Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Holy Family NS,
Newport, Co. Mayo
Uimhir rolla:19451O

Date of inspection: 13 April 2010
WHOLE-SCHOOL EVALUATION

A whole-school evaluation of Holy Family NS was undertaken in April 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 Physical Education. 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

Holy Family NS was established in 1977 and is the amalgamation of five schools in the parish of Burrishoole. It caters for boys and girls from infants to sixth class and has an autism unit for six pupils. It is under the patronage of the Catholic Archbishop of Tuam. The school has designated disadvantaged status and receives funding and the services of a shared home-school-community liaison co-ordinator under the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) scheme. Attendance levels at the school are 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>191</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainstream classes in the school</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers on the school staff</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainstream class teachers</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers working in support roles</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special needs assistants</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT

1.1 Characteristic spirit, mission or vision

The school strives “to create a happy and stimulating learning environment where each child is encouraged to develop to his/her potential”. The success of the school in achieving this aim is manifest in many aspects of school life. A commendable ethos of inclusivity is fostered. The individuality of each pupil is nurtured through a broad, balanced and flexible curriculum. Pupil achievement is high across a number of curricular areas and a wide range of after-school activities is offered to pupils at the school.

1.2 Board of management

The board of management is very effective in its running of the school. It is properly constituted, meets regularly and maintains minutes. Roles and duties have been assigned to different board members and are undertaken assiduously. Accounts are certified. The board is actively involved in the whole-school planning process and has recently engaged in a praiseworthy self-evaluation exercise. The board communicates very effectively with parents through the issuing of an annual report which is presented to parents at the school’s annual general meeting.
1.3 In-school management

The in-school management team comprises the principal, deputy principal and four special duties posts. The principal is courteous and professional in his interactions with staff and parents. He has a high level of commitment to professional development. His promotion of self-evaluation is commendable. It is recommended that the principal ensures that there is a more equitable distribution of pupils in mainstream classes and that the differential between the largest and smallest class is kept to a minimum in line with circular 20/07. Members of the in-school management team display a high level of commitment to the ongoing development of the school. Their duties are carried out competently and effectively. They are reviewed on a regular basis to meet the evolving needs of the school. The team is open and flexible in undertaking new tasks.

1.4 Management of relationships and communication with the school community

The quality of management of relations and communication with the school community is very good. The school has a very active parents’ association that organises very enjoyable activities for the pupils in the course of the school year. Interactions among parents on the committee are enthusiastic and energetic. The association is commended for its ongoing support of the school. Parents are very satisfied with the level of communication from the school. They receive regular newsletters and notices regarding school activities, new school plans and policies and updates on school development. They can also access information through the school’s website. Annual parent-teacher meetings are organised and parents also get a written report on their child’s progress at the end of the school year.

1.5 Management of pupils

The quality of pupil management is very good. All pupils are well supported in their academic and social development. This is particularly true of the pupils enrolled in the autism unit. The high level of commitment by all staff members to inclusion is laudable. An effective code of behaviour has been devised and is successfully implemented. An ethos of mutual respect is successfully promoted and is reflected in the positive and sensitive interactions between staff and pupils. Regular assemblies create a sense of school community. The competence of the special needs assistants contributes significantly to the management of pupils with additional needs.

2. Quality of school planning

2.1 Whole-school and classroom planning

The quality of whole-school planning is good. A large number of organisational policies, which reflect the school’s context, have been developed. These policies are clear and comprehensive. Parents are involved in the planning process, as appropriate, and information on the plan is effectively communicated. Curricular plans for all subject areas have been devised by designated curricular leaders on the staff, in collaboration with all teachers. They are the result of hard work, research and reflection. It is recommended that as the staff engages in regular review of these plans that the focus is now placed on discussing individual classroom practice in specific curricular areas with a view to devising a number of whole-school approaches.

The quality of classroom planning shows some scope for development. While all teachers complete long-term schemes of work, only a minority of teachers satisfy Rule 126 of the Rules for National Schools (1965) in terms of short-term planning. It is recommended that this is addressed
promptly. The quality of classroom planning by infant teachers is very good. It is recommended that teachers agree a common framework for their planning which facilitates the documentation of learning objectives and the specific differentiation of material and objectives for individual pupils. Monthly progress reports are consistently recorded and centrally stored.

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**

Ar an iomlán, muintear an Ghaeilge go héifeachtach agus tá caighdeán maith á bhaint amach i leith foghlaim na Gaeilge. Tá dearcadh dearfach á chothú trí an scoil de bharr na gníomhaochtaí éagsúla a eagraítear don Ghaeilge. Cuireann formhór na n-oidí an cur chuige cumarsáideach chun cinn ar bhonn leanúnach. Baintear feidhm eifeachtach as obair bheireite, amhráin, rannta, cluichí teanga agus drámaíocht chun na daltaí a mhealladh chun cainte. Bhí an Ghaeilge in úsáid ag gach oide i rith na gceachtanna le linn na gcigireachta. Úsáideann cuide de na múinteoirí an Ghaeilge mar theanga bhainistíochta an rang a chomh maith, rud a chuireann go mór le tuiscint agus leathnú foclóra na ndaltaí. Leagann formhór na múinteoirí bheim ar fhreagraí iomlána ó na daltaí. I gcuid de na ranganna bhí na daltaí in ann caint go leanúnach faoi réimse támhaí agus in aimsirí éagsúla. Moltar an dea-chieachtais seo a bhunú i ngach rang. Moltar chomh maith bheim sa bhreis a leagan ar fhoghlaime na filiochta sa scol. I ranganna aírithe leagtar bheim leanúnach ar fhorbairt na héisteachta trí réimse de ghníomhaochtaí éisteachta a fhóraítear. Moltar an cleachtas seo a leathnú sa scol.

