An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

St Colman’s National School,
Derrinabroc, Co. Sligo
Uimhir rolla:19798G

Date of inspection: 04 March 2010
WHOLE-SCHOOL EVALUATION

A whole-school evaluation of St Colman’s National School (NS), Derrinabroc 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, Irish, Mathematics and Science. 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

St. Colman’s NS is a two-teacher school, situated between Ballaghaderreen and Charlestown in county Mayo. The school was built in 1987 following the amalgamation of Derrinacartha NS and Cloontia NS. This is a co-educational primary school which serves a small rural community. Enrolment figures have remained stable since the last school inspection in 1997. The pupils’ attendance levels are commendable.

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>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainstream classes in the school</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers on the school staff</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainstream class teachers</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers working in support roles</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special needs assistants</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT

1.1 Characteristic spirit, mission or vision

St. Colman’s NS is under the patronage of the Catholic Bishop of Achonry. The school is a focal point for the local community. Its mission statement outlines a commitment to a holistic education and development of pupils’ self-esteem. There is a positive atmosphere in the school.

1.2 Board of management

The board of management is properly constituted, meets on a regular basis and functions very effectively. Financial matters are managed very efficiently and minutes are recorded carefully. The board is highly supportive of all school activities. Its main concern is the care and welfare of the staff and pupils. The school building is cleaned daily by a caretaker and the school is well kept both internally and externally. Very good attention is given to policy development, ratification and review. The board sees the strengths of the school as the friendly atmosphere, the commitment of parents and teachers to education and the high attendance by pupils at school.
1.3 In-school management

The principal teacher performs her teaching and administrative duties with energy, dedication and commitment. She provides strong leadership and promotes collaboration. She consults with her staff on school matters and cultivates good communication among all the partners. Newsletters are disseminated bi-annually and the text-a-parent service is used effectively. The principal carries out her administrative duties efficiently and is ably assisted by her dedicated secretary and assistant teacher. The special-duties post provides a supportive role to the principal with administrative, management and curricular duties. Continuous professional development among the teachers is actively promoted and facilitated.

1.4 Management of relationships and communication with the school community

The school supports many charitable organisations through raffles and fundraising events facilitated by the parents’ association. Pupils and parents take part in the annual St. Patrick’s Day parade in Ballaghaderreen. They participated in 2009 by wearing costumes all made from recyclable materials linked to their Green Schools project. Parents, staff and pupils all work collaboratively to prepare for this event. The entire community is welcomed to the annual Christmas concert/celebration. The parents’ association organises a party for the pupils and families on First Holy Communion day. The high involvement of parents in the school is appreciated by the staff and pupils. There is a strong sense of belonging to the community within the school.

1.5 Management of pupils

The pupils are very well behaved, are courteous towards their teachers and towards each other. They demonstrate a high level of interest in their work and willingly co-operate with the teachers in all activities. Teachers undertake yard duty on a rota basis as outlined in the supervision policy. As the school ground is so spacious, it is recommended that the play area be confined to ensure that the pupils are more easily supervised by the teacher on duty.

2. Quality of school planning

2.1 Whole-school and classroom planning

The quality of whole-school planning is very good. The policies are devised collaboratively by the staff and commendably follow the School Development Planning Support (SDPS) guidelines. There has been good consultation with parents prior to the ratification of policies by the board of management. Many policies have been reviewed appropriately and others are due for review in line with their strategic plan.

A comprehensive range of organisational policies is in place, in response to relevant legislation and the evolving needs of the school. The overall quality of the documentation is very good. The recently reviewed code of behaviour is worthy of commendation. However, there are some policies which require some modifications and insertions as discussed at the post-evaluation meeting. It is recommended that the school devise an information and communication technology (ICT) policy in line with its strategic plan. Overall, the curricular policies have been very well formulated. As with organisational policies, some of these need augmentation to assist the school in improving the quality of learning and teaching.
The quality of classroom planning is good. All teachers prepare satisfactory long-term and short-term planning in preparation for their work. A common template is in place for short-term planning and for the recording of work completed at the end of the month, which is commendable. The quality of long-term planning needs to be reviewed. The teachers are experienced and dedicated. Both plan integrated programmes of work.

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_


Cleachtann na daltaí tascanna éagsúla simplí sa scribhneoireacht agus déanann siad an obair scriofa go náéta, tuiscneach. Moltar do na hoidí struchtúr faoi leith a bheith acu san dá sheomra chun scribhneoireacht chruthaitheach a fhónta sa scoil. Moltar athbhreithniú a dhéanamh ar an bpolasá Gaeilge chun clár leanúnach a leagan síos don ghrámadach, do scribhneoireacht chruthaitheach, don léitheoireacht agus do mhúineadh na mbriathra.

_Irish_

The teaching of Irish is undertaken diligently and a large range of resources is used effectively. Poems, songs, pair work, role-play and games are all used fruitfully in the learning. However, it is recommended that pupils be given even more opportunities to engage in pair work. The teachers are advised to develop storytelling and the novel in Irish. Books from the series Séideán Sí are used productively to support reading in the school. The majority of the pupils read with understanding. There is commendable emphasis placed on language development.

The pupils practise various simple writing exercises and their work is done neatly and with understanding. The teachers are advised to devise a structure for the teaching of creative writing in the school. It is recommended that the Irish policy be revised to allow for continuity in the teaching of grammar, creative writing, and reading and in the teaching of verbs.
The quality of teaching and learning in English is good. A very strong emphasis is placed on the development of pupils’ oral-language skills. The pupils are confident in discussing topics and in answering questions. Some very good approaches to poetry exploration and composition were observed during the evaluation. Debating, circle work, brainstorming and presentation of projects are some of the notable methodologies and strategies used to develop pupils’ competence in communication.

