An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Scoil Náisiúnta Eoghain
Moville, County Donegal
Uimhir rolla: 20054L

Date of inspection: 4 December 2009
WHOLE-SCHOOL EVALUATION

This report has been written following a whole school evaluation of Scoil Náisiúnta Eoghain, Moville. It presents the findings of an evaluation of the work of the school as a whole and makes recommendations for the further development of the work of the school. During the evaluation, the inspectors held pre-evaluation meetings with the principal, the teachers, the school’s board of management, and representatives of the parents’ association. The evaluation was conducted over a number of days during which inspectors visited classrooms and observed teaching and learning. They interacted with pupils, examined their work and interacted with the class teachers. They reviewed school planning documentation and teachers’ written preparation, and met with the in-school management team. Following the evaluation visit, the inspectors provided oral feedback on the outcomes of the evaluation to the staff and to the board of management. 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.

1. INTRODUCTION – SCHOOL CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

Scoil Náisiúnta Eoghain is a co-educational school situated in the town of Moville, County Donegal. It is under the patronage of the Catholic Bishop of Derry. This school is the result of an amalgamation, in 1996, of two single-sex schools. It was accommodated on two separate sites until 2008 when temporary, same-site accommodation was provided during the building of a new school. The staff and pupils moved into their new school building in November 2009. SN Eoghain participates as a Band 2 Urban school in the School Support Programme of Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS), the action plan of the Department of Education and Science for educational inclusion.

Currently, SN Eoghain has thirteen teachers on its staff, including an administrative principal. There is an enrolment of 220 pupils allocated to eight single-unit, mainstream classrooms. This allocation has resulted in considerable variance in class sizes ranging from nineteen to thirty-five pupils. School management should ensure that in accordance with Primary Circular Letter 02/2009 the differential between the largest and the smallest classes is kept to a minimum for the next school year. Data provided by the school indicate that overall attendance for 2008/09 was 93 per cent. A more targeted approach to improving pupils’ attendance is warranted and a review of the attendance strategy at board of management level is recommended.

2. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT

2.1 Board of management

Currently the board of management is not functioning satisfactorily as a cohesive unit. Working relationships and purposeful communications between the board and the principal have broken down. It is essential that lines of communication and a professional working relationship are re-established. The current situation is untenable and is impacting negatively on school management and on staff morale and confidence.

The board of management meets regularly; meetings are minuted and the attendance of members is recorded. There were three changes of chairperson during 2009. The frequency of these
changes was caused, according to the board, by the stress of dealing with a range of complex issues.

In June 2009 the board engaged an accountancy firm to examine the existing financial systems and to advise on the creation of an appropriate financial framework. It is essential that this process is completed without further delay as, at the time of the evaluation, the board was unable to account fully for ongoing income and expenditure.

This board should review current in-school management structures to ensure their effectiveness. It should actively promote teachers’ continuing professional development and processes which focus on self-evaluation and school improvement.

The commitment and dedication of the principal and of past and present board members in co-ordinating arrangements for the new school building deserve particular acknowledgement. The transfer to the new school building, a short time prior to the whole-school evaluation, was completed promptly and efficiently with the able assistance of the staff, the parents and other volunteers.

2.2 In-school management

The in-school management team includes the administrative principal and three post-holders: the deputy principal, one privileged assistant and one special duties post-holder. The effectiveness of the role of the principal could not be evaluated fully as the principal was on leave for almost all of the whole-school evaluation process. In-school management arrangements were found to be seriously deficient at the time of the whole-school evaluation. Appropriate arrangements for the discharge of the principal’s functions had not been put in place by the board of management. An ongoing issue around the appointment of the deputy principal presented a further complication in the process of making such arrangements. It is essential that the issue in relation to the deputy principal’s appointment be resolved by the board of management as a matter of urgency.

There is significant variation in the arduousness and diversity of the duties assigned to the members of the in-school management team. There is also considerable variation in how effectively the duties are discharged. Currently, two post-holders share responsibility for curriculum planning and school sports while one attends to rolls and registers. It is recommended that the duties of the three post-holders are detailed in the school plan and are reviewed at school and at board of management level.

