Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Scoil Éanna
Ballybay, County Monaghan

Uimhir rolla: 20174V

Date of inspection: 26 February 2010
WHOLE-SCHOOL EVALUATION

A whole-school evaluation of Scoil Éanna was undertaken in February 2010. The evaluation covered key aspects of the work of the school in the areas of management, teaching and learning and supports for pupils. The evaluation focused on the quality of teaching and learning in English, Irish, Mathematics and Science. The representatives of the parents’ association met with the inspector. The inspector interacted with the pupils, examined pupils’ work, reviewed school planning documentation, observed teaching and learning and provided feedback to individual teachers. Following the evaluation visit, the inspector provided oral feedback on the outcomes of the evaluation to the staff and to the board of management. This report presents the findings of the evaluation and makes recommendations for improvement. 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.

INTRODUCTION – SCHOOL CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

Scoil Éanna, a co-educational Catholic primary school under the patronage of the Bishop of Clogher, opened in September 2003 as a result of an amalgamation of Saint Patrick’s Boys and Saint Brigid’s Girls national schools. It is situated in Ballybay in County Monaghan and caters for pupils from Tullycorbet parish and its environs. Its enrolment has been steadily increasing over the past number of years and is set to remain stable for the foreseeable future. The school enrolment includes pupils from different national backgrounds.

The following table provides an overview of the current enrolment and staffing in the school:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total number of pupils enrolled</th>
<th>223</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total number of teaching staff</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of teaching staff working in support teaching roles</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of mainstream classes</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of special needs assistants</td>
<td>4</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

The board of management also employs a secretary, a cleaner and a caretaker who make a valuable contribution to the work of the school.

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT

1.2 Characteristic spirit, mission or vision

Scoil Éanna promotes the ethos and characteristic spirit of the Catholic religion while respecting and accommodating pupils of diversity in culture and religion. This distinctive spirit and moral dimension permeates the core values of school life. In partnership with parents it aims to enable pupils to achieve their full potential through positive learning experiences in a well-ordered, caring and safe environment.

1.1 Board of management

The board of management is properly constituted and its members have been allocated specific tasks. It endeavours to ensure that the school complies with Department of Education and Skills
requirements. The board has a clear understanding of the school’s developmental needs and a strategic plan guides its work. Meetings of the board are convened regularly, minutes are maintained and a financial account is furnished at each meeting. It is advised that accounts be certified annually as required in Section 18 (1) of the Education Act 1998. The chairperson plays a very proactive role in the school and is a valued member of the community. The current priorities of the board of management include the development of communication modes within its community, the provision of a new playground and continued investment in school resources.

1.2 In-school management

The in-school management team comprises a principal, deputy principal and three special duties posts. The principal and deputy principal are currently in acting-up positions. Central to the acting principal’s vision is the holistic development of both pupils and staff to achieve their full potential. She is a reflective leader who is open to new ideas in the interest of school development. The promotion of a positive school climate, where there is open communication, mutual respect and collaborative decision-making, is a noteworthy feature of the school’s leadership. The acting principal maintains a welcoming and well-organised learning school environment. Administrative and organisational tasks are undertaken with care and all school records are meticulously maintained. The acting principal enjoys the full support of the teaching staff, board of management and parents.

Very good professional relationships exist between the principal and the in-school management team. Specific duties, incorporating curricular, pastoral and organisational responsibilities, have been delineated for each post which reflect current school priorities and support its efficient management. Members of the in-school management team are committed to making a genuine, contribution to the overall effectiveness and development of the school. They are very supportive of the acting principal and make a considerable contribution to the management of the school particularly in the area of instructional leadership. The in-school management team leads staff effectively in regular self-evaluation and review of practice.

1.3 Management of relationships and communication with the school community

Effective and open lines of communication are maintained within the school community. Consultation with parents is effectively facilitated. Regular dialogue is maintained with parents through written communication and the recently established school website. The issuing of a regular school newsletter would further enhance communication and share pupils’ endeavours and successes.

The parents’ association supports the school by fundraising for additional resources. In partnership with staff the association organises the after-school club and supports all school activities. Initiatives such as the homework club, the Green Schools Programme and the development of the school garden successfully involve parents in the work of the school. Parents’ representatives reported that they were satisfied with the educational provision in the school. They also commended the board of management and staff in addressing pupils’ diverse needs.

