved communication procedures between the board and the teaching staff are also advised. The board members identify the ongoing support of the parent body and the dedication of the teaching staff to be key strengths of the school.

Good-quality, well-maintained accommodation is provided for teaching and learning. The board is commended for its efforts in respect of the recent extension to the building and for its ongoing involvement in school improvement using the Department’s summer works schemes.

1.3 In-school management

The in-school management team comprises an acting principal and an acting deputy principal. The acting principal has a long association with the school and demonstrates a sincere commitment to its development. She endeavours to ensure that the school continues to reflect and maintain the traditional values and strengths of the local community. The acting deputy principal approaches her assigned duties in a conscientious manner. A satisfactory working atmosphere prevails and daily tasks are shared efficiently. Into the future, further involvement by both post-holders in the review of whole-school planning is recommended. To facilitate this, regular, recorded whole-staff meetings should be re-established.

A policy regarding the allocation of teachers to classes has been drafted. However, there has been no significant change in the allocation of permanent teachers to classes for some time. While keeping the pupils’ learning needs to the fore, consideration should be given to accommodating teachers’ wishes to move classes. In the past, teachers have specialised in certain subject areas and exchanged expertise accordingly. This practice should be reintroduced on a whole-school basis.

1.4 Management of resources

The management of resources is satisfactory overall. The mainstream classrooms and support rooms present very well—they are organised, colourful, print and number-rich. The teachers have been creative yet practical in providing resource materials to support teaching and learning. Some additional manipulative resources should be acquired to facilitate hands-on learning across the curriculum and especially in Mathematics.

The school has very recently acquired interactive whiteboards for each mainstream classroom and already these are being used very effectively. In addition, each classroom has one desktop computer for pupils’ use. It is recommended that the school augments its resources as soon as its finances permit so that pupils have additional opportunities to engage actively with information and communications technologies (ICT) Additional software resources should be sourced particularly for the support teaching context.
1.5 Management of relationships and communication with the school community

The board of management and teachers report that the parent body is supportive; this is demonstrated through attending parent-teacher events, helping with outings and activities and participating in pair-reading initiatives, as appropriate. The long-established parent-teacher association (PTA) is affiliated to the National Parents Council (Primary). The PTA has an executive of three parents with all other parents having automatic membership. Ordinarily, the PTA meets thrice annually and there is good attendance by parents and teachers. According to the executive, these meetings generally provide a useful means of sharing information. Currently, the PTA supports the school through various fund-raising activities, helping to organise the pupils’ insurance scheme and assisting in various fun days and celebrations. In the near future, however, the executive intends to examine other ways of operating, including the use of subcommittees, and hopes to extend its involvement in the life of the school.

The executive reported that parents are satisfied with the quality of education provided by the school. They praised, in particular, the variety of co-curricular activities and the support provided for pupils with additional learning needs. Parents are given copies of some key school policies and receive regular news letters about school activities. There has been some involvement of parents in policy development. Further involvement by parents in policy development and review would be beneficial. In addition to informal visits to the school, parents have the opportunity to meet formally with teachers at the annual parent-teacher meetings and at PTA meetings.

1.6 Management of pupils

During the evaluation the management of pupils was good. The routines and protocols implemented were effective and they simplified and enhanced the day-to-day life of the school. Classrooms were busy and transitions from activity to activity were well organised. The good practice of using Irish in the day-to-day management of pupils as observed in one classroom should be emulated in all classrooms. The practice of permitting pupils to remain on the school yard for the first ten minutes after the school’s official start time of 09.20 should be rectified.

It is recommended that an audit of the school’s existing code of behaviour be undertaken to ensure its accord with the guidelines from the National Educational Welfare Board (Developing a Code of Behaviour: Guidelines for Schools, NEWB 2008). The audit checklist developed by the NEWB will be a useful starting point for this work.

2. QUALITY OF SCHOOL PLANNING

2.1 Whole-school and classroom planning

Over the years, the school has engaged diligently in the planning process. A large array of organisational policies is in place and many of these policies have been discussed and ratified by the board of management. Some good work has been undertaken in the development of curricular plans and there is satisfactory classroom implementation of decisions made at whole-school level. However, a number of curriculum plans need to be revisited to include policy statements and implementation details for each class level. It is recommended that when reviewing plans for English additional direction be provided for oral language development throughout the school. In Mathematics, further whole-school focus on planning for problem solving and hands-on learning would be beneficial. In History, planning should include appropriate progression and
development in the themes chosen for local studies. A programme should be drawn up to assist the pupils’ structured use of ICT.

The quality of written classroom planning is satisfactory. The teachers provide useful long and short-term planning. The current format of monthly progress reports should be reconsidered so as to better facilitate school-self evaluation.