To lead effective change in this school the principal, post-holders and teachers in consultation with the board need to develop a clear vision and a common purpose. They need to develop a more unified approach so as to improve teaching and learning, staff morale and school atmosphere. At present, there are insufficient arrangements for the staff to engage in a collaborative and consultative manner. The support of an external facilitator for staff meetings might be considered as a means of encouraging and sustaining effective communication and cooperation.

2.3 Management of resources

The teaching team comprises the administrative principal, eight mainstream class teachers and three learning-support/resource teachers. The post of home-school-community liaison (HSCL) co-ordinator was vacant at the time of the evaluation. Since there is a lack of clarity in relation to
how teachers are allocated to particular roles and teaching duties it would be beneficial to have an agreed class allocation policy that is implemented in a transparent and consistent manner.

There are two full-time special needs assistants. Although very obliging, their contribution in the mainstream classrooms is not fully realised due to a lack of clarity about their role. A school policy on the role of special needs assistants and the teachers’ responsibility in guiding their work needs to be agreed and implemented consistently. The school secretary provides valuable support to the staff. The school grounds and internal accommodation are well maintained by the caretaking and cleaning personnel. There are deficiencies in terms of the teaching and learning resources available for many curriculum areas. Following the recent transfer to the new school building an audit of existing resources is necessary and the funds available should be used to acquire any resources needed as soon as possible. In particular, the stock of reading materials needs to be improved significantly. Some use of information and communications technologies (ICT) was observed during the evaluation. However, ICT is not currently being used to a large extent to enhance teaching and learning throughout the school. Recently, the school has been allocated additional government funding for ICT. How best to spend this funding should involve very careful research and decision-making by the board and staff.

2.4 Management of relationships and communication with the school community

There is scope for development in the management of relationships and communication with the school community. The parents’ association representatives stated that while communication with the board of management is satisfactory, communication with and from the school is unsatisfactory overall. They are unhappy with parents’ lack of access to school policies and to standardised tests results. The parents’ representatives also stated that there is unsatisfactory communication between the association and the teachers as there are no procedures in place for updating the staff of the outcomes of association meetings. It is recommended that an effective home-school communication policy be adopted and implemented without undue delay.

The parents’ representatives expressed satisfaction with the overall standard of teaching and learning in the school. However, they wished to see better provision for Irish and ICT and hoped that the new school facilities would enhance provision for Physical Education. They state that the parents’ association is willing to support the school in any way it can but that there has been insufficient guidance from the school as to how best it can contribute to school improvement.

The school arranges for parent-teacher meetings once yearly and it also issues end-of-year school reports about pupils’ progress. Letters, bulletins and the school magazine are used to inform parents of school activities. An information booklet for parents is disseminated which provides some detail of in-school procedures. Positive links have been developed with the local family resource centre, library and the local post-primary school.

2.5 Management of pupils

Standards of pupil behaviour are generally very good. Teachers have suitable rapport with their pupils. The pupils are co-operative, well-behaved and courteous. Almost all teachers implement brisk and efficient routines and transitions between activities. It is important that school protocols, for example those around lining up and movement on the stairs, are enforced by all teachers so as to provide consistency and good example for all. The school should introduce assembly time in order to celebrate pupils’ achievements and build self-esteem and confidence. During the evaluation pupils who travel on the school bus frequently arrived late for school. The board should address this with the appropriate parties.
3. QUALITY OF SCHOOL PLANNING

3.1 School planning process and implementation

Based on the evidence available, there are significant deficiencies in school development planning in terms of its content, process, communication and review. The board of management has not been involved in the development or ratification of school policies. It has requested access to existing school policies from in-school management but at the time of the evaluation these policies had not been presented to the board. This situation is far from satisfactory as under section 21 of the Education Act 1998 the board is charged with making arrangements for the preparation of a school plan and in ensuring that it is regularly reviewed and updated. As a matter of priority, the board should make the necessary arrangements for the review and ratification of key school policies. A health and safety policy should be prepared for the new school building and there should be a formally appointed health and safety officer within the school staff.

As the principal was absent, it cannot be assumed that the administrative documents presented to the inspection team represent the entirety of those available. However, the overall quality of the presented documents was unsatisfactory. The teachers stated that they were not involved in the development or review of administrative planning. This is a very regrettable situation as successful school development planning depends on joint decision-making and collaborative work practices.

