Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Holy Family National School,
Balloonagh, Tralee, Co. Kerry.
Uimhir rolla: 19536W

Date of inspection: 07 December 2011
1. Introduction

Holy Family N.S. is a Catholic, co-educational mainstream school situated in the town of Tralee. There are 295 pupils enrolled in the school. The school staff comprises an administrative principal, twelve mainstream teachers, two learning-support teachers, two teachers for pupils with special educational needs and a teacher for pupils whose first language is not English. There is scope for development in the attendance levels of some pupils. During the whole-school evaluation inspectors observed teaching and learning in twelve mainstream class settings and four support-teaching settings. 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.

2. Summary of Findings and Recommendations for Further Development

The following are the main strengths of the work of the school:

- The board of management works effectively in the best interests of the school community.
- The school grounds and building are maintained to a very high standard and a wide range of supportive resources are provided to enhance teaching and learning.
- The school, as evidenced by the responses to questionnaires issued, enjoys positive levels of support from the parent body.
- Lessons observed during the evaluation period were of a high quality.
- Pupils cooperate with teachers and partake enthusiastically in learning activities.
- The quality of pupil learning in Mathematics and Geography is of a good standard.

The following main recommendations are made:

- It is recommended that an emphasis be placed on the development of the curriculum leadership roles of the in-school management team.
- It is recommended that, under the direct leadership of the principal, a strategic plan should be drafted which focuses on optimising learning outcomes for all pupils across the curriculum.
- It is recommended that the current whole-school assessment policy be reviewed ensuring that it gives clear guidelines to teachers regarding the implementation of the principles of assessment of learning and assessment for learning.
- It is recommended that a systematic review of the present provision for pupils in need of support be undertaken as a matter of priority.
3. Quality of School Management

- The board of management is highly committed to its role and works effectively in the best interests of the school community. It is recommended that an annual report on the work of the school be published. It is further recommended that the board place a focus on reviewing the school plan and on monitoring standards of pupil achievement. It is also recommended that the current attendance policy be reviewed and that a clear range of strategies to enhance pupil attendance be implemented.

- The principal discharges his administrative and pastoral duties effectively and he cultivates positive relationships with the school community. A range of administrative duties has been allocated to the middle management team. These duties are conscientiously discharged. However, it is recommended that duties of middle management be extended to include curriculum leadership roles as a matter of priority. It is further recommended that the principal place an enhanced focus on the leadership of teaching and learning in the school.

- The board oversees the maintenance and development of the school building and its environs and has successfully provided a safe, suitable and supportive learning environment for the pupils and the staff. It is recommended that a staff rotation policy be drafted to enable all teachers experience a range of teaching contexts and class levels.

- The management of relationships and communication with parents and the wider school community is of a very good standard. End-of-year school reports and annual parent-teacher meetings ensure that parents are informed of their children’s progress. The parent association is highly supportive of the school. Responses to questionnaires issued to parents indicate very high levels of satisfaction with the school.

- During the evaluation, examples of good classroom management were observed. The pupils presented as well-mannered and respectful. They co-operate willingly with their teachers and peers. They are facilitated to partake in a wide range of extra-curricular activities. In general, pupils, in their responses to questionnaires issued, are positively disposed towards the school.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- The school is praised for the development of a school plan. Organisational plans are, in general, of a good quality. Curriculum plans vary in quality from fair to good. It is recommended that the board arrange for the cyclical review of these documents and that it facilitate parental input where appropriate. At this juncture, the school needs to engage in a process of systematic school self-evaluation. A school development plan, focused on the maintenance of quality and the pursuit of excellence should be drafted.

- All teachers prepare long and short-term planning for their work and monthly progress reports are completed and stored centrally. This planning varies in quality from poor to very good. It is recommended that teachers devise a common planning and reporting format. This should ensure that a broad and balanced curriculum is delivered to the pupils and that there is continuity and development between class levels. It is also recommended that increased emphasis be placed on the selection of lesson content which is reflective of pupils’ interests and experiences. Provision should also be made to meet the learning needs of all pupils, particularly those with learning difficulties, within the classroom context.
• Confirmation was provided that the board of management has formally adopted the Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-primary Schools (September 2011) without modification. The school is compliant with the requirements of Primary Circular 0061/2006. School authorities provided evidence that arrangements are being put in place to ensure compliance with the requirements of the recently published Circular 0065/2011 and Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools as a matter of priority.

