Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Our Lady of Lourdes National School
Rossbrien, Limerick
Uimhir rolla:19667O

Date of inspection: 24 March 2010
A whole-school evaluation of Our Lady of Lourdes National School was undertaken in March 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, Gaeilge, Mathematics and History. 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**

Our Lady of Lourdes NS, is situated in the south side of Limerick city. It is a twenty teacher, co-educational school, which caters for pupils from infants to sixth class. The school is under the patronage of the Catholic Bishop of Limerick and is part of the Delivering Equality of Opportunity In Schools (DEIS) Initiative (Band 1 – Urban). Specifically, additional resources have been allocated to this school to support the school’s endeavours in strengthening early education and to support its efforts towards improving the literacy and numeracy standards of its pupils. Under the DEIS Initiative, it is anticipated that the school would place sustained emphasis on the involvement of parents, family members and the community in the pupils’ education. It is also anticipated that the school would work in collaboration with external bodies to enhance attendance, educational progression, retention and attainment in the school.

The enrolment in the school is stable. Pupil attendance is an issue of considerable concern for the school with a very significant cohort of pupils having a fractured and discontinuous engagement with education. As a result, these pupils are not achieving to their full potential. School attendance records are conscientiously maintained and the Educational Welfare Board is notified of prolonged absences in accordance with the terms of the Education (Welfare Act) 2002. The school is commended on the initiatives it has engaged in to date and it is recommended that it further engage with parents to improve attendance rates. Our Lady of Lourdes National School also receives additional resources under the Early Start project, the School Completion Programme and other Department of Education and Skills initiatives to tackle educational disadvantage.

The following table provides an overview of the enrolment and staffing in the school at the time of the evaluation:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pupils enrolled in the school</td>
<td>202</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainstream classes in the school</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers on the school staff</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainstream class teachers</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers working in support roles</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homes School Community Liaison</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early Start Teacher</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resource (Part-time)</td>
<td>6 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English as an Additional Language</td>
<td>4.5 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child-care worker (Early Start)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special needs assistants</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT

1.1 Characteristic spirit, mission or vision
The mission statement of the school is inclusive and states that it “strives to create a happy environment where pupils strive to reach their full potential physically, academically, emotionally, culturally, spiritually and socially”. The school does succeed in creating an atmosphere where everyone is valued and respected, regardless of race, creed, colour or cultural background. It was evident during the evaluation period through the interactions with the school community that the values outlined in the above statement are shared by all and every attempt is made by the staff to ensure their attainment.

1.2 Board of management
The roles and responsibilities of the board are clearly defined and board members undertake these responsibilities effectively. The board complies with statutory requirements, Department of Education and Skills guidelines and circulars. The members of the board are aware of their duties in supporting the work of the school. They use available finances in a very efficient manner and the school accounts are certified on an annual basis. The school is very well resourced with a wide range of supportive teaching and learning materials. The decision making procedures are open, clear, and effective and are carried out in the best interest of the school community. An annual review of the school’s work is shared with the school community through school newsletters. While the board plays an active role in the development of the DEIS plan it is now recommended that their role in evaluating the implementation of this plan, particularly in relation to increasing pupil attainment and attendance be further developed.

1.3 In-school management
The principal’s work in leading and managing the school is highly effective. She inspires and motivates colleagues and has established a high level of personal credibility. She sets high expectations for the staff and the pupils in all their daily routines. A very positive climate has been established in the school which is characterised by collegiate working relationships, openness and trust. The in-school management team comprises a deputy principal, two assistant principals and six special duties post holders. Each member has been assigned a comprehensive range of roles and responsibilities which they discharge effectively and conscientiously. It is now recommended that the curriculum leadership role of the in-school management team focuses more closely on the implementation and monitoring of the outcomes of the targets outlined in the DEIS plan. It is further recommended that the in-school management team meet formally and work collaboratively with the principal and the board in order to lead school improvement and innovation. The practice of convening staff meetings within school time on a monthly basis should be discontinued. It is recommended that staff meetings be convened in line with the conditions outlined in Circular 14/04.