1.4 Management of pupils

The management of pupils is very good. The school staff is very committed to the general welfare of pupils and to pastoral care. Pupils demonstrate high levels of confidence, respect and self-esteem. They are eager to participate in learning activities and contribute enthusiastically to all aspects of school life. Pupil attendance is very good. The student council is well-organised and
meets after school on a fortnightly basis. Pupils reported that they appreciate their involvement in school policy and procedures and are proud of the changes to school life in which they have been involved. It is commendable that they issue a newsletter to fellow pupils and are currently developing their own blog on the school website.

2. Quality of school planning

2.1 Whole-school and classroom planning

The quality of whole-school planning is very good. All partners including pupils are involved in the whole-school planning process. Pertinent statutory policies have been devised and associated organisational procedures have been documented to support their implementation. These measures impact positively on school organisation. Curricular policies have been developed and reviewed to reflect the needs of the school. Teachers are commended for the development of a strategic plan outlining priority areas for consideration over a certain period. A clear action plan has also been formulated to address these areas.

The quality of classroom planning is very good. All teachers devise long and short-term plans to support the implementation of the curriculum. Long-term planning is set out in line with curriculum and is appropriately linked to the whole-school plan. In general short-term planning is appropriately devised. In some plans, however, it is necessary to further differentiate programmes of learning to meet the individual needs of pupils. Teachers have developed a suitable whole-school approach to recording monthly progress records.

Confirmation was provided that, in compliance with Department of Education and Skills Primary Circular 0061/2006, the board of management has formally adopted the Department’s Child Protection Guidelines for Primary Schools (Published 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_

Tá foghlaim agus teagasc na Gaeilge go maith sa scoil. Rinneadh athbhreithniú ar an bplean uile-scóil le déanaí agus is inmholta mar a cuireadh plean gnímh le chéile chun tabhairt faoi theagasc na Gaeilge a fheabhsú. Tá timpeallacht oiriúnach cruthaithe don Ghaeilge i gcuid mhaithe ranganna agus baintear feidhm chuí as raon áiseanna oiriúnacha chun tacú leis an bhfoghlaim. Is inmholta mar a bhaintear úsáid rialta as an nGaeilge neamhfhoirmiúil ar fud na scoile.

Baintear feidhm fhónta as an bhfíilíocht agus as an scéalaíocht chun suim a spreagadh agus a choinnéidh sa teanga. Eagraítear gníomhaíochtaí éisteachta go céimniúil agus léiriúonn na daltaí tuiscint mhaith ar an teanga i gcuid mhaithe ranganna. Múinteir ionchar teanga cuí i roinnt
ranganna agus déantar cleachtadh rialta ar na heiseamhláirí teanga. Tá struchtúirí theanga mhaith agus foighraíochta chrutha ag roinnt daaltaí go háirithe sna ranganna sinsearacha agus éiríonn leo iad a úsáid i gcomhthéacsanna éagsúla. Is fiú go mó r tógáil ar an obair iontach seo i ngach rang agus béim a chur ar thobarbaír na struchtúr agus na n-eiseamláirí teanga ar bhonn uile-scoilí. Is inmholta mar a bhaintear féidhmi eficeachtach as straitéisí éagsúla chun forbairt a dhéanamh ar chumas cumarsáide na ndaltaí.

Múinteann scileanna na léitheoireachta go héifeachta ch i gcuid de na ranganna. Tá sé ar chumas cuide de na daaltaí léitheoireachta Ghaeilge a dhéanamh le tuiscint, le luas agus le cruinneas áirithe. B’fhéidir a chinntiú, afach, go bhfuil na scileanna á bhforbairt go cceimniúil ag gach leibhéil agus go gcuirtear i bhfeidhm plean cinnnte do thús na liteartha. Moltar béis a chur ar mhúineadh fhogharluach na litreach agus plean fóineolaíochta uile-scoile a leagan amach agus a chur i bhfeidhm. Thabharfadh soláthar breise d’áthair léitheoireachta deiseanna do dhaltaí léitheoireacht a chlideachtadh i gcomhthéacsanna níos leithne.

Cuítear ar chumas na ndaltaí téacsanna gairidte ata bunaithe ar théamaí maraon le cleachtaí feidhmiúla as leabhair shaothair a scríobh. Déantar monatóireacht rialta ar an obair seo. I gcead de na ranganna cleachtar próiseas na scríbhneoireachta go céimniúil. Is inmholta mar a chruthaíonn na daaltaí sinsearacha leabhairní beaga do ranganna eile. Is fiú tógáil ar bhonn uile-scoile, ar na straitéisí atá á gcur i bhfeidhm sna ranganna sinsearacha chun cur le hábaltacht na ndaltaí sa scríbhneoireacht Ghaeilge.