Significant curricular planning has been undertaken since the beginning of the school year. As a next stage, and through a formalised process of discussion and collaboration, the teachers need to contextualise and take ownership of the curriculum planning process. It is strongly recommended that a targeted three-year action plan for literacy and numeracy improvement is progressed without delay.

The board of management has confirmed that the school is not in compliance with Department of Education and Science Primary Circular 0061/2006. The board has not formally adopted the Child Protection Guidelines for Primary Schools (Department of Education and Science, September 2001). Child protection procedures have not been brought to the attention of management, school staff and parents and management has not ensured that all staff members are familiar with the procedures to be followed. A designated liaison person (DLP) and a deputy DLP have not been appointed in line with the requirements of the guidelines. It is absolutely essential that all requirements in relation to child protection policy and procedures are fully implemented by the board and in the school as a matter of priority.

3.2 Classroom planning

The quality of teachers’ individual classroom planning varies across the school and there is a lack of specificity in some cases. There is a need to draw up an agreed, common template for short-term planning which focuses on identifiable short-term learning outcomes. There is scope for development in planning for assessment. Ongoing observation and recording of progress should be planned for as recommended in Assessment in the Primary School: Curriculum Guidelines for Schools (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, 2007).

Teachers maintain monthly records of completed work and most use a common template. However, in several cases, these records do not include sufficient detail as to what has been achieved.
4. **QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING**

4.1 **Overview of learning and teaching**

The quality of teaching is satisfactory overall. Most classrooms were well organised, print-rich learning environments. The teachers’ commitment to the preparation and development of an attractive learning environment since the very recent transfer to the new building is commended. Classroom interactions are positive. The teachers employ a variety of teaching approaches but there is still need to increase the use of pair work in all classrooms. Teachers utilise whole-class teaching methods well. Some teachers share the purposes of the lessons effectively with the pupils. All teachers give clear explanations and new content which builds on previous learning and real-life experiences is presented well.

While a number of teachers employ group work to good effect this is an area that should be improved throughout the school. Differentiated teaching strategies and activities should be developed to ensure that teaching and learning experiences are tailored to individual pupil need, as appropriate. At present assistance is provided to pupils on request or when difficulties are observed. However a more systematic process is needed. More emphasis should also be placed on expanding pupils’ higher-order thinking skills.

While the pupils experience a broad range of activities and learning experiences in all curricular areas, many pupils’ ability to benefit fully from these activities is limited by their restricted skills in literacy and numeracy. There is a significant cohort of pupils who are underachieving as evidenced in standardised assessment tests in reading and Mathematics particularly at the senior end of the school.

4.2 **Language**

**Gaeilge**

Ar an iomlán, tá forbairt ag teacht i ngnéithe áirithe do sholáthar na Gaeilge tríd an scoil. Úsáidtear an Ghaeilge mar mhéan teagaisc i rith na gceachtanna mar is cóir. Múinteoirí foclóirí nua go rialta dona daltaí in oiriúint dá gcuid taiti sa teanga. Ach, is léir go bhfuil an stór foclorá ag gach rang leibhéil teoranta agus go bhfuil scileanna lagad cumarsáide ina seilbh. Cé go bhfuil samplaí in ngach rang de chleachtas maith ó thaobh modhanna múnite is fiú bheim a chur ar raon nóis leithne de mhodhanna múnite. Tá sé rí-thábhachtach go gcinntitear cur i bhfeidhm na trí tréimhsí cumarsáide i ngach ceacht Gaeilge. Moltar deiseanna rialta labhartha a thabhairt do na daltaí agus a chinnítiú go gcuirtear ar a gcumas an Ghaeilge a úsáid i suimh fior-chumarsáideeacha agus i gcomhthábhachtáil. Is fiú chomh maith le forbairt ar an dtagadh na teanga freisin go minic. Ba chóir a chinnítiú, chomh maith, go ndéantar daingníú agus dul siar rialta ar ábhar atá múnite agus foghlaímh cheana féin ag na daltaí. Tá roinnt dánta agus amhráin ar eolas ag na daltaí ach is fiú forbairt a dhéanamh ar an ngné seo chun rithim na teanga a fhhorbairt.