1.4 Management of relationships and communication with the school community
The management of relations and communications with the school community is of a very high quality. Annual parent teacher meetings are organised and parents report that they are welcome at all times to approach the school and teachers with any concerns they may have. Considerable
progress has been made in relation to the development of an atmosphere of collective responsibility and mutual support in the school. The home-school-community liaison (HSCL) coordinator has established very positive working relationships with the parent body and this has resulted in increased parental involvement in a wide range of school related activities. Regular newsletters are issued to all parents and end of year pupil progress reports are communicated to all parents. An enthusiastic recently formed parent association is engaged in supporting many school related activities and they are high in their praise of the school.

1.5 Management of pupils
The school is commended for the quality of support which it provides to the pupils in the school. Pupils are valued members of the school community and are treated with equality, fairness and respect. The pastoral needs of the pupils, including those pupils with specific learning, emotional and social needs are managed very effectively and pupils’ holistic development is nurtured. A wide range of initiatives has been organised to support pupils in school and after school hours. Pupils were well behaved during the evaluation period and the school is engaging with parents and with initiatives aimed at supporting those pupils who are experiencing difficulty in engaging actively in their learning. To further develop this good work, it is recommended that increased focus be placed on the identification and support of parents from the more marginalised families.

2. QUALITY OF SCHOOL PLANNING

2.1 Whole-school and classroom planning
A good whole-school plan which is reflective of the school context has been formulated. Curriculum plans in all subject areas have been developed by the staff and ratified by the board of management. Increased focus however should be placed on monitoring the implementation of these plans to ensure that there is continuity and progression between classes and that programmes of work are designed which are more responsive to the learning needs of the pupils. A Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) programme should also be implemented as a matter of priority in all classes. A very wide range of organisational policies has been ratified by the board and these are of a very good standard and are effectively implemented on a whole-school basis. The school has formulated a DEIS plan addressing the areas of literacy, numeracy, attendance and parental involvement. While it is recognised that progress is being made in each area, it is nonetheless recommended that the targets identified, specifically in the areas of literacy and numeracy, be more specific and more focused on raising pupil attainment.

All teachers prepare satisfactory long and short-term plans in preparation for their work with some examples of very high quality planning evident throughout the school. The planning prepared by the majority of special education needs teachers is of a very high standard. End of month progress records are maintained and retained in the school in a very methodical fashion. It is now recommended that the very good practice observed be replicated by all teachers. The development of a standard monthly progress record is recommended as a means of monitoring the implementation of agreed school priorities and pupil progress. This document could facilitate the school’s self-evaluation process.
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 English
The quality of teaching observed in English was of a good standard, however, there remains significant scope for development in relation to the attainment levels of the majority of pupils in literacy. The successful implementation of a number of initiatives is beginning to impact positively on pupil learning outcomes and the staff is praised in this regard.

In the area of oral language the pupils are presenting with significant language deficits and the school should, as a matter of urgency, prioritise this as an area for targeted intervention. The good practice whereby the school has begun to assess pupils’ receptive language should provide the foundation upon which a structured oral language intervention programme could be based. This programme should be implemented in a systematic manner. The provision of discrete oral language lessons in which clear learning outcomes are identified on a whole-school basis should be considered.

The majority of pupils in the school are presenting with significant difficulties in the area of English reading. The implementation of the Reading Recovery Programme and the embedding of Literacy Lift-off into mainstream classroom practice is impacting positively on pupil learning outcomes, particularly in the junior classes. Positive attitudes towards reading are being successfully promoted through the engagement of parents in shared reading programmes and activities. This good practice is highly praised. Some very good practice was observed in the teaching of reading in the school. The effective use of story, collaborative and experiential reading activities observed in some classes should now be extended to all classroom settings. Differentiated reading programmes should be provided in all classes and the introduction of differentiated reading schemes as a basis for the teaching of reading should be prioritised. The introduction of formal reading schemes in the infant classes should also be deferred and replaced by an intensive emphasis on the development of pupils’ emergent reading skills.