Baintear úsáid as uirlisí éagsúla measúnaithe i nGaeilge ar nós dírbhreathnú an mhúinteora, tascanna agus trialachan a n-oidheachtaí, agus bailiúchán d’obair na ndaltaí. Moltar critéir a leagan amach ar bhonn uile-scoile don mhneasúnú ar an nGaeilge.

**Irish**

In general teaching and learning in Irish is good. The whole-school plan for Irish has been recently reviewed and the staff is commended for the action plan drafted to support the improvement of the teaching of Irish. Suitable learning environments for Irish are created in most classrooms and judicious use is made of a range of resources to support learning. It is commendable that Irish is used informally on a regular basis throughout the school.

Poetry and story are judiciously used to stimulate and maintain pupils’ interest in the language. Listening activities are systematically organised and pupils display a good understanding of the language. In many classes appropriate language input is taught and sufficient practice is given to pupils to consolidate language exemplars. Some pupils, particularly in the senior classes, have good language structure and appropriate phonemic skills and can use them in different contexts. It would be very worthwhile to build on this very good practice to develop language exemplars and structures in every class. It is commendable that effective use is made of a variety of strategies to develop pupils’ communicative abilities.

Reading skills are taught effectively in some classes. Some pupils read in Irish with understanding, fluency and a certain degree of accuracy. It is necessary to ensure, however, that reading skills are developed systematically on a whole-school basis and that a specific plan is implemented for early literacy. Emphasis should also be placed on the development of phonological and phonemic awareness for which a plan should be delineated and implemented at whole-school level. A greater variety of reading materials would afford pupils opportunities to practise reading in broader contexts.
Pupils are enabled to write short texts based on the curriculum themes and to complete functional exercises from workbooks. Work is monitored regularly. Process writing is practised in some classes and it is commendable that senior pupils create little books as reading material for younger pupils. It is advised that these effective strategies be implemented on a whole-school basis to further increase pupils’ capacity in Irish writing.

Various assessment methods are used to evaluate Irish such as teacher observation, teacher-designed tasks and collections of pupils’ work. It is advised that criteria be created for assessment in Irish on a whole-school basis.

**English**

The teaching of English is underpinned by a comprehensive whole-school plan and it is of good quality. Commendable emphasis is placed on oral language development through cross curricular work and through a range of oral language activities. Discrete oral language lessons are a feature of good practice in the majority of classrooms. In most classes, discussions are well managed and open-ended questioning techniques are employed to develop pupils’ thinking skills. Some pupils demonstrate good communication skills and confidence in oral presentations. The delineation of oral language objectives for each class level would further enhance the incremental development of pupils’ oral language competencies. Appreciation, composition and recitation of poetry are praiseworthy features of practice in many classes.

The majority of classrooms are appropriately prepared as high quality stimulating print-rich environments. A highly structured approach to the teaching of reading is adopted in junior classes including the use of large-format books, graded reading materials and a suitable phonological programme. Station-teaching effectively facilitates a focused and differentiated approach to the development of pupils’ reading skills. In the middle classes a graded class-reader is the main source of instructional reading material. A wider variety of instructional materials and reading strategies is recommended to broaden the reading experience for pupils at this level. In senior classes carefully chosen class novels and reading materials stimulate a high level of positive pupil engagement and a rich response to reading. Well-managed peer-tutoring further facilitates skill development and positive attitudes to reading. The majority of pupils achieve a very good standard in reading and this is clearly reflected in the school’s standardised assessment results.

Overall the quality of pupils’ writing is good. Pupils engage in a range of appropriate early-writing activities in the infant classes and have regular opportunities to experience the teacher model writing. Pupils in the junior classes write for a variety of purposes and their independent writing skills are suitably scaffolded. In the middle classes, pupils’ functional writing skills and penmanship are systematically developed. In the senior classes, there is an appropriate balance between functional writing and process writing. Pupils write successfully in a range of genres and can use language appropriately with very good attention to the conventions of writing. Various booklets prepared by pupils in senior classes demonstrate high standards of presentation in a range of genres. In the majority of classrooms, pupils’ writing is monitored regularly and teachers provide effective formative feedback to pupils. ICT is used successfully by the pupils in the presentation of their work. Individual writing is displayed attractively in corridors and classrooms throughout the school. Spelling strategies are taught and effectively reinforced through a multi-dimensional approach throughout the school.
3.2 Mathematics