Tá caighdeán na léitheoireachta Gaeilge ard sna ranganna ina leagtar bheim ar éagsúlacht téacsá. Sna ranganna seo tá na daltaí in ann léamh go cuinin agus go lófá. Baineann siad taithneamh as na ‘fhorleabhair’ atá in úsáid. Ar an iomlán, tá forbaíre le d'éanamh maidir le scribhneoireacht na ndaltaí. I bhformhór na ranganna cuirtear an iomarca béime ar an téacsleabhar agus ní fhaigheann na daltaí a ndéanann deis chun scribhneoireacht cruthaitheach a dhéanamh. Moltar réimse leathan de theascanna scribhneoireachta a eagrú i ngach rang bunaithe ar an téama labhartha.

**Irish**

On the whole, Irish is taught effectively and a good standard of learning in Irish is achieved. A positive attitude is promoted throughout the school through the variety of activities organised for Irish. A majority of teachers emphasise the communicative approach on an ongoing basis. Effective use is made of pair work, songs, rhymes, language games and drama to motivate the pupils to speak. Each teacher used Irish during the lessons observed. Some teachers use Irish as the main language of the classroom which greatly aids pupil understanding and vocabulary development. A majority of teachers emphasise full-sentence answers from the pupils. In some classes pupils can speak at length about a variety of topics and in different tenses. It is
recommended that these good practices be established in each classroom. It is further recommended that a greater emphasis is placed on poetry in the school. In some classes an ongoing emphasis is placed on the development of listening skills through a range of activities. It is recommended that this practice is broadened throughout the school.

The standard of reading is high in classes where the teacher promotes a range of texts. In these classes pupils can read accurately and fluently. They enjoy reading ‘real’ books. Overall there is scope for the development of writing. In a majority of classes there is an over-emphasis on the use of textbooks and pupils do not get adequate opportunities to write creatively. It is recommended that a broad range of writing tasks is introduced in each class, which is based on the oral language themes being explored.

**English**

The quality of teaching and learning in English is good, with some very good practice observed during the course of the evaluation. All teachers create print-rich environments in their classrooms. Considerable emphasis is placed on oral language development throughout the school, both discretely and on a cross-curricular basis. Good questioning techniques are employed to develop pupils’ speaking skills. Discussions are well managed to ensure maximum pupil participation.

There is a clear commitment to the promotion of pupils’ reading skills in the school through the use of reading schemes, parallel readers, library books and novels. Paired reading, shared reading and peer reading are implemented successfully in many classrooms. Structured programmes are used successfully to develop pupils’ phonological and phonemic awareness. Reading material is carefully differentiated for pupils throughout the school and this ensures that pupils achieve high standards in reading.

Pupils are generally encouraged to write in a variety of genres and to write from different points of view and for different audiences. Most teachers model writing conventions for pupils and help them to plan and organise their ideas to scaffold the writing process. There is evidence that the writing process is well attended to in most classrooms and information and communication technology (ICT) is often used for the presentation of final drafts. Age-appropriate dictionaries are used effectively to assist the writing process and to develop pupils’ comprehension skills. The celebration of pupils’ written work through display could be further developed in some classrooms. The quality of penmanship and neatness is generally good and pupils’ written work is consistently well corrected. Pupils’ writing demonstrates good age-appropriate mastery of grammar, spellings and the conventions of writing. In-class support is used effectively in some classrooms to support pupils with additional learning needs. There is scope to provide for the further differentiation of written activities for pupils in many classrooms. Throughout the school, pupils listen to, read, learn, recite, write and respond to a varied range of poetry.

**3.2 Mathematics**

The quality of learning in Mathematics is generally very good. Teachers place a very good emphasis on the learning of number facts and the development of mathematical skills such as estimation. New concepts are related to the environment and to the pupils’ lives. Teachers ensure pupils’ consistent improvement in mental Mathematics. Very good use is made of games, concrete materials and active learning to stimulate interest in Mathematics. In the infant classes, structured play activities are organised daily to develop early mathematical skills. Pupils’ questions are welcomed by all teachers. Some teachers make very effective use of pair work to ensure pupils can use the language of Mathematics appropriately. The use of station teaching by
the infant teachers is a particularly effective methodology which could be extended to all classes. There are very good displays for Mathematics in individual classrooms and in shared areas within the school. Considering the broad spectrum of ability in each classroom, it is recommended that teachers group pupils to ensure all children can work at an appropriate pace.

