

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

**Whole School Evaluation
REPORT**

**Tralee Educate Together Primary School
Uimhir rolla: 20158A**

Date of inspection: 19 September 2013



1. Introduction

Tralee Educate Together primary school is situated in Tralee town in temporary rented accommodation. It is a multi-denominational, co-education school under the patronage of Educate Together.

The school receives additional funding, staffing and support under the Department of Education and Skills' *Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (Deis) Urban Band 2* programme. It has an enrolment of eighty-eight pupils. Enrolments have decreased significantly in recent years. The board of management of the school 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.

2. Summary of Findings and Recommendations for Further Development

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

- The parent association is involved in many aspects of school life.
- In general, early intervention programmes are appropriately implemented and support for pupils with special educational needs is good.
- Pupils are courteous and well behaved. They co-operate willingly with their teachers and are eager to learn.
- Staff displays a willingness and a capacity to implement school improvement initiatives.

The following **main recommendations** are made:

- Bearing in mind the difficulties being encountered by the school at present, especially in relation to its general management and functioning, the board should consult with the patron in relation to accessing appropriate external support, facilitation and management advice to enable the school address identified priorities and improve internal modes of working.
- The board of management should ensure accounts are maintained in accordance with best practice and are independently certified annually.
- The school requires more effective leadership in monitoring and implementing the curriculum to ensure the learning needs of pupils are addressed and the standards of pupils' attainment are raised significantly.
- A whole-school plan for all subject areas should be drafted and implemented, following ratification by the board.
- School register (Clár Leabhar) and daily attendance register (Leabhar Tinrimh) should be completed as per Department rules.
- A greater balance between in-class support and the withdrawal of pupils with special educational needs should be achieved.

3. Quality of School Management

- The board of management meets monthly and maintains comprehensive minutes. The board has seven members at present. It is recommended that, in conjunction with the patron, an eighth member is appointed to ensure membership is in keeping with Department regulations. A financial report is provided at most meetings. While good progress has been made in the management and presentation of school accounts, it is recommended that the board ensures accounts are independently certified annually, in accordance with the Education Act (1998). The chairperson meets with the principal regularly to discuss school issues. It is recommended that the board develops a strategic plan to address the future accommodation needs of the school. Bearing in mind the difficulties being encountered by the school at present, especially in relation to its general management and functioning, the board should review its role and responsibilities as set out in the Education Act (1998) to ensure effective management and leadership for the school.
- The in-school management (ISM) team consists of the principal, deputy principal and three special-duties teachers. The school lacks the necessary cohesion and leadership required for effective school management. It is strongly recommended that the board of management addresses this matter without delay. In this regard, it is recommended that the board consults with the patron in relation to accessing appropriate external support, facilitation and management advice to enable the school improve leadership and management at the school. The school register (clár leabhar) and daily attendance register are not completed in accordance with Department rules. It is recommended that these official registers be completed correctly and in a timely fashion. Although appropriate duties are assigned to post holders, these need to be formalised and reviewed on a regular basis. In-school management team meetings take place as part of staff meetings and informally between individual members. It is recommended that the role of the in-school management team be further developed, in a formal, cohesive manner, particularly in the area of collaborative curriculum leadership. Regular formal meetings will assist in achieving this objective. At present excessive duties have been attached to the post of deputy principal.
- In general, adequate teaching and learning resources, including technology, are effectively utilised to implement the curriculum in the subject areas observed. Some remedial work has been carried out on the building in recent times by the landlord. The contribution of the school secretary to the work of the school is acknowledged. Effective structures should be put in place for mentoring new staff and supporting existing members of staff.
- The management of pupils is good. They were supervised in the playground at all times during the evaluation. Pupils are courteous and co-operate willingly with their teachers. A student council provides pupils with opportunities to actively input into many aspects of school life. Respondents to Department questionnaires stated that they feel safe in school and that they know the school rules.
- An active parents association strongly supports the school. Its main function is fund-raising and supporting extra-curricular activities. It also inputs into policy development. The association would benefit from accessing training opportunities provided by the National Parents' Council (Primary). Parent representatives, at a meeting with the inspector, stated they were satisfied with the standard of education at the school. Results of questionnaires to parents support this view generally. Communication at the school requires development. To this end, a policy has been drafted and has been circulated to