The quality of teaching and learning in Mathematics is very good. In general pupils’ progress is commensurate with their abilities. Monthly progress records indicate that a broad and balanced programme is delivered across all strands of the mathematics curriculum with particular emphasis on number. A mathematics-rich environment is created and judicious use is made of mathematical games and ICT resources. Concrete materials are used to enhance pupils understanding of concepts in some classes. This good practice should be emulated throughout the school. Effective whole-class teaching is the primary methodology employed in the teaching and learning of Mathematics with activities differentiated for different class groupings. An appropriate focus is placed on the development of specific mathematical language in most classes. Mental calculations are an integral part of many lessons. Class discussion and appropriate learning activities are effectively used to develop pupils’ understanding of concepts and development of skills. Pupils generally demonstrate an ability to apply the concepts they have learned in real-life situations. Further development of pupils’ problem solving skills across the strands through collaborative learning activities, of open-ended mathematical investigations and of mathematics trails is advised. Mathematics is suitably integrated with other areas of the curriculum in most classes. Pupils carefully record their work and it is appropriately monitored in most instances.

3.3 Science

The quality of teaching and learning in Science is very good. The whole-school plan for Science is contextualised to the needs of the school and its effective implementation guides the delivery of a programme that is generally broad and balanced. Many classrooms feature appropriate science displays and investigation areas. Teachers skilfully employ a variety of methodologies that embrace whole-class teaching and group work. In many classrooms, there is a worthy emphasis on well-organised cooperative learning during hands-on activity and investigation. In some lessons an increased level of teacher-pupil interaction would benefit pupils’ learning.

A scientific approach is adopted to the study of living things and pupils display a very good understanding with regard to the structure and function of a variety of living organisms and life processes. Pupils are developing an informed appreciation of the school environs and the wider local natural environment. The development of a variety of trails is recommended to further guide this work. A good level of awareness and care of the environment is evident and the school is actively working towards the attainment of its first green flag within the Green Schools programme.

Pupils are acquiring a noteworthy range of science skills. In many classrooms, they enthusiastically describe investigations and demonstrate competent use and understanding of an appropriate language register. In some classrooms, pupils display a praiseworthy understanding of fair testing and its suitable application in science investigations. It is also evident that pupils are acquiring a very good awareness of the importance of science and technology in everyday life. In all classes, engagement with materials provides some opportunities for the scientific process of exploring and making. A more concerted focus on designing, making and evaluating is recommended to further develop the problem-solving approach to this aspect of the science curriculum.

A whole-school approach to pupils’ recording in Science has been developed and very good samples of pupils’ work are evident in many classrooms. A whole-school approach to the assessment of learning in Science should be developed to further monitor the implementation of
the science programme. In some classrooms, opportunities are provided for pupils to share their learning with other classes. This is highly commended.

3.4 Assessment

An appropriate range of standardised tests in literacy and numeracy is administered annually to pupils from first to sixth class. In addition the Middle Infant Screening Test (MIST) is used to identify pupils with specific learning needs at an early age. The Non-Reading Intelligence Test (NRIT) is administered in first class. A range of diagnostic tests is used by support teachers in identifying the specific learning needs of individual pupils. Teachers also employ a variety of assessment for learning strategies effectively. Senior pupils are enabled to engage in self-assessment.

Teachers maintain careful records of outcomes in all assessments and results are usefully shared between class teachers and support teachers. Assessment data are used primarily to identify pupils who may be in need of additional support. Consideration should now be given to extending the use of these data to monitor and track all pupils’ progress on an individual and on a whole-school basis. Staff might now consider extending assessment modes to include all curriculum areas in accordance with the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment’s (NCCA’s) assessment guidelines.

4. QUALITY OF SUPPORT FOR PUPILS

4.1 Pupils with special educational needs

Three full-time and three part-time support teachers provide additional support to pupils with special educational needs (SEN), to pupils with English as a second language (EAL) and to Traveller pupils. The staged approach to SEN intervention is documented in the whole-school policy. However it is recommended that further clarity be provided in relation to the implementation of stage one of this approach.

A consistent approach to the formulation of learning programmes and individual education plans (IEPs) pertains in all support settings. In this process, there is evidence of consultation with parents, classroom teachers, pupils and external agencies where appropriate. In some settings, targets should be delineated more specifically and sequentially. There is variation in the length of instructional terms and a consistent approach is recommended to meet the needs of individual pupils. There is need to clearly document the responsibilities of the class teacher, the parent and special needs assistant (SNA) within the IEP. A consistent approach to the structuring and maintenance of weekly planning and progress records is also recommended.