Class libraries and print-rich environments are very well organised in both classrooms. The reading of the class novel in an integrated manner and silent reading in the senior room are all contributing productively to the pupils’ attainment in reading. Large-format books are used effectively in the junior classroom. Pupils’ reading skills are developed appropriately. The majority of the pupils are reading competently. Further reinforcement of words through games and activities would be beneficial, however. It is recommended that an early-intervention programme, incorporating pre-reading skills, be implemented in junior classes. The Jolly Phonics scheme was introduced in the current school year and further work needs to be done to consolidate phonological awareness for some pupils.

Regular opportunities are provided for pupils to write in a variety of genres. The pupils’ work is displayed on notice boards and in copybooks. Writing is very well modelled for the infant classes by their teacher. Pupils’ grammar, spelling and handwriting skills are developed in a sequential manner. However, further work needs to be done to develop the pupils’ creative output and extend their vocabulary in both classrooms. This can be achieved through further brainstorming and preparation of challenging language charts for the pupils. Pupils would benefit also from guidance in the use of the thesaurus, in editing their own work and in conferencing in groups.

3.2 Mathematics

Very good practice in the teaching and learning of Mathematics was observed during the evaluation. There is commendable emphasis on the development of mathematical language and on the understanding of concepts. Loop games, target boards, tables, concrete materials and activities are all used effectively to support pupils’ learning. The pupils are achieving very well in their written work and in oral questioning. The teachers manage the four class groupings successfully in the teaching of this subject. However, it is recommended that the staff develop mathematical trails, linkage and problem-solving in the teaching of Mathematics. The staff may find the Department of Education and Skills publication Effective Literacy and Numeracy Practices in DEIS Schools useful in implementing this recommendation.

3.3 Science

The Science programme is delivered in a school environment that is conducive to meaningful scientific discovery. There is a range of habitats nearby, with well-maintained flowerbeds and bird-feeding tables. The school has been awarded a green flag for their success in the Green Schools project. Lessons are well structured, well paced and well developed. The pupils’ concepts are developed through activity, experimentation and investigation. Pupils proved knowledgeable when assessed on conceptual knowledge. Brainstorming and discussion are praiseworthy features of all lessons. The pupils use terminology carefully and are developing scientific skills appropriately.

The teachers organise a range of trips to complement the programme in Science. Junior pupils have visited a farm as part of their learning in the strand Plants and Animals. The senior pupils
have visited the local airport as part of their learning in the strand of Energy. The board of management has facilitated visits to the school by science experts, which has enhanced the programme of work for the pupils. The teachers ensure breadth and balance in the programme implemented.

3.4 Assessment

The quality of assessment is good. The assessment and record-keeping policies guide the assessment that takes place in the school. Sigma-T and Micra-T standardised tests are administered in Mathematics and English each year. The results are recorded and used to identify the pupils who require supplementary teaching. A variety of tests is used to further diagnose pupils’ learning needs. Both mainstream teachers maintain work samples, test results and anecdotal notes. Formal parent-teacher meetings are convened annually. An end-of-year report gives parents clear information on their children’s performance. It is recommended that the teachers place greater emphasis on the assessment of pupils’ learning in subjects other than Mathematics and English.

4. QUALITY OF SUPPORT FOR PUPILS

4.1 Pupils with special educational needs

The quality of provision for pupils requiring supplementary teaching is very good. Very effective teaching and learning is achieved through the combination of carefully planned comprehensive programmes of work and clear learning targets. Support is given in both literacy and numeracy. Lesson provision is of a very high quality. Lessons are well-structured and contain a praiseworthy range of elements and tasks. The support setting is attractive and well-resourced. Supplementary teaching is provided exclusively on a withdrawal basis. It is recommended that opportunities for in-class support be investigated. It is recommended that the support teacher implement an early-intervention programme in consultation with the junior classroom teacher. The support teacher would then build up a list of suitable activities for a pre-reading programme which could be appended to the learning-support policy. The Middle-Infant Screening Test (MIST) is used to identify those pupils in senior infants who may require additional support. It is recommended that the school consider the use of paired reading to support a small number of pupils. Overall, positive levels of pupil achievement are in evidence.

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

The school has received grants from the Social Inclusion Unit of the Department of Education and Skills. This funding has now ceased. This funding assisted the school in the provision of enhanced educational activities for some pupils. The open and inclusive climate in the school ensures that individual pupils are supported appropriately and sensitively.

5. CONCLUSION

The school has strengths in the following areas:

- The dedicated board of management and the parents’ association work diligently on behalf of the school.
• There is a strong sense of belonging to the community within the school.
• The school has an enthusiastic, dedicated and committed principal teacher. All of the teachers are conscientious and diligent in their work.
• The pupils are very well behaved and co-operate willingly with the teachers.
• English, Science and Mathematics are taught effectively in the school.
• The quality of support for pupils is very good.

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

• It is recommended that the supervision policy be reviewed, with a view to reducing the play area to ensure that all pupils are visible to the teacher on supervision.
• Moltar athbhreithniú a dhéanamh ar an bpolasaí Gaeilge chun clár leanúnach a leagan síos don ghramadach, don scríbhneoireacht chruthaitheach, don léitheoireacht agus do mhúineadh na mbriathra.
  *(It is recommended that the Irish policy be revised to allow for continuity in the teaching of grammar, creative writing, reading and in the teaching of verbs.)*
• It is recommended that the staff develop mathematical trails, linkage and problem-solving in the teaching of Mathematics.
• It is recommended that a pre-reading programme be implemented to support pupils’ development in the early years.
• Supplementary teaching is provided exclusively on a withdrawal basis. It is recommended that opportunities for in-class support be investigated.

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*