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 obair shásúil ar súil i soláthar na Gaeilge tríd an scoil agus cothaítear dearadh dearfach i leith na teanga. Tugtar faoi mhúineadh na teanga go diograisach agus baintear úsáid éifeachtaí as mórchuid acmhainní. Mar is céor, cloítear leis an nGaeilge mar theanga theagainse le linn na gceachtana. B’immholta úsáid na Gaeilge a chleachtadh go leanúnaíoch in ábhar éigin eile den churaclam.

Tá an chuid is mó de na daltaí ag déanamh dul chun cinn sásúil i labhairt na teanga. Baintear úsáid rialta as cluichí teanga, dánta agus amhráin chun suim na ndaltaí a mhúscailt sa chomhrá Gaeilge. B’fhíú chomh maith feidhmiú níos rialta as obair bheiire go gnáthchomhpháirteach laethúil i ndailte na seomra ranga. Aithrisíonn agus canann na daltaí rann, dánta agus amhráin as Gaeilge go cumasach.

Leagtar béim rialta ar an léithetheoireacht Ghaeilge agus ar an iomlán, léann na daltaí os ard go cumasach. Is féidir leis an sáothar ceisteannála simplí bunaiteach a dhéanamh ar an méd atá léite a fhreagraítear go sásúil. Moltar an scéim chéimeaithe léithetheoireachta céanna a úsáid ó rang a dó ar aghaidh agus níor mhiste cur leis an raon agus abhar léithetheoireachta chun breis taithiú agus leathnú a dhéanamh ar an bhfíor-léithetheoireacht. B’fhíú straitéií focal-bhhriseadh a chur chun cinn agus scileanna foineolaíochta na ndaltaí a leathnú. Tugtar faoiin scribhneoireacht theithíúil go rialta agus déantar monatóireacht i lár ar bhonn cúramach. Chun dul chun cinn sa scribhneoireacht a threisiú trí an scoil, d’fhéadfadh níos mó deiseanna a thabhairt do na daltaí scriobh go cruthaitheach agus go pearsanta. B’fhíú chomh maith scéim mheasúnaite do Ghaeilge a leagan amach chun an obair a threorú agus a stiúradh amach anseo.

_Gaeltacht_

There is satisfactory provision for Irish throughout the school and a positive attitude is cultivated towards the language. Teaching is undertaken diligently and effective use is made of many
resources. As appropriate, Irish is adhered to as the language of instruction during lessons. It would be beneficial if Irish was used consistently in another subject area of the curriculum.

Most pupils are making satisfactory progress in learning to speak the language. Regular use is made of language games, poems and songs to stimulate the pupils’ interest in speaking Irish. It would be worthwhile if more use was made of pair work and ordinary daily discussion in every classroom. The pupils recite and sing rhymes, poems and songs capably in Irish.

Regular emphasis is placed on Irish reading and, in the main, the pupils read aloud in a capable manner. They can answer simple comprehension questions which are based on the text satisfactorily. It is recommended that the same reading scheme be used from second class to sixth and that the range and subject matter of reading materials are augmented so that pupils have extended opportunities for real reading. It would be beneficial to develop the pupils’ word-attack and phonological skills. Functional writing is undertaken regularly and monitored carefully. To strengthen writing in the school, it would be worthwhile to give the pupils more opportunities to write creatively and personally. It would also be beneficial if an assessment plan for Irish was laid out which would inform work into the future.

**English**

The quality of provision for English is good overall. Teachers encourage the pupils to speak carefully and expressively. The pupils listen patiently to others and wait their turn to speak. In the senior classes, there are effective opportunities provided for pupils to engage in structured peer discussion. Further use of peer discussion would be beneficial in the junior and middle classrooms. In promoting oral language development throughout the school, it is recommended that targeted activities are implemented as part of a discrete oral language programme. In every classroom, there is appropriate focus on poetry and recitation.

In the junior classes, there is an effective, purposeful approach to the teaching of reading. There is a very suitable rich-print environment and the pupils are enabled to use a range of appropriate emergent reading techniques. A good range of resources is used including early literacy schemes, phonological awareness programmes and a selection of large-format books. In the middle and senior classes, a graded-reading scheme is used. The majority of pupils are achieving well and are confident in their approach to reading. It is recommended that differentiated class novels be used to enhance the reading programme. Recreational reading is promoted very successfully throughout the school.

Very careful attention is paid to early writing activities in the junior classes and the pupils’ writing skills are progressed effectively in the middle and senior classes. They are provided with regular opportunities to write in a variety of genres. The majority of pupils write well and use age-appropriate punctuation and spelling. However, the pupils should be encouraged to use a broader and richer vocabulary. Written work is carefully monitored. In the senior classes, pupils’ self-assessment of writing is promoted to good effect. The majority of pupils present neat, careful work. A mixture of handwriting styles exists. It is recommended that cursive writing be introduced in the junior classes so that it becomes more firmly established throughout the school. The teaching of spelling is generally consistent throughout the school but further use of dictation would be beneficial.