5. Quality of Teaching, Learning and Pupil Achievement

• During the evaluation period the quality of teaching in the lessons observed was of a good to very good standard. Teachers utilised a broad range of resources, including information and communication technology (ICT), to good effect. A variety of teaching methodologies and approaches was successfully employed. The quality of pupil attainment in Mathematics and Geography was of a good standard. However, there is scope for development in relation to the quality of pupil achievement in English and Irish and significant scope for development in the quality of provision for pupils with special educational needs.

• Although there is a consciousness among the staff of the importance of oral language development, there is a need for a more systematic approach to implementing this aspect of the English curriculum. It is therefore recommended that clearer learning outcomes for the teaching of oral English, which parallel those of the primary curriculum, should be stated in teachers’ planning. Many pupils have achieved satisfactory standards in reading. However, the standards attained by a small number of the pupils in English reading are a cause for concern. In order to improve pupil achievement levels, it is recommended that available assessment data be utilised to plan for the delivery of a developmentally appropriate programme for reading throughout the school. Pupils, at all levels, should be provided with a broad range of challenging and diverse reading materials commensurate with their reading abilities. The teaching of writing is, in general, of a good standard and the overall quality of learning achieved by the pupils is good. Formal writing is well taught. The good practice observed in some classes whereby pupils are facilitated to write in a range of genres and where the writing process is systematically developed should now be extended on a whole-school basis.

• I múineadh na Gaeilge, brathteann na hoidí go rómhóir ar scéim téacsleabhar agus agis leír go bhfuil deacrachaí ag a lán daltaí labhairt go leanúnach i gcomtheacsanna éagsúla. I ranganna áirithí, baineann daltaí taithneamh agus tairbhe as ceachtanna ina bhfuil cluichí teanga, obair bheirte, rainn, amhráin agus scéalta nasctha le chéile sa teagasc. Moltar an cleachtas seo a phlé agus a scriobhadh go hiomlán trí an scoil agus gach iarraidh a dhéanamh leanúnachas agus forchóiríochtaí a chinntiú. Moltar freisin tuisleadh béime a leagan ar éisteacht ghníomhach i gcomhthéacs na cumarsáide. Leantar clár grádaithe i dtéacs na láthairlaíochtaí. Cá bhfuil roinnt deacraí i dteagasc na láthairlaíochtaí? Is léir go bhfuil deacrachaí ag cuid acu an t-ábhar léitheoireacht agus an rathú a bhaint as an chónaithe. Sítear freisin roinnt deacraí i léith na scríbhneoireachta a dhéanamh leis an chéad牢固. Tugtar cleachtadh cuí do dhhaltaí sa scríbhneoireacht agus go bhfuil deacrachtaí ag cuid mhaith daltaí bunábairtí a scriobh as Gaeilge. Is annamh a scriobhann daltaí scéalta pearsanta. Moltar atbhreithniú a dhéanamh ar theagasc na Gaeilge chun claoi go cruinn le haidhmeanna agus bunphrionsabail churaclam na bunscoile.

• In the teaching of Irish teachers rely too much on the textbook scheme and it is evident that many pupils have difficulty in speaking continually in different contexts. In some classes, the pupils derive benefit and enjoyment from lessons in which language games, paired work, poems, songs and stories support the teaching. It is recommended that this
practice be discussed and extended throughout the school and every effort made to ensure continuity and development between classes. It is also recommended that increased emphasis be placed on active listening activities with the pupils. A graded reading scheme is used in the teaching of reading. While a number of pupils read texts reasonably accurately, it is evident that many have difficulty understanding the content of the reading. Some very good work regarding formal writing was observed at different class levels. In general, appropriate formal writing activities are organised however many pupils have difficulty writing basic sentences in Irish. Pupils seldom write personal stories. It is recommended that a review of the teaching of Irish now be undertaken, to ensure close adherence to the objectives and principles of the primary curriculum.