### 3.3 Physical Education

The quality of teaching and learning in Physical Education is of a high standard. The school makes good use of its indoor and outdoor facilities in the delivery of the curriculum. Provision is made for the implementation of the aquatics strand for one term annually in a local swimming pool. In the teaching observed, an appropriate emphasis was placed on warming-up, skill development, cooling-down and active participation and enjoyment on the part of pupils. The school emphasises the enjoyment of physical activity through its code of ethics for sports which is included in the school plan. The use of incidental Irish was a positive feature of some lessons. Commendably, many opportunities are provided for pupils to reflect on lessons and to develop their understanding and appreciation of Physical Education. Pupils display good understanding of rules and routines and there is a high level of co-operation and collaboration during lessons. The school hosts an annual sports day and partakes in a range of sports competitions, with some notable successes in recent years.

### 3.4 Assessment

The quality of assessment is good. Early screening tests are used to identify pupils at infant level in need of additional support. Standardised tests in Mathematics and English are administered to pupils from first class upwards. The results of these tests are graphed to determine the overall school performance, and a tracking system is in place for individual pupils, practices which are highly commended. Pupils’ work in copies is regularly monitored and feedback is given to pupils by a majority of teachers. Infant teachers have established very effective documentation of teacher observation and praiseworthy base-line information on each child, which they progressively develop. It is recommended that such practice is extended to all classes. It is further recommended that teachers use the results of assessments to differentiate work for individuals or groups of pupils and develop a whole-school approach to assessment for learning.

### 4. Quality of Support for Pupils

#### 4.1 Pupils with special educational needs

The provision of support for pupils with special educational needs (SEN) shows a number of strengths. The school has two full-time and one shared learning-support/resource teaching posts and an additional teaching post for the autism unit.

The learning-support/resource teachers (LS/RT) provide support in the areas of literacy and numeracy. Each pupil has an individual education plan with his/her priority learning targets clearly documented. All individual education plans are signed by parents. A good range of diagnostic assessment is used to ascertain pupils’ specific needs. Support is provided in a number of ways, depending on the needs of the pupils: withdrawal of individuals or groups of pupils and in-class support. The quality of teaching within both these models is very good. A very good range of resources is effectively used to support and consolidate learning. During well-structured lessons teachers combine focused teaching with practical learning activities. The progress of pupils is carefully monitored and reviewed at suitable intervals. To further the development of
this provision, it is recommended that class teachers share their short-term plans with the LS/RT to facilitate clearer objectives for in-class support. The staged approach is clearly documented in the school’s special needs policy. However, it is recommended that class teachers document and plan for pupils at stage one of this process.

The quality of provision in the autism unit is very good. The teacher is supported by very able special needs assistants who show interest and initiative in their work. A broad and balanced programme is presented to all pupils in line with their needs. An effective combination of approaches is used to maximise learning. The school is highly commended for its success in promoting very positive attitudes to special needs among the pupil body. Pupils from the unit are integrated into mainstream classes at every opportunity.

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

The quality of supports for pupils under the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) shows scope for development. The school has access to a co-ordinator who is shared with three other schools. While the school has devised a three-year plan with a number of targets, there is a lack of continuity between this plan and the co-ordinator’s scheme of work. It is recommended that the co-ordinator’s schemes of work include clear long-term aims and short-term objectives. As each initiative is completed, the co-ordinator is advised to assess its success using pre-determined success criteria.

The co-ordinator currently takes small groups of pupils on a withdrawal basis to support classroom learning. It is recommended that a long-term plan and short-term plans are laid out for these pupils with specific objectives. While an initiative to promote Mathematics in the senior classes took place earlier in the year, it is recommended that the Maths for Fun programme, which is done with junior classes, is fully implemented to encourage parental involvement. The school should also consider Literacy for Fun and Science for Fun initiatives which are valuable elements of the DEIS programme.

5. CONCLUSION

The school has strengths in the following areas:

- The pupils experience a welcoming and caring learning environment.
- Teachers are committed to their pupils, are open to suggestions and new initiatives and display great pride in their school.
- The board of management is very successful in its running of the school.
- Pupil behaviour is very good and individual pupils are effectively supported.
- The quality of communication with and support from parents is very good.
- The standards achieved in literacy and Mathematics are very good.
- There is very high quality provision for pupils with special educational needs.

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

- It is recommended that there is a more equitable distribution of pupils in mainstream classes, with the differential between the largest and smallest class kept to a minimum, in line with circular 20/07.
• It is recommended that all teachers satisfy Rule 126 of the Rules for National Schools (1965) in terms of short-term planning.
• It is recommended that teachers use the results of assessments to differentiate work for individuals or groups of pupils and develop a whole-school approach to assessment for learning.

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.

Published, December 2010
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 welcomes the very positive findings of the WSE process in our school and would like to strongly endorse the strengths that were recognised by the report. The whole evaluation process was a very positive and affirmative experience for all in Holy Family School and the wider school community.

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 recommendations in the report are being implemented.