Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Moyle National School
Newtowncunningham, County Donegal
Uimhir rolla: 19633U

Date of inspection: 26 February 2010
WHOLE-SCHOOL EVALUATION

A whole-school evaluation of Moyle National School was undertaken in February 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 Visual Arts. The board of management 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

Moyle National School is a co-educational, primary school located near Newtowncunningham, County Donegal. The school is a very positive, caring community which nurtures the all-round development of its happy pupils effectively. The pupils’ attendance levels 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>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainstream classes in the school</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers on the school staff</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainstream class teachers</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(including the teaching principal)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers working in support roles</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special needs assistants</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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A visiting resource teacher also attends the school for five hours per week. The board employs a part-time secretary who provides careful, competent service to the school. A cleaner is employed for twelve and a half hours per week and caretaking services are contracted as the need arises.

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT

1.1 Characteristic spirit, mission or vision

Moyle National School is under the patronage of the Presbyterian Church, in the Presbytery of Derry and Donegal. According to the school’s ethos statement pupils are treated fairly and their spiritual, moral and religious development is encouraged, as is their intellectual, social and academic development. Observation of daily school interactions and routines indicates that this ethos is being realised successfully. A very diligent, committed team of teachers ensures that regular opportunities are provided for the pupils’ involvement in a broad range of co-curricular and extracurricular activities. Such activities include the Discover Primary Science Programme, the Green-Schools Programme, the Active Schools Programme, the MS Readathon, the Irish Aid Awards, the Ulster Scots Programme, the Post Office Savings Scheme and the annual Donegal Historical Society competition.
1.2 Board of management

The board of management is functioning very well. The chairperson’s attendance at school assemblies is an effective means of keeping up-to-date with school events and in contact with pupils and staff. The board is commended for its significant efforts in respect of the recent school extension and refurbishment project which provides high-quality accommodation for teaching and learning. The board’s current infrastructural priority is the development of the car-parking facilities thereby making the entrance safer when parents are dropping off and collecting their children. Other planned projects include the development of an organic garden, the acquisition of additional information and communications technology (ICT) hardware and outdoor play equipment. These will all be beneficial developments. Board members identify the happy pupils, the diligent teaching staff and the effective communication structures between the school, parents and the wider community to be key strengths.

The board is committed to the development and review of whole-school policies and procedures and facilitates the dissemination of key policies to the school community. The development and use of a school web site would be beneficial in facilitating the sharing of information among the parent community.

The board facilitates a tin-whistle tutor in providing private music tuition to pupils during the school day. Fee-paying pupils are withdrawn from their mainstream classrooms to receive this tuition. The practice of pupils paying for instruction that takes place during the school day should be reviewed, as should any arrangement which entails pupils missing out on mainstream classroom activity unless absolutely necessary.

1.3 In-school management

The in-school management team comprises the teaching principal, the deputy principal and one special duties post-holder. The teaching principal provides very effective leadership to the school community. She is very innovative and embraces new methodologies and approaches readily. The principal’s vision for the school is one of constant improvement. She is dedicated to providing a broad educational experience for the pupils, where their skills and talents are recognised and nurtured. She maintains praiseworthy collaboration and supportive working relationships with her colleagues. The principal is fully accountable to the board of management and provides comprehensive annual reports to both the board and to the parents’ association. Whilst the daily attendance of pupils is monitored appropriately, it is recommended that annual attendance figures for pupils are recorded in the school registers in line with Rule 123 of the Rules for National Schools.

The deputy principal and the post-holder fulfil all assigned duties effectively. They work very enthusiastically in support of the principal and contribute very successfully to the overall management of the school.

1.4 Management of relationships and communication with the school community

The board and the teaching staff welcome the support and partnership of parents. Very significant effort has been invested in developing effective communications systems with parents and the wider community. The parents’ notice board, information and policy booklets and the Moyle N.S. Newsletter are effective means of communicating and celebrating the work of the school with the wider community. Parents are regularly invited into the school to support the pupils’ learning.
The work of the parents’ association is highly commendable. Its members are committed to the school, are active fundraisers and make significant contributions towards augmenting school resources. Parents participate fully in school events, meetings and extracurricular activities. At a pre-evaluation meeting, officers of the association reported that the school is operating very well, that teachers are very approachable and that the children are very content coming to school. They acknowledge the flexible arrangements already in place for parents to meet with teachers but they would welcome parent-teacher meetings being held earlier in the year, the results of standardised tests being included in end-of-year reports and additional information meetings being held for parents about the curriculum.

1.5 Management of pupils

The management of pupils is highly effective and the relationships between the pupils and the teaching staff are very good. The pupils display interest, pride and enthusiasm in their work. School assemblies are held to progress the pupils’ moral and religious development and to acknowledge and celebrate the efforts that the pupils’ make in their learning and behaviour. The Moyle School Promise, a motto which is repeated at assemblies, is used very effectively to promote a positive whole-school climate.

