Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Holy Family National School
Rathmore
Uimhir rolla: 20111U

Date of inspection: 26 May 2011
1. Introduction

Holy Family National School is a co-educational, primary school, under the patronage of the Catholic Bishop of Kerry. This school, situated in the parish of Rathmore, plays a central role in the community it serves. There is a current enrolment of 214 pupils whose attendance is noted as being very good. 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.

2. Summary of Findings and Recommendations for Further Development

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

- The board of management actively supports the work of the school. It has managed an amalgamation process very successfully and has procured excellent school facilities.
- The commitment and dedication of the principal and in-school management team contributes notably to the efficient organisation of the school.
- The teaching staff works in a collaborative manner and provides a broad and balanced educational experience for pupils.
- The school is characterised by a strong sense of community and supported by committed parents’ association.
- Pupils demonstrate very good behaviour and participate enthusiastically in learning.
- The overall quality of teaching and learning is very good.
- Valuable assistance is provided by secretaries and caretakers and their contribution to the overall functioning of the school is noteworthy.

The following main recommendations are made:

- Regular review of post-holders’ duties with greater emphasis on the curricular leadership role is recommended. This should be supported by systematic self-evaluation approaches.
- It is recommended that greater emphasis be placed on pupil skill development across all curricular areas.
- The further development of pupils’ oral language skills in both English and in Irish is recommended.
- It is recommended that the school's assessment policy be reviewed. This review should define the school's approach to assessment for and of learning and outline a means through which pupil progress across curriculum areas might be recorded.
3. Quality of School Management

- The board of management has successfully overseen an amalgamation process. It discharges its duties effectively, attends training regularly and ratifies organisational policies. However, a more active role in policy formulation and review is recommended. Further strategies of communication with all stakeholders should also be developed.

- The principal keenly promotes a positive and supportive school climate. He has been instrumental in acquiring and developing school facilities. The cultivation of collaborative decision-making and mutual respect is a praiseworthy feature of his leadership style. He cultivates a strong work ethic and affirms staff regularly.

- The principal is ably assisted by a dedicated in-school management team who undertake assigned duties competently. Developing the role of the in-school management team in instructional leadership would greatly enhance the monitoring of curriculum provision on a whole-school basis. In the future review of post holders’ duties, greater emphasis should be placed on identifying the priority needs of the school and on devising strategic actions plans to ensure systematic implementation.

- A new school building was procured in 2007 and extended in 2010. The school and its environs are maintained to a very high standard. The provision of a range of resources, including interactive whiteboards, is noteworthy. It is recommended that the school prioritise the acquisition of additional resources to include reading and mathematical materials. Valuable assistance is provided by secretaries and caretakers and their contribution to the overall functioning of the school is noteworthy.

- Positive relations are in evidence among all partners of the school community. The parents’ association actively supports the work of the school, in particular through successful fundraising activities. Further opportunities to facilitate greater parental involvement in policy formulation and in school activities should be considered. Parents, in their responses to department questionnaires, expressed high levels of satisfaction with the quality of education provision in the school.

- Pupils are very well behaved, display a positive attitude to learning and engage enthusiastically in school life. Classroom atmospheres are positive and interactions between teachers and pupils are affirmative.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- Whole-school planning has been gainfully progressed resulting in a range of plans and policies. Further delineation of content in some curricular plans is recommended.

- Teachers conscientiously prepare schemes of work. Staff members are advised to make greater use of the school plan, using content objectives to inform teaching and learning. A review of the approach to maintaining monthly progress records is also recommended.

- School self-evaluation practices have been initiated successfully. To further advance this work, staff and management need to adopt a more formal and systematic approach to self-evaluation procedures.

- School authorities provided evidence that, in compliance with Primary Circular 0061/2006, the board of management has formally adopted the Department’s Child Protection Guidelines for Primary Schools. Evidence was provided to show that these
The quality of teaching and learning in this school is very good. Lessons are carefully structured and a variety of effective methodologies skilfully used. The competent use of information and communication technology (ICT) as a teaching resource is praiseworthy. To optimise pupils' learning, it is recommended that less emphasis be placed on the use of text books. A greater balance between knowledge, skill and attitudinal development should be promoted. A range of assessment modes are used to good effect. While teachers monitor learning, a more consistent whole-school approach to devising formative and summative assessment strategies should be adopted. Further analysis of assessment results and tracking of pupils' progress would gainfully inform teaching and learning. The use of diagnostic testing should also be extended.