relevant stakeholders for submissions. This policy, on ratification, should be implemented in full and without delay.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- There is a variety of curricular and administrative plans available. However there is no whole-school plan for Visual Arts or for Physical Education. It is recommended that this matter be addressed without further delay. Some plans have been reviewed and ratified in recent times. All relevant stakeholders are provided with opportunities to input into policy development. A school self-evaluation report has been drafted and oral language development has been identified as a priority. A school improvement plan has yet to be devised based on the aforementioned report. The whole-school plan should inform teacher planning more clearly to guide practice in the classroom
- All teachers provide appropriate planning documents. Most teachers provide monthly progress reports. A variety of practices exist in these documents. It is advised that a common approach be implemented to ensure progress reports are consistently provided and to promote continuity and progression of learning activities. Specific objectives should be recorded in planning documents to guide effective learning activities. Specific planning for differentiation is required also to help support individual pupils' learning needs.
- Confirmation was provided that the board of management has formally adopted the *Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools* without modification, however no child protection report is provided at board meetings in compliance with section 3.3 of the aforementioned procedures. It is strongly recommended that the procedures outlined in the procedures be fully implemented.

5. Quality of Teaching, Learning and Pupil Achievement

- Tá caighdeán Gaeilge na ndaltaí lag i gcoitinne. Léiríonn daltaí easpa tuisceanna ar an teanga agus níl ar a gcumas abairtí aoisoiriúnach a struchtúró go cruinn. Moltar an cur chuige cumarsáide a fhorbairt a thuilleadh ar bhonn uile-scoile chun scileanna labhartha na ndaltaí sa teanga a fhorbairt. B'fhiú go mór clár struchtúra a leagan amach chun foghlaim na teanga a fhorbairt. Baintear leas fóna as rannta agus dánta i roinnt ranganna. Moltar an dea-chleachtas seo a leathnú ar bhonn uile-scoile. Is scríbhneoireacht fheidhmiúil don chuid is mó a chleachtar. Tá caighdeán na scríbhneoireachta cruthaithí an-lag. Moltar deiseanna rialta struchtúra scríbhneoireachta cruthaithí a sholáthair so dhaltaí. B'fhiú go mór measúnú foirimiúil, caighdeánach a chur i bhfeidhm chun dul chun cinn na ndaltaí a mheas.
- *[The standard of pupils' Irish is weak generally. Pupils display a lack of understanding of the language and they are unable to structure age-appropriate sentences correctly. It is recommended that the communicative approach be developed further on a whole-school basis to develop pupils' speaking skills. It would be beneficial to develop a structured programme on a whole-school basis to develop learning in the language. Rhymes and poems are well used in some classes. It is recommended that this good practice be extended on a whole school basis. Pupils regularly engage in functional writing activities. The standard of creative writing is very poor. It is recommended that pupils be provided with regular structured opportunities to engage in creative writing activities. It would be most beneficial if a formal, standardised assessment of pupil progress be implemented.]*
- Pupils' reading standards vary considerably and standardised test results indicate that the standard of English requires significant development. Some good quality teaching was observed in English in some class settings. An examination of monthly progress

reports show that not all classes engage in regular discrete oral language lessons, with one class group not receiving any lessons in this aspect of the curriculum. It is recommended that regular discrete oral language lessons are taught, throughout the school, with a clear focus on vocabulary development. Poetry is not a regular feature of pupils' learning in some classes. It is recommended that this deficit be addressed on a whole school basis. A graded reading scheme is appropriately used throughout the school. Pupils' comprehension skills in reading require development also. The standard of handwriting is very poor, in general, and requires a whole-school approach to significantly improve standards. The standard of creative writing is poor and requires significant development. To develop these skills it is recommended that an integrated language approach be implemented in a structured whole-school manner.

- The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in Mathematics is good. Results of standardised tests concur with this finding. Concrete materials and information and communication technologies (ICT) are regular features of lessons. Some lessons observed were linked to pupils' environment to explain and consolidate concepts. Calculators are rarely used.
- Lessons observed in Physical Education were generally well organised. All pupils were engaged in activities including pupils with special educational needs. The school does not have access to a general purpose room for physical education lessons therefore lessons take place in the playground, weather permitting. A review of the teachers' monthly progress reports indicates a broad range of activities are engaged in throughout the year, including games, dance, athletics and aquatics.
- Some good lessons were observed during the evaluation. It is recommended that the good practice and wide variety of approaches observed in those classrooms be extended on a whole-school basis. An over-reliance on textbooks is a feature in some settings. A greater emphasis is required on: whole-school approaches; effective use of the whole-school plan to inform teaching methodologies; continuity and progression; and differentiated activities to address pupils' individual learning needs. The development of effective classroom management skills, in some instances, will assist in supporting pupils' learning experiences.