Stimulating learning environments are provided in the majority of support settings and a wide range of appropriate resources is used effectively to promote learning. Well-structured lessons were observed in all settings and, in the main, appropriate learning activities based on pupils’ identified needs were provided. Pupils, for the most part, experience learning in a positive and encouraging learning atmosphere. Further discussion with regard to the extension of this good practice is recommended.

In the main, supplementary teaching is provided for literacy and numeracy. Commendably, support is also provided for speech and language needs. A variety of approaches is adopted including withdrawal and effective models of targeted in-class support for literacy in the junior
classes. Well-planned Reading Recovery lessons are devised and pupils’ progress is carefully monitored and recorded. In the teaching of Mathematics in withdrawal settings there is greater need to ensure that mathematical concepts and language development are more closely aligned to individual pupil’s specific needs. In-class mathematics support is a worthwhile initiative and further collaboration between the support teacher and the classroom teacher would enhance provision for pupils.

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

The inclusive and caring climate in the school ensures that appropriate provision is made for all pupils. EAL pupils receive support on a withdrawal basis and benefit from cooperative in-class support. An appropriate attractive learning environment is created for second-language acquisition. Effective use is made of the Primary School Assessment Kit and other materials from the Integrate Ireland Language and Training (IILT) programme. Further focused short-term planning should identify specific language skills and structures to be taught. The use of running records and the creation of individual profiles using language proficiency benchmarks would contribute to the ongoing assessment of pupils’ progress in language acquisition. Structured lessons were observed during the evaluation with suitable language input taught and appropriate opportunities organised for pupils to practise the language. Pupils engaged enthusiastically in learning activities and displayed a good knowledge of English. Further strategies to facilitate pupils’ communication skills are advised.

5. CONCLUSION

The school has strengths in the following areas:

- A positive school atmosphere has been created and is characterised by openness, respect and collective responsibility for quality learning experiences for pupils.
- The commitment of the board of management and the parents’ association to the ongoing development of the school is praiseworthy.
- The teaching staff is commended for its dedication to the welfare and care of pupils.
- It is praiseworthy that teachers continuously engage in self-evaluation and review in order to evaluate the effectiveness of their practices.
- Pupils are very responsive and participate with enthusiasm in all learning activities, demonstrating an ability to work both collaboratively and independently.
- Effective methodologies contribute significantly to pupils’ good attainment levels in aspects of English, Gaeilge, Mathematics and Science.

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

- The staff should now consider a whole-school approach to assessment to track pupils’ progress in all areas of the curriculum.
- Moltar tógáil ar an obair mhaith atá déanta go nuige seo i dteagasc na Gaeilge agus forbairt chéimniúil a dhéanamh ar scileanna teanga na ndaltaí ar bhonn uile-scoile. (The good practice in the teaching of Irish should be extended on a whole-school basis to systematically develop pupils’ language skills in Irish)
- A review of how planning and progress records are structured and maintained is recommended for pupils receiving additional support.

Published November 2010
Appendix

SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

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

- The BoM of Scoil Éanna wish to acknowledge the courteous and professional manner in which both inspectors carried out this thorough and detailed evaluation.
- The BoM welcomes the strengths outlined and the affirmation of the work done by the teaching staff, support staff, pupils, parents, the school community and the BoM.
- The BoM welcome and accept the recommendations which will further enhance the school’s effectiveness.
- The BoM are particularly pleased that the report acknowledges the positive and respectful school atmosphere and the active involvement of pupils in school policy and procedures.

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

- Tá obair déanta i dteagasc na Gaeilge chun na struchtúr agus na n-eiseamláirí teanga a forbairt go céimniúil ar bhonn uile-scoile.

- Sa Phlean Gnímh 2010/11 tá foireann na scoile ag iarraidh:-
  - Straitéisí a chur i bhfeidhm chun ábaltacht sa scríbhneoireacht a chur chun cinn ar bhonn uile-scoile.
  - Plean cinnte do thús na litearthachta a chur i bhfeidhm.

- In relation to the quality of support for pupils with special educational needs:-
  - Tracking of progress has been completed in English and Mathematics across the whole school. Consideration is being given this year to assessment of progress in Irish.
  - The special education and in-school management teams will review the structure and maintenance of planning and progress records.