2. QUALITY OF SCHOOL PLANNING

2.1 Whole-school and classroom planning

The quality of whole-school planning is commendable. Curricular plans address the principles of the Primary School Curriculum (1999) appropriately. Support services are often requested to provide guidance in the areas of classroom practice that the teachers prioritise for development. There are a number of pupils in the middle and senior classes who have been granted exemptions from the study of Irish. It is recommended that a whole-school policy governing the exemption of pupils from the study of Irish be drawn up in line with Primary Circular 12/96. An e-learning plan will also be beneficial in ensuring that ICT is used effectively in teaching and in learning in all classrooms. This should include a developmental programme of ICT skills for pupils. Planning and implementing e-learning in your school (National Centre for Technology in Education, 2009) should prove to be a useful reference in this regard.

The quality of classroom planning is commendable. All teachers provide very effective long-term planning in support of their teaching. They utilise a common template for short-term planning and for recording monthly progress. Planning for pupils with learning difficulties and special educational needs is very good. The support teachers plan collaboratively with the mainstream teachers and individual programmes of learning have clear and detailed learning targets.

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**

Déantar iarracht choinsiasach an Ghaeilge a chur chun cinn i ngach rang ach, ar an iomlán, tá forbaírt ag teastáil i ngnéithe áirithe do sholáthar na Gaeilge tríd an scoil. Tá roinnt straitéisí gníomhachtaí agus modhanna teagaisc éifeachta i núsáid don snáithe *Labhairt* tríd an scoil. Baineann na hoidí feidhmi mhaith as rainn, filfocht agus amhráin chun fuaimeanntí agus rithim na teanga a chur ar chuasa na ndaltaí. Faigheann na daltaí deiseanna an teanga a úsáid tríd dhrúileanna a chleachtadh, trí chuimh cainte, trí cheisteanna a chur agus a fhreaigáirt agus trí ról imirt. Cé go mbaineann na daltaí taitnmeach as na ceachtanna éagsúla, léiríonn formhór na ndaltaí caighdeáin teoranta ó thaobh labhairt na teanga de. Moltar níos mó bême a thabhairt d'agallaimh dheireanach, don ról imirt, don dramaíocht agus do straitéisi breise chun liofacht teanga a fhhorbairt. Úsáideann na hoidí roinnt Gaeilge lasmuigh de na ceachtanna foirnmílta. B'fhiú anois thull leadhadh bême a chur ar úsáid na Gaeilge mar theanga chaidrimh agus bhainisteoireachta sa scoil.

Leagtar béim ar an léitheoireacht Gaeilge ó rang a dó ar aghaidh. Léann cuide de na ndaltaí os ard go réasúnta cumasach atá d'fheidhmeacht ann. Is gá aird a dhíriú ar dhea-fhoghraíocht níos forleithne. Moltar flor-leabhair agus leabhair mhóra a úsáid níos mó chun taithí níos leitheach léitheoireachta a chur ar fáil. Déantar cleachtadh rialta ar an scribhneoireacht tríd an scoil agus déantar monatóireacht chur ar amháin. Bunaistear cuide de na gnóthachtanna sa ghrábhannaíocht agus sa saorscríbhneoireacht go híseal. Chun dul chuig cinn sa scriptbhneoireacht a threisiú gá clú deiseanna saoirseanna chun lip i gconasadh sa scoil agus déantar príomhán an scríbhneoireachta a thabhairt don scoil agus déantar roinnt oideachas tríd an scoil agus an scríbhneoireacht tríd an scoil agus déantar roinnt straitéisi agus modhanna teagaisc éifeachta i núsáid don snáithe *Labhairt* tríd an scoil.

**Irish**

A conscientious effort is made in every classroom to promote Irish, however, overall there is scope for development in certain aspects of the provision throughout the school. There are some active strategies and effective teaching methodologies in use for the curriculum strand, *Labhairt*. Rhymes, poetry and songs are employed effectively by teachers to familiarise pupils with the sound and rhythm of the language. Pupils are afforded opportunities to use their language through drills, language games, the use of questions and answers, and role play. However, even though the pupils enjoy the various lessons, a majority of pupils in the middle and senior classes demonstrate restricted oral language ability. It is recommended that additional priority be given to the use of peer-conversations, role play, drama and other strategies in order to develop the pupils’ fluency in the language. The teachers use some Irish outside of the formal lessons. Additional emphasis should be placed on the use of Irish in communication and classroom management through the school.