Tá caighdeán na léitheoireachta agus na scríbhneoireachta trasna na scoile go híseal. Moltar scileanna léitheoireachta na ndaltaí a fhhorbairt go forfuirúil trí thimpeallacht shaibhir Gaeilge a sholáthar ar fud na scoile, trí stráitéis focal-bhriheadh a chur chun cinn, trí anailís agus a dhéanamh ar fhocail agus trí scileanna foineolaíochta na ndaltaí a leathnú. Tá gá le forbairt ar an léamh thuiscint comh maith. Ba chóir cnuasach leathan de leabhair dhaithíle le scéalta gearra a chur ar fáil i ngach rang leibhéal. Ta gá le forbairt ar scríbhneoireacht pearsanta na ndaltaí. B’fhíú nóis nó cloghacht a dhéanamh sa scríbhneoireacht aidhmeach chun cuspóirí ar leith a bhaint amach sa teanga. Is fiú chomh maith machnamh a dhéanamh ar an ngné seo chun cuspóirí ar leith a bhaint amach sa teanga. Is fiú chomh maith machnamh a dhéanamh ar an ngné seo chun cuspóirí ar leith a bhaint amach sa teanga. Is fiú chomh maith machnamh a dhéanamh ar an ngné seo chun cuspóirí ar leith a bhaint amach sa teanga. Is fiú chomh maith machnamh a dhéanamh ar an ngné seo chun cuspóirí ar leith a bhaint amach sa teanga.
Irish

Overall, provision for Irish in the school has scope for development in several areas. As appropriate, Irish is used as the language of instruction during lessons. New vocabulary is taught regularly in accordance with the pupils’ ability in the language. However, it is evident that the pupils have a restricted range of vocabulary at each class level in the school and that they possess poor communicative skills. While there are examples in each classroom of good teaching methodologies, it is necessary to provide pupils with a wider variety of methodologies in the teaching of Irish. It is very important to ensure that the three phases of communication are implemented in every Irish lesson. 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 learnt in authentic situations and in various contexts on a frequent basis. It should also be ensured that regular consolidation and revision is undertaken of content previously taught to and learned by the pupils. The pupils can recite some rhymes and poems in Irish and this aspect should be developed further to expose pupils to the rhythm of the language.

The standard in reading and writing in Irish across the school is low. 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-attack strategies, through undertaking regular word analysis activities and through the expansion of phonological skills. There is scope also for the development of comprehension. A wide range of attractive colourful books with short stories should be provided for each class level. The development of pupils’ personal writing should be extended and pupils should be exposed to further opportunities in purposeful writing. 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.

English

The quality of teaching in English is satisfactory in most aspects. However, there is a discrepancy between the quality of the teaching methods and of pupils’ engagement which was observed and pupil outcomes as evidenced in standardised tests. The results of standardised tests need to be more carefully monitored and analysed to assess the impact of particular initiatives and to inform the planning, teaching and learning continuum in English. The work already undertaken in drawing up the English curriculum plan is worthwhile. However, its policy focus should be further developed substantially. For example policies for the teaching of phonics, reading, writing and the assessment of progress are needed urgently.

Teachers promote talk and discussion in all classrooms. However, there needs to be a more systematic approach to oral language development. Thematic approaches are used successfully in some classrooms as a framework for the implementation of curricular oral language objectives. This should be extended to all classes. In the junior classes, teachers use large format books well to stimulate talk and in the middle and senior classrooms teachers choose discussion topics that interest the pupils. Poetry is taught well in all classrooms and the pupils can recite poems from a variety of genres.

The whole-school approach to the teaching of reading has scope for improvement as current practice varies too much from classroom to classroom. Some pupils in each classroom read with age-appropriate fluency. However, the reading and comprehension skills of many pupils at each class level need further development. Differentiated reading strategies should be implemented at all class levels. A small number of teachers have begun to engage with class novels and this practice is commended. Teachers in the junior classes use flash cards to help develop the pupils’
emergent phonological and emergent reading skills. It is now recommended that a structured and sequenced phonics programme be implemented to enhance literacy levels.

The teaching of functional writing is generally satisfactory. Some teachers are approaching the teaching of creative writing in a well-organised and purposeful manner. The First Steps Programme has been introduced and should show benefit when implemented consistently. Some teachers use ICT to publish samples of pupils' writing and it is recommended that this practice be extended. Pupils use dictionaries in some classrooms; they should be readily available in all classrooms so that pupils can self-correct thereby becoming more independent writers. The emphasis on handwriting and presentation of work varies from classroom to classroom; there needs to be a more consistent approach. It is recommended that cursive writing be introduced in the junior classes and progressed systematically in every classroom thereafter.

