An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Scoil Náisiúnta Mhichíl Naofa
Bere Island, County Cork
Uimhir rolla: 19525R

Date of inspection: 24 June 2010
WHOLE-SCHOOL EVALUATION

A whole-school evaluation of Scoil Náisiúnta Mhichíl Naofa was undertaken in June 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 Drama. The board of management of the school was given an opportunity to comment on the findings and recommendations of the report; the board chose to accept the report without response.

INTRODUCTION – SCHOOL CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

This is an island school in the parish of Castletownbere in West Cork. It is a two-teacher, co-educational primary school under the patronage of the Catholic Bishop of Kerry and has disadvantaged status as part of the rural Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) programme. Enrolment statistics indicate a consistent pattern in recent years and pupil attendance levels are high.

The following table provides an overview of the enrolment and staffing in the school.

<table>
<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 is a Catholic school with an inclusive ethos which affords due recognition for all other religions. The school’s aim is to provide to provide a caring, happy and secure atmosphere where the intellectual, spiritual, physical, moral and cultural needs of the pupils are identified and addressed. At the time of this whole-school evaluation the daily practices of the school were in line with this aim.

1.2 Board of management

The board of management plays an important role in managing the overall affairs of the school and reports a good relationship with the school community. It is properly constituted and meets on a regular basis. The chairperson is newly appointed and is highly commended for his interest in promoting best management practice. The importance of following agreed procedures was discussed and agreed during the evaluation. In this regard it is proposed to improve protocols governing board meetings in the short-term. The board oversees the financial affairs of the school in line with Departmental guidelines and accounts are audited annually. Procedural changes
involving signatories to board cheques were discussed and agreed at the post-evaluation conference.

The board has been active in the development of some school administrative and organisational policies. Relevant examples include the school code of behaviour, enrolment, admissions and health and safety policies.

The board has not been directly involved in the development of curricular policies and it is advised that they now become more active in the ongoing development and review of these important documents. In this regard, it is recommended that the board ratify, sign and date all policies, including curricular policies when completed.

The establishment of a Parents’ Association was also discussed during the evaluation. The Board has reported that such will be established from September 2010.

1.2 In-school management

The principal works closely with the other class teacher and with the chairperson of the board, organises and participates in the effective supervision of pupils, maintains school records appropriately, co-operates fully with Departmental officials and seeks to win the confidence, cooperation and goodwill of the pupils, the parents and the school community generally. The parents’ representatives on the board report satisfaction with the open-door policy adopted by the staff regarding school work.

Staff meetings are held at least once per term and in-school management practices are enhanced through regular informal staff discussion. Mutual support and collegiality are significant aspects of the in-school management practices in the school. Advice was provided and accepted regarding the maintenance of appropriate minutes for all staff meetings and also in relation to the attendance of support staff shared with other schools.

1.3 Management of resources

There are two mainstream teachers in this school and additional supports are provided through a shared learning-support teacher and a shared home-school-community-liaison coordinator. A number of additional external tutors are used to deliver aspects of the curriculum which include gymnastics and art.

Overall, a high standard of accommodation was evident during the evaluation. However, there are difficulties with the school’s water supply. This matter was discussed with the board and remedial work is to commence during the Summer school holiday period. A generous supply of appropriate resources is available to support teaching and learning throughout the school.

1.4 Management of relationships and communication with the school community

Relationships within the school community are good. The board of management and staff recognise the importance of the involvement of parents as key partners in the educational process. However, as outlined elsewhere in this report, it was agreed that the establishment of a Parents’ Association is a key priority for the school authorities in the short-term.
1.5 Management of pupils

The central importance of the individual pupil is recognised in the school. During the course of the evaluation it was noted that the pupils responded positively to the use of appropriate teaching methodologies in the promotion of a broad and balanced curriculum. An emphasis on the promotion of positive behaviour was also noted and very good pupil behaviour was observed in all classroom settings during the evaluation.

2. QUALITY OF SCHOOL PLANNING

2.1 Whole-school and classroom planning

The whole-school planning process in the school conforms to Departmental guidelines and a comprehensive range of documentation was presented for evaluation. Many of the plans were reviewed in June 2009, however all plans need to be ratified, signed and dated by the board. Advice was also provided in relation to further parental involvement in the planning process.

The teaching staff presented suitable long-term and short-term plans as well as monthly progress records during the 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 (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 English programme is implemented effectively throughout the school. There is a commendable emphasis on the development of key aural and oral language skills at all class levels and an important range of reading skills is systematically and successfully promoted. Writing skills are also purposefully promoted and many pupils write competently in a variety of genres. The teaching of language across the curriculum is also an attractive feature of the teachers’ work as is their emphasis on reading for pleasure. The use of standardised tests is commended.