Irish reading is emphasised from second class onwards. Some pupils read aloud with reasonable fluently and a certain understanding. There is need to pay more wide-spread attention to correct pronunciation. It is recommended that real books and large format books are used to prove wider reading experience. Writing activities are regularly undertaken across the school and the pupils’ written work is monitored carefully. Much writing activity is based on textbooks. Overall,
however, the quality of free writing is poor. In order to strengthen progress in this area, more frequent free-writing opportunities should be provided to pupils. It would also be beneficial if more thorough whole-school assessment was conducted in the various strands of listening, speaking, reading and writing from infants to sixth class.

**English**

The quality of teaching and learning in English is very good. Oral language development is emphasised in all classrooms and the pupils enjoy discussions, debates and opportunities to extend their vocabulary. The teaching of poetry is uniformly strong across the school. The teachers work diligently to promote the pupils’ reading skills. There is creative use of peer tutoring and buddy support systems to develop a love of books and reading. In the infant classes, flip charts and large-format books are used effectively to foster emergent reading. The pupils’ word-attack skills are age-appropriate and their phonological awareness is successfully promoted through the use of *Jolly Phonics*. Junior pupils have access to graded readers and suitable supplementary reading materials. In the middle and senior classes, teachers read regularly to pupils and the use of class novels is praiseworthy. The majority of pupils read to a very good standard with some pupils demonstrating very effective higher-order comprehension skills.

The teachers provide varied and very worthwhile opportunities for pupils to write. They scaffold the pupils’ writing appropriately and undertake very good work in developing the pupils’ vocabulary in writing. The use of thesauri in the senior classes is praiseworthy. The pupils’ creative work is attractively displayed on notice boards and in bound booklets. Writing in copies is very well monitored and the majority of pupils achieve a satisfactory cursive writing style by the senior classes. Teachers encourage writing across the curriculum to good effect. Project work is particularly effective in the middle and senior classes and there is some use of ICT. Pupils’ spelling is tested regularly and their free writing indicates that spelling is generally secure.

**3.2 Mathematics**

The quality of teaching in Mathematics is very good. Teachers emphasise activity-based learning and use a good range of resources effectively. There is a very good mathematics-rich environment in all classrooms, with relevant number facts, charts and a suitable array of resources on display. Effective use is made of number songs, rhymes and manipulatives in the infant classes and the infant pupils show a sound understanding of number. There is a need, however, to provide further challenge for pupils of higher ability at this level. Team-teaching is used as a very effective approach in the junior classes where the learning-support teacher works alongside the class teacher to ensure very good support for pupils’ learning. The pupils benefit from effective oral mathematical activities. In the middle classes there is very good use of pair work during revision and consolidation activities. Very good drill in number facts is undertaken in the senior classes and pupils have opportunities to link their learning in Mathematics to the local environment. New content is linked successfully to pupils’ previous learning and conceptual understanding.

In completing various tasks during this evaluation, pupils in all classes displayed a solid knowledge of number facts, an age-appropriate ability to carry out number operations and a good understanding of concepts that have been taught. Further attention should be paid to the systematic development of pupils’ problem-solving skills across all strands of the mathematics curriculum.
3.3 Visual Arts

Teaching and learning in the Visual Arts are both of high quality. The teachers present a very comprehensive programme of creative activities which ensures broad and balanced curriculum provision. All classrooms and common areas have praiseworthy displays of the pupils’ creative work. During this evaluation pupils engaged in construction in the infant classes using images of sculptures in the local environment as stimuli. In the junior classes the pupils studied batik and examined local artists’ work in the genre. In the middle classes the pupils worked with clay in the creation of three-dimensional tiles. Links to learning in History were exploited effectively. In the senior classes the pupils used view finders successfully to explore the artistic detail of a vase of flowers which they then sketched using pastels. In all lessons the language of art and the creative process were emphasised. The pupils are active in exploring, experimenting, expressing and enjoying art.

3.4 Assessment

The quality of assessment is good. Pupil profiles, which amongst other data contain samples of the pupils’ writing, drawing and handwriting, are maintained from infants upwards. This is very good practice. Standardised tests in English reading are administered from first to sixth classes. Satisfactory systems are in place to facilitate teachers in tracking and monitoring the pupils’ progress. Standardised testing is carried out in Mathematics in first and fourth classes in accordance with Circular Letter 0138/2006. To further facilitate the tracking of the pupils’ attainment in Mathematics, consideration should be given to the annual assessment of the pupils’ learning. Effective screening tests are administered to the infant pupils in order to facilitate the early identification of learning difficulties.

4. QUALITY OF SUPPORT FOR PUPILS

4.1 Pupils with special educational needs

The quality of support for pupils is high. Learning support is provided in literacy to pupils from senior infants to sixth class who are identified through standardised testing or early screening tests as needing supplementary teaching. Effective early intervention in literacy is provided to junior-infant pupils. In-class support of literacy and numeracy is highly commended. Lessons evaluated in the support setting were well structured and featured high-quality interaction between pupils and the support teacher. Concrete and electronic resources were used constructively. Individual profile and learning programmes (IPLPs) are formulated in consultation with class teachers and a range of diagnostic tests is used to identify pupils’ learning strengths and needs. The pupils’ progress is monitored and recorded diligently.