Teachers are keenly aware of the need to improve their pupils’ literacy levels and show considerable dedication to this goal. Further links should be established with the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) and Special Education Support Service (SESS) to assist in planning for interventions to improve standards in English for pupils who are underachieving in standardised assessments.

4.2 Mathematics

The quality of teaching in Mathematics is satisfactory in many areas. During the evaluation, charts and concrete materials were used to good effect in the junior classrooms. In the middle classes, there was appropriate emphasis on oral work and problem-solving. In the senior classes, teachers used pictorial materials very effectively to explain concepts. Pupils were engaged in their learning and responded well to the activities organised for them. Many pupils in the junior classes can identify shapes and complete simple number operations. In the middle section and senior sections many pupils can complete questions based on length and are able to discuss and interpret graphs.

Many teachers are using the same class textbook for every pupil regardless of ability. This is unsuitable in light of the number of pupils experiencing difficulties, as evidenced in standardised test results. There is a need to ensure that a differentiated curriculum is delivered in all classes which is suitable to the learning needs of pupils. A clear policy should be developed to guide teachers in this. Additionally, there needs to be a whole-school approach to the innovative use of concrete materials in all classrooms and there should be a consistent focus on mental Mathematics, the teaching of tables and further use of mathematical games to reinforce concepts.

Formative assessments and the tracking of progress in respect of concept acquisition, problem-solving and knowledge attained should be undertaken regularly and where improvement is not seen remedial action should be devised and implemented.

4.4 Social, Environmental and Scientific Education

History

The provision for History is satisfactory in most aspects. Teachers make good use of timelines, stories, secondary evidence and, in some instances, artefacts. The quality of classroom displays for History is generally good. Some aspects of local history are being explored and in the main there is judicious use of the textbooks. Pupils were observed to work successfully as historians in a number of classrooms; this is of paramount importance and should be progressed in all
classrooms. Some teachers are making good use of project work. However, there needs to be a more consistent approach to project work across the school. It is advised also that teachers consider the use of planning grids to ensure that they are covering all aspects of the curriculum progressively. Additionally, there should be more focus on revision and assessment.

**Geography**

Teaching and learning in Geography are satisfactory in most aspects. Lessons observed were well organised and structured appropriately and there was effective use of resources. Two lessons stood out as being very effective in this regard; a lesson in the junior section about the people who help us and a lesson in the senior section about people in other lands. Geographical investigation skills are being developed in most classrooms but this is an area that would benefit from further whole-school attention. Maps, globes and graphical skills are being addressed effectively in some instances but there is a shortage of teaching and learning resources which needs to be addressed. The teachers are aware of the need to develop the pupils' sense of local place and space but their approach should be reviewed at whole-school level so that overlap and omissions are avoided.

**Science**

Provision for Science is satisfactory in most aspects. Lessons are presented in an organised manner and the pupils are well managed during practical work. The pupils have opportunities to work scientifically—to question, to predict, to investigate and to experiment. The quality of the pupils' recording and communicating of work varies from classroom to classroom and requires an agreed whole-school approach. During the evaluation, most teachers presented closed activities where pupils discovered a pre-determined idea or procedure. However, in one senior classroom, the pupils had opportunity to work on an open-ended activity in creating their own light experiments. The combined use of closed and open-ended activities should be considered in every classroom. There is excellent opportunity now to develop the school grounds as a rich learning environment for Social, Scientific and Environmental Education (SESE). The creation of different habitats, observation points, weather stations and SESE trails would be highly beneficial.

**4.5 Arts Education**

**Visual Arts**

Lessons observed in the Visual Arts were good. The teachers demonstrated a very positive attitude to the subject and the pupils were encouraged to explore materials and tools and create effectively. Most teachers organised that the pupils worked in a careful manner and all encouraged co-operation and group interaction. All teachers maintained simple portfolios of the pupils’ work including, in some instances, photographic records of construction work and clay. This is good practice. Many teachers integrate the Visual Arts very effectively with other curriculum areas, particularly SESE.