6. Quality of Support for Pupils

- Two teachers provide support for pupils with special educational needs. In general, this support is provided on a withdrawal basis. Lessons observed were effective and based on the learning needs of pupils. Pupils are progressing appropriately and commensurate with their abilities and needs. A greater balance should be ensured between in-class support and withdrawal of pupils. Individual education plans (IEPs) are devised collaboratively. More specific targets-setting in these plans would benefit pupils' learning. *Reading Recovery* is effectively used in some instances. To further enhance the delivery of special educational needs support, it is recommended that the team meets on a regular basis to review and plan collaboratively. A special-needs assistant gives effective support to pupils and works collaboratively with teachers.
- A variety of diagnostic assessment tools are utilised to assess pupils' learning needs. Regular assessment of learning takes place using standardised tests, teacher designed tasks and tests and teacher observation. Suitable monitoring of written work takes place regularly. To enhance current practice, it is recommended that teacher observation notes be maintained as outlined in the whole-school plan. Assessment for learning practices should be developed further and implemented consistently throughout the school. A

tracking system to track individual pupil's progress should be developed and implemented on a whole-school basis.

- A Home School Community Liaison teacher works effectively with parents and the whole-school community. She is based in another school and attends this school two days a week. She organises a wide variety of events for parents on a regular basis. Visits to pupils' homes take place on a frequent basis.

Appendix

School response to the report

Submitted by the Board of Management

Area 1 Observations on the content of the inspection report

The Board of Tralee Educate Together National School welcomes the opportunity offered by the Whole School Evaluation process.

During the evaluation, the Board and school did not adequately highlight the significant contribution of the Board to whole school improvement and as a result this is not apparent in the report. The Board is proactive in its objective of providing a positive learning experience to children, staff and the whole school community, despite challenging conditions.

The deficits in leadership, management and communication outlined in the report were identified by the Board prior to the WSE and determined attempts have been made to improve these areas. Deficits in communication and management were given as continuing areas of concern by the Board at the pre-evaluation meeting.

TETNS is highly heterogeneous and in keeping with the ethos of Educate Together, welcomes pupils from diverse backgrounds. The school considers this variety a significant asset and acknowledges that it requires extra creativity and resources. Over one third of the pupils come from non-English speaking multilingual homes.

The Whole School Plan acknowledges that this rich linguistic diversity needs to be considered when implementing strategies to improve standards of English and Irish. Supports will be provided to further the competence and confidence of staff when working with bi-/multi lingual learners. First Steps was implemented in all classes in 2012-13. An outcome of the School Self Evaluation was a focus on oral language in 2012-13 which was maintained in 2013-14. Numeracy will be an added focus in future years to consolidate learning in mathematics.

National standardised assessments in maths and English are used and the school will revise its evaluation policy to enable it to support teachers in raising standards of pupil attainment. Extra resources and CPD will be required as well as internal dissemination of good practice. The challenge of a common curriculum, differentiated to meet inner learning differences, in a cooperative learning environment, will be one of the main objectives of the Whole School Plan. This will involve a new balance between withdrawal and in-class support for pupils with SEN.

The Board is cognisant of deficits in internal modes of working. A Communication and Leadership survey was carried out in April 2013. As a result, a comprehensive Communication Policy was developed (ratified in December 2013) which takes account of all stakeholders within the school community. The commitment of the Patron (Educate Together) is ongoing to whole school improvement. The Patron proposes to host a meeting with PA, staff and BOM in early 2014.

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

TETNS values the whole child and each child's potential in keeping with the Learn Together Programme and its Ethical Education Curriculum. The Board of Management is now fully constituted. Enrolment has been affected by migration and the issue of feeder school access to second level schools. Suggestions re the curricular areas are noted and will be implemented incrementally. PE and Visual Arts policies have been ratified. A reconstituted Building Committee will actively research accommodation options. Accounts are maintained, are currently being certified and this will be done on an on-going basis. The School register is now following DES

guidelines. Child Protection has always been a core value within the school and this is now a standing item on Principal Teacher's report to Board as per policy.