The provision for pupils with special educational needs is effective. The quality of the teaching and learning observed was high. Very good individual educational plans (IEPs) are provided. Collaboration with parents and the class teacher is ongoing and purposeful. Review procedures and record-keeping are of a very high standard. During this evaluation, the teaching and learning observed took the form of one-to-one sessions in the support classroom. The contribution of the special needs assistant to the care and inclusion of pupils is commended.

In developing the area of learning support/special education in the school, there are a number of areas that should be considered. As the learning-support post is shared with another primary school, a cluster policy should be drawn up in partnership with that school to ensure that priority
is given to the needs of those pupils in each school who experience very low achievement in reading and Mathematics. Additionally, pupils with higher attainment scores should not generally be withdrawn from the classroom for learning-support. The advantages to the school of a member of staff obtaining a post-graduate diploma in special educational needs might be considered. It is suggested that advice be sought from the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) and the Special Education Support Service (SESS) in relation to providing further in-class supports for pupils with assessed special educational needs.

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

The school is not involved in any of the Department's programmes designed to promote educational inclusion. Teachers are sensitive to any isolated instance of disadvantage which manifests.

5. CONCLUSION

The school has strengths in the following areas:

- The board of management is functioning very well; its members are hardworking and very committed to the school and its development.
- The teaching principal gives effective leadership to the school community. She is innovative and embraces new methodologies and approaches readily.
- The team of energetic, creative teachers works very diligently to provide a solid programme of education for their pupils.
- Strong emphasis is placed on the development of pupils' literacy skills.
- The ethos of the school is very positive, encouraging and affirming of pupils. The pupils are actively involved in a wide range of co-curricular activities.
- The teaching and learning in the Visual Arts are very effective.
- The work of the parents’ association is highly commendable.

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

- Moltar breis stráitéisi a úsáid chun cumas cumarsái de ndaltaí sa Ghaeilge a fhorbairt. B’fhíu an léitheoireacht agus an scribhneoireacht sa Ghaeilge a fhorbairt freisin. It is recommended that additional strategies are used to develop the pupils’ communicative abilities in Irish. Reading and writing in Irish should also be developed.
- It is recommended that information and communications technologies (ICT) are used more effectively to support teaching and learning in all classrooms.
- Further attention should be paid to the systematic development of pupils’ problem-solving skills across all strands of the mathematics curriculum.

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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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, staff, pupils and parents of Moyle School wish to acknowledge and thank the inspectorate for the professional and courteous way in which the inspection was conducted.

The school community would like to thank the inspector for her practical advice and generous sharing of resources.

We are happy to see the following areas were highlighted for praise:
1. Board of Management functions very well and is committed to the school and its development.
2. A very diligent, committed, energetic and creative team of teachers.
3. Innovative teaching principal gives effective leadership to the school community.
4. High quality of Learning Support services and effective support for Special Educational Needs.
5. Deputy Principal and Special Duties post holder contribute very successfully to the overall management of the school.
6. Contribution of the Special Needs Assistant to the care and inclusion of pupils is commended.
7. Part-time secretary provides careful, competent service to the school.
8. Work of the Parent Teacher Association is highly commendable.
9. Highly effective management of pupils and very good relationships between pupils and teaching staff.
10. High quality teaching in the area of Visual Arts
12. Quality of classroom planning is commendable.
13. Ethos of the school is very positive, encouraging and affirming.
14. Very good attendance levels.

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

1. ICT funding has been spent which has furnished the Infant classroom with a SmartBoard. Each other classroom has a whiteboard, teaching laptop, visualiser, data projector, sound system and internet access points. Our broadband connection has also been upgraded to a faster speed.
2. The Learning Support teacher has commenced the Learning Support course in St. Angela’s, Sligo.
3. The school report template has been reviewed and revised. Results of standardised tests are now supplied to parents on the report.
4. Parent Teacher meetings have been moved to November.
5. Mathematics standardised testing (Sigma T) is done in all classes 1st – 6th. The further development of problem-solving skills will be discussed at our next School Development Planning day.
6. The teaching of Gaeilge has been reviewed in all classes. Strategies to improve reading, writing and the spoken word are being implemented. “Big books” and reading books/novels have been purchased in a range of levels to encourage and develop the reading of Irish. ICT is used in the teaching of reading in the classroom. Class teachers are providing more opportunities for “free-writing”.

7. In-class support is now in place in all classrooms in the areas of English and Mathematics.