**Music**

The quality of teaching and learning in Music is good overall. Lessons observed were well structured and suitably challenging. The pupils sing a repertoire of simple unison songs well and enjoy opportunities to improvise using percussion instruments. In one senior classroom there are good efforts paid to the dynamics of singing. While some teachers use pitched instruments in teaching singing, it is advised that all teachers do so. Music is integrated well with other
curriculum areas. The use of a commercial textbook series aids consistency to the provision for exploring sound, listening to music and music literacy. To enhance provision for Music, it is advised that an agreed school plan for Music is devised and implemented.

**Drama**

The lessons observed in Drama were successful: lesson content was appropriate and the pupils were co-operative and well-behaved. Teachers utilise drama devices to good effect including whole-class role play, teacher in role, hot seating, frozen pictures, conscience alley and thought tracking. The teachers create a safe environment successfully for the making of drama. However, it is advised that a drama contract is agreed in every classroom. Some teachers use props very effectively. For example, in one lesson pupils used various hats to assist them in taking on roles. It is advised that each teacher augments his or her store of dramatic props. There is good integration of Drama with other subjects especially English and SESE. To enhance provision in this subject, teachers are encouraged to explore the curriculum exemplars and activities, and to be mindful of the prerequisites for making drama and the elements of Drama as outlined in the curriculum.

**4.6 Physical Education**

The quality of the teaching and learning observed in Physical Education were good. Most of the work observed was from the *Games* and *Athletics* strands of the curriculum. Lessons were well-organised and active and the pupils were engaged and co-operative. The teachers and pupils are gradually becoming familiar with the spacious school hall and external facilities which include a basketball court and extensive hard-surface play areas. These enhanced facilities will undoubtedly boost provision for the subject across the school. However, there remains a paucity of suitable equipment for the subject. Amongst other things, additional mats, balance benches, indoor nets, resources for basketball, racquet games, hockey, hurling, football and co-operative games are required. Pupils attend swimming for a number of sessions each year in a local swimming pool. External tutors visit the school taking pupils for GAA skills and soccer. The work of one such tutor observed during the evaluation was purposeful and effective.

**4.7 Social, Personal and Health Education**

Lessons observed in Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) were commendable. Teachers made good use of circle-time activities and, in one instance, ICT. The teachers have suitable rapport with their pupils and give them plenty of opportunities to contribute ideas and to talk about issues. Teachers in all classrooms should be mindful to reduce gender-stereotypical constructions among pupils.

Teachers’ planning for SPHE indicates that their programme content is selected from various sources including some sections of the *Walk Tall Programme*—a programme for the prevention of substance abuse. The *Stay Safe Programme* is not implemented throughout the entire school and this omission should be remedied without delay. Provision for Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) is unsatisfactory. The school should have a context-specific and relevant RSE policy and the teachers need to work in closer consultation with parents in planning for and delivering the RSE programme. Policies should also be developed to address substance misuse and gender equality.
4.8 Assessment

The quality of assessment has room for improvement. Assessment practice from class to class needs to be co-ordinated and monitored more effectively so that there is better consistency of approach. Most teachers provide purposeful feedback in copies and make use of teacher-designed tasks and tests. The aforementioned *Assessment in the Primary School Curriculum: Guidelines for Schools* should prove a useful resource in helping to extend the scope and effectiveness of assessment throughout the school.

Standardised assessment tests are administered annually in English reading and Mathematics. However, there is insufficient use made of the test data; they are not used efficiently enough to analyse patterns of performance at different class levels or to map pupils’ progress towards specific learning targets. Teachers should also use the data in determining differentiated programmes of work for individuals and for differing ability groups. As is appropriate, the results of standardised tests inform decisions in relation to learning-support provision. Early screening, using the Middle Infant Screening Test (MIST), takes place at senior infant level. Teachers have discussed implementing the *Forward Together* programme but this has not yet been realised. Support teachers administer diagnostic tests and the results are used to assist them in planning learning programmes for pupils with additional and special educational needs.

End-of-year progress reports are issued to parents. It is recommended that the results of the standardised tests results should be included in these reports.

5. Quality of Support for Pupils

5.1 Pupils with special educational needs

A policy statement has been drafted which sets out broad aims for special education provision in the school. However, this policy gives little practical guidance in relation to identification procedures, organisation of supports, consultation and collaboration, planning of programmes, and procedures for ongoing monitoring and review. In addition, the staged approach to assessment, identification and programme planning needs to be implemented more consistently in this school.