**3.2 Mathematics**

Provision for Mathematics is effective overall. In the junior classes, mathematical language is reinforced well and early mathematical concepts are extended and consolidated appropriately.
Most pupils are making good progress in their learning and their knowledge of number and shapes is solid. A range of equipment is used well to support early mathematical activities. However, further investment and use of concrete materials to support active learning is recommended for all classes throughout the school.

In the middle and senior classes, the teachers are successful in ensuring that the programme has relevance and a good environmental basis. Mental mathematics and tables are given careful attention. Teachers make very good use of the interactive whiteboards to enhance learning in this subject. Pupils achieved well in tasks assigned during the evaluation; most demonstrated a good knowledge of place value and are confident in the four basic number operations. The pupils’ overall attainment in standardised tests is satisfactory. However, as a number of pupils in one or two classes are experiencing difficulty in Mathematics, standardised assessment data should be analysed thoroughly in order to ascertain the areas where pupils are having specific difficulty and to guide in-class support interventions.

A whole-school approach to problem solving is recommended. It is also recommended that consideration be given to developing the school grounds further as an ‘outdoors classroom’. For example the development of maths trails would be beneficial.

### 3.3 History

Teaching and learning in History are good in most aspects. In the main, textbooks are used judiciously and a range of resources is available to support the delivery of strands and strand units. In the junior classes there is satisfactory focus on story, personal history and integrated learning. During the evaluation, the pupils were introduced to relevant artefacts. In the middle and senior classes, a suitable textbook-based programme is presented to pupils and most pupils can recall successfully topics that have been covered. During the evaluation there was good use of illustrative resources and voice recordings. Some local studies are undertaken in the middle classes and pupils in the senior classes engage beneficially in project work. Throughout the school, further focus on the pupils’ use of evidence, especially that relating to local history, is recommended. More opportunities for pupils to work as historians are recommended for all classes.

### 3.4 Assessment

The quality of assessment is satisfactory in most aspects. A range of informal and formal assessment strategies is used throughout the school. Standardised tests of attainment in English reading and Mathematics are administered as appropriate and suitable screening tests are administered to infants in order to assess emergent reading development. While using data from such tests as a basis for decision-making, there should be greater involvement by the entire teaching staff in selecting pupils for additional learning support.

A very useful assessment portfolio is available for every pupil, augmented as the individual pupil progresses through the school. End-of-year reports give satisfactory information to parents about their children’s performance across the curriculum. In the future, it is recommended that parents be informed of their children’s progress in standardised tests at parent-teacher meetings and in written reports. More use of peer and self-assessment approaches with pupils should be considered.
4. QUALITY OF SUPPORT FOR PUPILS

4.1 Pupils with special educational needs

Two teachers—a part-time teacher and a shared teacher, based elsewhere—work specifically in providing for pupils with additional learning needs. The part-time teacher attends for three days per week and supports pupils who have English as an additional language as well as providing some learning-support/resource teaching provision. The shared teacher works in a learning-support/resource capacity; she visits for five hours per week and caters for three pupils. The support teachers are not involved centrally in the selection of pupils for additional support in this school. There is need for more clarity with regard to selection procedures and with regard to the duration and intensity of the support provided.

In the main, pupils are withdrawn for support either singly or in pairs and support is provided in literacy and numeracy, as appropriate. The quality of support provided for the pupils in this context is good. Planning and preparation for teaching is satisfactory in most areas. The support rooms, though small, are well stocked and attractively presented and displays are very relevant. The lessons observed were of high quality; they were structured appropriately and utilised a variety of purposeful learning strategies. Interactions between teachers and pupils were very affirming. The pupils’ progress is monitored closely and pupils are making very suitable progress in achieving the targets outlined in their learning programmes.

There is overlap of support in a small number of cases—for example, a number of pupils are withdrawn from their mainstream classes to receive support from more than one support teacher on the same day. It is recommended that such overlap be avoided. A review of the grouping and withdrawal arrangements is advised so to ensure that the maximum number of pupils benefit from the expertise of the support team. Consideration should be given to developing in-class support approaches in order to share the expertise of the support team and to develop a complementary and viable approach to withdrawal.

Six pupils receive English-language support and the quality of teaching observed was commendable. However, it is recommended that lessons are organised twice weekly rather than once.

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 board of management, the executive of the parents’ association and the general parent body are supportive of the school.
- All teachers are dedicated to their work and committed to school improvement.
- The overall quality of teaching and learning is good across the four subject areas under review.
• The pupils are well behaved and respectful. They are eager to learn and interested in doing well.

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

• It is recommended that an audit of the school’s existing code of behaviour be undertaken to ensure its accord with the guidelines from the National Educational Welfare Board (Developing a Code of Behaviour: Guidelines for Schools, NEWB 2008).

• It is recommended that whole-school targeted activities are implemented as part of a discrete oral language programme in English. Further use of peer discussion approaches would be beneficial across all subject areas.

• Further opportunities for active learning are recommended throughout the school.

• More clarity is needed in the selection of pupils for additional support and in determining the approach, intensity and duration of such support.

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.

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