3.2 Gaeilge

Déanann na hoidí an-iarracht chun teagasc na Gaeilge a chur chun cinn sa scoil. Moltar go mór an bhéim a leagtar ar fhorbairt na scileanna éisteachta agus dá réir sin an dícheall a chaitear le forbairt na fíor-chumarsáide i measc na ndaltaí. Léiríonn mórán de na daltaí cumas inmholta sa
The teachers make commendable efforts to promote the teaching of Irish in the school. The emphasis on developing listening skills is highly commended as are the efforts made to promote real communication among the pupils. Many pupils display creditable competency in reading. The use of real books in this regard is particularly commendable. The teaching of key writing skills is equally successful.

The teachers have indicated that they will review the suitability of existing text book material shortly.

3.3 Mathematics
Mathematics is taught effectively for the most part throughout the school. Due emphasis is placed on the internalisation of concepts and a range of suitable methodologies is used to promote pupils’ understanding of basic operational procedures. A suitable balance is promoted between mechanical operations and higher-order thinking skills. The language of mathematics is also given careful attention.

An impressive selection of resources is available to support the teaching of mathematics and active learning methodologies are effectively used on a regular basis. The use of modern technologies and of standardised test results is to be commended.

Advice was provided regarding additional strategies aimed at further enhancing the pupils’ problem solving capacity.

3.4 Drama
The Arts Education curriculum is appropriately emphasised in the school. Drama is taught purposefully in all class levels and is frequently used to enhance the quality of learning in other curricular areas. Situations and characters encountered by pupils through drama lessons are used to explore feelings, emotions and to highlight possible solutions to problems.

The use of relevant approaches which ensure a good balance between drama teaching and performance were key aspects of school work at the time of the evaluation.

3.5 Assessment
Assessment practices are consistent and a suitable range of screening and standardised tests is in regular use. Formal testing procedures are supported by teacher observation, teacher-designed tests, purposeful homework and other assignments. Advice was provided in relation to the additional use of diagnostic testing.

Records are maintained and appropriate data are shared with parents and other relevant educational partners.
4. **QUALITY OF SUPPORT FOR PUPILS**

4.1 **Pupils with special educational needs**
Learning support tuition is provided in the school one day per week and is guided by school policy which sets out procedures for screening, planning and implementation. Support is offered to all pupils who need assistance in English and Mathematics within the available time constraints. Parental co-operation is sought and parents of children with special educational needs are consulted in the drafting of individual education plans (IEPs). However, it is now recommended that parents be further involved in the identification and achievement of learning targets set out in the IEPs. It was also agreed that parents could be included more fully in the development of school policy on special educational needs.

A reasonable variety of interventions take place; resources are used effectively and records are maintained to a high standard. The advantages of additional in-class work during the forthcoming school-year were discussed and agreed during the evaluation to facilitate the teaching of language across the curriculum.

4.2 **Other supports for pupils: disadvantaged, minority and other groups**
The home-school-community liaison teacher (Breaking the Cycle rural co-ordinator) attends the school for one half-day weekly. School policy in this regard is developed in conjunction with the staff, board and parents. The teacher maintains termly and daily records as well as monthly progress records.

The main focus of the work relates to literacy and numeracy and a transfer programme for sixth class pupils is also facilitated through Foróige. Shared reading and Maths for Fun programmes are available for parents and the work in this regard is commended. However, home visitation is not a feature of the overall work. It is now recommended that the school’s DEIS plan be reviewed to facilitate greater parental involvement, attendance of shared staff at staff meetings and progress reporting to the board.

5. **CONCLUSION**

The school has strengths in the following areas:

- The board of management has provided a modern and well-equipped building for teaching and learning.
- The principal works diligently with the other class teacher and shared staff in support of agreed school objectives.
- Good teaching takes place in the school.
- There is an appropriate emphasis on the achievement of good standards across the range of subject areas evaluated.
- The school is safe and well ordered.

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

- It is recommended that the board of management formulate a short / medium and long-term strategic development plan which sets out the school’s priorities in relation to
maintenance, curriculum planning and implementation, school policy development and review.

- It is recommended that, following review, all school policies be signed and dated by the chairperson on ratification by the board of management.
- It is recommended that the school should further develop linkages with the school community through the establishment of a Parents’ Association.

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.