Three teachers provide specific support for pupils with additional and special educational needs: Two work as learning-support teachers; one is shared with two other schools and one is substituting for a teacher on leave. The shared learning-support teacher works with pupils from the two most senior classes. The substitute learning-support teacher supports pupils from senior infants through to fourth class. A significant number of pupils receive learning support in this school. The third support teacher is part-time and works with pupils who have English as an additional language and with those pupils who have assessed special educational needs. The board should seek to ensure that a qualified primary teacher is appointed to each of the support posts.

The support rooms are attractively presented and the support teachers have prepared individual and group learning programmes as appropriate. Regular, informal discussion occurs between mainstream and support teachers regarding these learning programmes. There is some good collaborative practice evident between one mainstream teacher and a support teacher and this practice should be emulated. It is recommended that formal structures are put in place to facilitate mainstream and support teachers in determining learning targets and reviewing pupils’ progress.
A policy on discontinuing learning support for individual pupils should be devised collaboratively. All three support teachers withdraw pupils from the mainstream classrooms. Very little consistent in-class support is provided. The quality of teaching observed in the learning-support setting varied. There is need for members of the support team to upskill themselves so that they can provide the best intervention possible for pupils. There is evidence that some pupils are making progress in their learning and benefit from learning support. However, the particular needs of pupils in the senior classes should be addressed in a more purposeful manner and as a matter of priority. It is recommended that targeted in-class support be provided as part of this process.

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

A part-time teacher provides conscientious additional support for seven pupils who have English as an additional language. The Primary School Assessment Kit:Tests for English Language Proficiency (Integrate Ireland Language Training, 2007) is used to assess the pupils’ language attainment and learning targets are determined accordingly. It is advised that the language outcomes achieved by pupils are recorded more frequently in the individual education plans. Further consultation with parents is also advised and a policy on intercultural education should be devised.

Under the DEIS action plan, this school receives additional support in terms of funding and staffing. A three-year action plan for literacy and numeracy improvement has been drafted. How far the plan has progressed beyond the initial drafting stage is unclear as, in the absence of the principal; there was no-one available who had specific knowledge of its current status. It is strongly recommended that the teachers review and take ownership of the three-year action plan.

The school receives additional funding from the Department of Social and Community and Family Affairs to provide school lunches. The school also receives funding under the School Completion Programme to help tackle educational disadvantage and it engages in a variety of activities in this area. It would be very beneficial if the school would share information of its participation in these activities with the general parent community.

6. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- The commitment and dedication of the principal and of past and present board members in co-ordinating arrangements for the new school building deserve particular acknowledgement. The efforts of the staff, parents and volunteers in facilitating the move to the new school are also commended.
- Classrooms were well-organised, print-rich learning environments and the teachers’ commitment to the preparation and development of their classrooms is commended.
- Teachers have suitable rapport with their pupils and provide them with plenty of opportunities to contribute ideas and talk about issues.
- All teachers give clear explanations and new content which builds on previous learning and real-life experience is presented well. Teachers utilise whole-class teaching methods effectively.
- Standards of pupil behaviour are generally very good.
- Provision for the Arts and Physical Education is satisfactory overall.
As a means of building on these strengths and to address areas for development, the following key recommendations are made:

- It is essential that appropriate communications and a professional working relationship are re-established between the board of management and the principal; the current situation is untenable and is impacting negatively on school management and on staff morale and confidence.
- The principal, the post-holders and the teachers in consultation with the board need to develop a clear vision and a common purpose. They need to develop a more unified approach so as to improve teaching and learning, staff morale and school atmosphere.
- It is recommended that the issue around the post of the deputy principal is resolved and that the duties of the three post-holders are reviewed at school and at board of management level.
- The board should make arrangements for the preparation of an effective school plan and ensure that it is regularly reviewed and updated.
- At present, there are insufficient arrangements for the staff to engage in a collaborative and consultative manner. The support of an external facilitator for staff meetings might be considered as a means of encouraging and sustaining effective communication and co-operation.
- It is absolutely essential that all requirements in relation to child protection policy and procedures are fully implemented by the board and in the school as a matter of priority.
- It is strongly recommended that the teachers review and take ownership of the three-year action plan for improvement in literacy and numeracy.
- To ensure consistency and cohesion in pupils’ learning experiences, it is recommended that additional learning support is provided to pupils within the context of their own classroom where practicable.