The successful implementation of First Steps Writing Programme is beginning to impact positively on pupil learning outcomes in writing. In general, pupils are afforded opportunities to write in a range of genres and for a wide audience. Some very good displays of pupils’ writing feature in classrooms and corridors and the school is actively working towards the creation of a supportive print rich environment. The use of evaluative checklists and the careful monitoring and evaluation of pupils’ written work is enabling the school to monitor individual pupil progress.

3.2 Gaeilge
I ranganna áirithe, feictear go bhfuil tuiscint chóir ag na daltaí ar ábhar an cheachta agus go muintear foclóir cuí dóibh atá in oiriúnacht dá gcuid taithí. Úsáidtear an Ghaeilge mar mhéan
In some classes, it is evident that pupils have an appropriate understanding of the content of the lessons and that relevant vocabulary is taught to them which is suitable to their experience. Irish is used as the language of instruction during lessons in Irish and productive use is made of computer resources to support lesson presentation. It is recommended that frequent oral language opportunities be given to pupils and it should be ensured that they are enabled to practise the Irish they have learned in authentic situations and in various contexts on a frequent basis. It is acknowledged that, in other classes however, the pupils' lack of interest in Irish can present a challenge. At middle and senior class level, it is evident that pupils have a restricted range of vocabulary and that they possess poor communicative skills.

It is recommended, therefore, that a wider variety of methodologies be implemented in every class so that pupils' communication skills are developed and that their interest Irish is encouraged. It should be further ensured that a broad repertoire of Irish stories, poems and songs is learned and is known by the pupils.

In reading, it is advised that pupils' reading skills are formally developed through the provision of a print-rich environment in Irish throughout the school, through the promotion of word-recognition strategies, through undertaking regular word analysis activities and through the expansion of phonological skills.

It should also be ensured that further use is made of computer resources to develop the process approach to writing, to support personal writing, and to publish and display pupils' written work in Irish.

3.3 Mathematics
Lessons observed in Mathematics were of a good to very good standard. Information and communication technology (ICT) was used to very good effect and concrete materials and illustrative materials were utilised well to support pupil learning in all classes. The strategies
utilised in *Maths Recovery* are being effectively modelled and implemented in mainstream classes and this is impacting positively on pupils’ engagement and attainment.

All teachers address mathematical language in their planning. The provision of increased opportunities for pupils to use this language in relevant contexts would further enhance the skill of communicating and expressing. However, teachers should ensure that all strands of the mathematics curriculum are addressed in a systematic and balanced manner. A good mathematics environment features in the majority of classrooms and an appropriate emphasis was placed on oral mathematical activities in all lessons observed. Pupils were observed to engage in the activities organised and assessment data indicate that pupil attainment is improving.

It is now recommended that the school provides increased opportunities for pupils to engage in collaborative problem-solving activities which are based on real life experiences. The development of the immediate school environment and the increased use of concrete materials to support pupil learning across the strands and strand units of the curriculum should also be considered. There is a need also to plan systematically, on a whole-school basis, for the development of pupils’ mathematical skills through the organisation of structured learning experiences.

### 3.4 History

The quality of teaching in History is of a high standard. Very good lessons were observed in which artefacts, primary and secondary sources of evidence and ICT were utilised to very good effect. Pupils were observed to be actively engaged and interested in the lessons. A range of active methodologies were utilised to sustain pupils’ interest in the topics addressed. Timelines featured in most classrooms and displays of projects completed by pupils were attractively organised. The associated skills of time and chronology, cause and effect, using evidence and empathy were addressed in a meaningful manner. It is now recommended that a wider variety of assessment modes be employed to monitor progress and to inform teaching and learning in the future. Increased emphasis should also be placed on the linking of significant periods of history to local history and historical sites.

### 3.5 Assessment

It is evident from the assessment results collated that data is being utilised effectively to identify and target areas for intervention in the future. Systems are now in place to monitor the progress of interventions currently being implemented in the school and their impact on pupil learning, especially in literacy and numeracy. Of particular note is the data generated on pupil progress during their engagement in the Early Start initiative. An increasing variety of assessment modes is being used to good effect. The results of standardised tests in literacy and numeracy are now collated on a whole-school basis and used to track individual pupil progress. These good practices are highly praised. End of year school reports are maintained and some teachers maintain portfolios of pupils’ work, checklists and pupil profiles. These practices might be further developed on a whole-school basis. An increased focus might also be placed on the use of assessment data to inform teaching and learning.