- The quality of teaching and learning in Mathematics is of a good standard. Oral mathematical activities are a feature of most lessons. Concrete materials are utilised to very good effect to enhance pupil learning. Mathematical language is well addressed by the majority of teachers. It is recommended that future reviews of the teaching of Mathematics place an emphasis on further developing approaches to multi-stage problem solving, on adopting a whole-school approach to the development of pupils’ mathematical skills and on the relevance of mathematical concepts to real-life applications.

- Good pupil learning outcomes are evident in Geography. Pupils display a comprehensive knowledge of topics they have studied. Praiseworthy work has been undertaken in the use of maps, globes, photographs and atlases enabling the pupils to develop a range of geographical skills. Lessons observed during the evaluation period were ably supported by the use of illustrative materials, google-earth applications and well-constructed PowerPoint presentations. It is recommended that geographical concepts, knowledge and skills should be thoroughly explored in local contexts at all levels and that active and discovery-learning methodologies feature to a much greater extent in the teaching of Geography.

- There is scope for development regarding the range of assessment modes and the collation and use of assessment data on a whole-school basis. Standardised tests in Mathematics and reading are administered annually. The majority of teachers attend carefully to lesson consolidation and pupils’ written work is regularly monitored and evaluated. The majority of IEPs and IPLPs viewed indicate that a limited range of diagnostic tests is utilised to identify specific learning difficulties which some pupils are experiencing. However, there is a need for a more rigorous and systematic analysis of pupil learning outcomes. Assessment data generated are not used efficiently to analyse patterns of performance at different class levels, for specific groups of pupils or to track and monitor individual pupils’ progress. Neither are data used effectively to guide teaching for groups of pupils and individuals within the classroom context. It is therefore recommended that current practice in relation to the assessment and recording of pupil progress be reviewed and evaluated and that a whole-school assessment policy be drafted which reflects the principles of assessment of learning and assessment for learning.

6. Quality of Support for Pupils

- The school is praised for the creation of an inclusive school atmosphere in which care is taken to attend to the pastoral needs of pupils. There is however significant scope for improvement in relation to the quality of supports for pupils with learning difficulties and special educational needs and for those whose first language is not English. While acknowledgement is given to the good work which many of the teachers are undertaking to meet the needs of these pupils, it is recommended that a whole-school approach to ensuring that learning programmes, appropriate to these pupils’ needs, are devised and
implemented both within the special educational settings and in the classroom. A system whereby pupils with the greatest needs are prioritised for educational assessments should also be outlined.

- Within the support settings, learning programmes are devised for all pupils in receipt of support. The identified learning targets outlined in many of the IPLPs and IEPs would be greatly enhanced by linking them more closely with results of diagnostic testing and good quality assessment data. Many good lessons were observed in these settings. Materials and resources were utilised to good effect to progress and consolidate pupil learning. The assessment and recording of pupil progress within these settings however requires significant attention.

- Presently, provision for pupils in need of support is primarily organised through the withdrawal of pupils from their classrooms. This practice should be reviewed and increased emphasis placed on early intervention initiatives and in-class support. It is recommended that a systematic review of the present provision for pupils in need of support be undertaken as a matter of priority. It is further recommended that advice and support be sought from support agencies to enable this process.

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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 of Holy Family School, Tralee wishes to acknowledge and thank the inspectors from DES for the courtesy and professionalism they displayed during our Whole School Evaluation.

We welcome the findings of the report which recognises the ongoing diligence of our staff, our parents and especially our children in their continued pursuance of high standards in all areas of education. This diligence was endorsed by the very positive comment expressed regarding the quality of teaching in the lessons observed during the inspection. It was also empathically affirmed by the very positive parent and pupil questionnaire responses which indicated high levels of satisfaction with the school.

We commend the inspectorate in their observation that the school building and grounds are maintained to a very high standard and that the Board of Management are committed to working effectively in the best interests of the 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 Board of Management in conjunction with the middle management team and staff of Holy Family School have considered the key recommendations in the report and are currently working together to facilitate their effective implementation.

We note the advice and suggestions given in the curricular areas and will endeavour to develop and evolve all our policies incrementally as suggested.