Post-evaluation meetings were held with the staff and board of management where the draft findings and recommendations of the evaluation were presented and discussed.
Appendix

School response to the report

Submitted by the Board of Management
Area 1: Observations on the content of the inspection report

The Board agrees with the content of the inspection report. It welcomes the recognition of the strengths of the school and values the clear recommendations for development.

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 has formally adopted the Child Protection Guidelines for Primary schools. A new comprehensive Child Protection Policy has been drawn up following consultation with Parents and the Teaching Staff. This Policy has been formally ratified by the Board of Management. All staff have a copy and are familiar with the policy. A Designated Liaison Person and a deputy have been appointed. The Board has committed itself to an annual review of the Policy.

Teaching staff and the Board are working on a new Discipline Policy for the school and this should be ratified before the end of 2010. The school is fully aware of the need to support the most vulnerable in its care and is currently in the process of appointing a Home School Liaison Co-Ordinator.

Stronger links have been created with NEPS and NCSE with the goal of ensuring that children with learning difficulties are given every opportunity to develop, gain confidence and grow in a positive learning environment.

In-service training of staff on various aspects of the school curriculum will continue. Teachers will be given the opportunity to gain expertise in specific areas such as Relationship and Sexuality Education (RSE), Health and Safety, and Child Protection. The Board recognises that teacher planning days are essential for effective communication between staff members and to develop progression in all curriculum areas and to ensure continuity of planning processes.

LITERACY:

There has been a major focus in the current school year, 2010/2011 on developing an effective, consistent literacy scheme throughout the school. Teachers in the Junior classes have established a new phonics scheme “Sounds in Action” coupled with Jolly phonics, which will continue through to 3rd class. This will give the children skills to syllabicate words and use when spelling. The junior class teachers have also introduced a wide variety of Big Books and new library books have been purchased for activities such as shared reading, guided reading, and paired reading. Teachers also operate a library programme with individual classes where children can enjoy reading at home with their families. To support these initiatives, the Board of Management has made the provision of Literacy and Numeracy resources a priority in its financial planning.

A new spelling program (Spellbound) has been introduced across 1st to 6th classes, which emphasises high frequency words and a phonics based approach to spelling. Teachers are encouraged to use the new updated library provisions in school and the local library in Moville.

There is a heightened exposure in school to oral and written language. The Novel is being used effectively from 3rd class upwards.

Local community links are being used to enable pupils to develop drama skills through creative workshops. Links with other schools are being developed, as well as the Family Resource Centre and world issues such as Poverty, Oppression, Climate Change, are being explored through local charities. Senior classes will also be given the opportunity to explore these themes through
literature, oral language, art, drama and music, leading to the public presentation of the findings through some media presentations.

In the Sugar Plum Project pupils will have the opportunity to be involved in a literacy based project compiling a Cookbook of traditional recipes, nutritional information and world issues of poverty and nutrition.

Within the area of learning support, the school has established the “Forward Together” programme for children falling below recognised standards in the MIST test. This programme uses parental involvement, through literacy games and home-based activities, and forms part of the early intervention strategy.

NUMERACY:
A considerable amount of time and finance has been invested in providing resources to improve numeracy skills in the school. There is now a greater focus on the use of mental maths teaching skills in the classroom and workbooks to promote this have been provided (table toppers and Mental Maths Books)

Other planned developments in this area include the continuing to administer and analyse the Sigma T or Drumcondra tests by class teachers:
Active maths programme to be resourced in all classes:
Maths for fun games to be purchased and the scheme developed by the HSCL
Whole school agreement on Maths methods for teaching number operations:
Focus on Tables – use a variety of methods:
The creation of a maths-rich environment in the school:
The development of a maths library within each classroom.
The broadening of maths teaching methodologies through professional development.

The Board of Management recognises as a key priority the provision of effective, professional, collaborative leadership within the school, and is vigorously pursuing this goal. It sees this as essential to providing a whole-school response to many of the areas for development recommended by the Inspectorate.

It also places great importance on the ongoing professional development of the school staff and intends to encourage this in every way possible.