Cothaitear dearadh dearfach i leith na Gaeilge. Forbraítear scil na héisteachta go cuí agus múintear réimse leathan rann agus dánta go tairbheach i gcuid mhaithe de na ranganna. Chun cur leis an dea-shaothar seo, b’fhíuí cur chuíge uile-scoile a aontú maidir le feidhm na scéalaiochta i bhfoighlaim agus i saibhriú na teanga. Chuige sin, moltar réimse níos leithne de leabhair scéalaiochta agus ábhar breise léitheoireachta a sholáthar. Léiríonn na daltaí cumas maith tuisceana. Múintear foclóir agus ionchur teanga cuí. Tá sé ar chumas roinnt daltaí abairtí a structúrú go cruinn ach b’fhíuí anois breis deiseanna a chruthú dóibh chun an teanga a chleachtaidh i gcomhthéacsanna cumarsáideacha. Léann na daltaí le cruinneas agus le dea-fhoghraíocht. Léiríonn siad tuiscint mhaith ar an ábhar léitheoireachta. Moltar, anois, eispéireas níos leithne le léitheoireachta a chur i gsholáthar. Scriobhann na daltaí tácaid maraon le cleachtai feidhmíula go rialta. Cleachtar scríbhneoireachta phearsanta ach tá gá le tuilleadh forbartha a dhéanamh ar an ngné foghlama seo.

A positive attitude to Irish is promoted. Listening skills are purposefully developed and a wide range of rhyme and poetry is beneficially taught in most classes. To extend this good practice, the importance of story in the acquisition and enrichment of language should be considered at a whole-school level. To this end, a wider range of story books and other suitable reading material should be provided. Pupils display a good understanding of language. Appropriate vocabulary and language input is taught. Some pupils have mastered good sentence structure. It is advised that every opportunity be presented to pupils to practise the language in a communicative context. Pupils read with accuracy, good pronunciation and understanding. A wider reading experience is recommended. Pupils are enabled to write functional and creative texts. They engage in some personal writing activities but would benefit from further development of independent writing skills.

The quality of teaching and learning in English is good. Pupils’ oral language skills are conscientiously progressed through a discrete oral language programme. Additional opportunities to engage in sustained talk and discussion should be provided. Pupils' appreciation of poetry is actively nurtured in some classes. The skilful development of pupils' phonological and phonemic awareness is highly praised. Reading skills are successfully developed and the majority of pupils read accurately and fluently. In general, however, reading material is not sufficiently differentiated within classes to meet pupils’ learning needs. It is now recommended that a wider range of reading material be
employed to ensure that all pupils be appropriately challenged at a level commensurate with their ability. Pupils are gainfully exposed to a wide range of genres. Further opportunities to write creatively, to engage in collaborative writing activities and to utilise a wider variety of presentation styles would enhance pupils’ writing skills.

- The quality of teaching and learning in Mathematics is very good and pupil achievement is very high. Mathematical concepts are well developed and all activities are successfully underpinned by purposeful use of concrete materials. The acquisition of additional mathematical equipment for some classrooms would further consolidate learning. Oral mathematical activity is a regular feature of lessons and pupils’ computational ability is incrementally developed. It is recommended that further emphasis be placed on the development of pupils’ mathematical skills with emphasis on talk and discussion.

- The quality of teaching and learning in Social Personal and Health Education (SPHE) is very good. The principles of the SPHE curriculum are promoted through a very positive school climate. Lessons are approached in a cross-curricular manner drawing on a range of specific programmes. In the further development of SPHE, it is recommended that the strand Myself and the wider world be given greater attention. Pupils are to be commended on their successful engagement with the Green Schools Initiative and with the Junior Entrepreneur Programme. To enhance such endeavours, the school might consider establishing a school council to further develop pupils’ decision-making and communication skills.

6. Quality of Support for Pupils

- The school currently has the services of four support teachers. Purposeful individual and group learning plans are carefully prepared. In general, learning targets are identified and reviewed periodically. However, tracking and recording of pupil progress should be further advanced. In-class support is commendably provided. To ensure that maximum benefit is derived from all in-class support, agreed outcomes of learning should be identified and formal opportunities for collaboration between mainstream class teachers and support teachers be facilitated. The work of the special needs assistants (SNAs) is highly commendable and they are acknowledged for their valued assistance.

- Support for pupils who are learning English as an additional language (EAL) is delivered effectively and in a purposeful interactive manner. Planning and recording of pupils’ progress is comprehensive. Active learning approaches are employed effectively. Regular testing of pupil progress is a notable feature of the programme.

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