### 4. QUALITY OF SUPPORT FOR PUPILS

#### 4.1 Pupils with special educational needs

The quality of provision for pupils with special educational needs is of a very high standard. Five full-time teachers and one part-time teacher provide support to pupils with learning difficulties. The staged approach is utilised to identify the pupils that require support teaching. Well-
maintained records detail the concerns identified and appropriate screening measures are administered to identify the relevant interventions to be provided for individual pupils. All support teachers have undertaken a course of professional development appropriate to their role and reflective of the particular needs of the school. The team is effective in the dissemination of the knowledge and skills acquired during their participation in these courses. In general, support teachers create stimulating and supportive teaching environments and provide an appropriate range of resources to support the needs, abilities and learning styles of pupils identified for support. Very effective individual education plans (IEPs) and individual pupil learning profiles (IPLPs) have been drafted with the appropriate involvement of parents. The team is managed effectively by the special education needs co-ordinator and there is evidence of collaborative practice among the team. Overall, progress is in keeping with the ability of pupils and the teaching targets set. There is clear evidence of the development of pupils’ competencies relative to their baseline data in IEPs. The school should now consider how best to deploy teacher resources in the best interest of the pupils in the infants, junior and middle standards to maximise the benefit to pupil learning.

4.2 Other supports for pupils: disadvantaged, minority and other groups
This school has the services of a full-time HSCL coordinator. The effective development of parental and community liaison is promoted. A wide range of educational initiatives are made available to parents through the school, and parents reported that an increased number of parents were participating in these initiatives. The HSCL coordinator is involved in a variety of local committees and networks and attends various meetings where aspects of good practice are shared and initiatives are discussed and evaluated.

There is a very attractive parents’ room in the school and parents are encouraged to meet in this area. Programmes which encourage parental involvement in curricular activities such as *Maths for Fun* and, *Literacy for Fun* are organised and accredited courses are provided. At the time of the evaluation the HSCL, supported by the School Completion Programme (SCP) co-ordinator, were working closely with parents and the pupils in sixth class on a specially devised project ‘Mission Transition’ to support pupils’ transition to second-level school. Other initiatives, which are organised with the SCP, include the homework club and a focus on monitoring pupils’ attendance and engagement in school.

The Early Start provision in this school is long established. A highly structured programme is provided across a diverse range of areas including literacy, numeracy and socialisation. A part-time teacher for English as an additional language (EAL) provides support for pupils for four and a half hours per week.

At the time of this evaluation, EAL support was also made available for three newcomer pupils through the provision of part-time teaching hours by Limerick VEC.

5. CONCLUSION

The school has strengths in the following areas:

- The board manages resources including the school building very effectively. Board members are aware of the context in which they work and they give freely of their time, skills and expertise.
- The principal is committed to building a teaching team which is focused on improving the provision for pupils in the school and she ensures that the decision-making process is open and transparent.
• The teaching team is committed to the holistic development of pupils in a caring and supportive environment.
• Increased commitment to the raising of pupil attainment, particularly in literacy and numeracy, is evident in the school.
• The school is experiencing considerable success in involving a greater number of parents in school-based initiatives.
• Overall, the quality of teaching is of a good to very good standard and all teachers display an openness to exploring initiatives which are beneficial to pupil learning across the curriculum.
• ICT is utilised to good effect to support teaching and learning.
• The school is praised for the utilisation of a wide range of assessment instruments and for the analysis of assessment data to track pupil progress.
• The quality of support for pupils with special educational needs is of a very high standard

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

• It is recommended that the school convene staff meetings in compliance with Circular 14/04.
• A structured oral language intervention programme, specific to the needs of the pupils should be formulated and implemented in a systematic manner throughout the school.
• A differentiated reading programme should be provided in all classes.
• In Mathematics, it is recommended that the school provides increased opportunities for pupils to engage in collaborative problem-solving activities which are based on real life experiences.
• Increased collaboration and a team approach to in-school management should be implemented.
• A Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) programme should be implemented as a matter of priority in all classes.

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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