An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Tullamore Educate Together NS
Collins Lane, Tullamore
County Offaly
Uimhir rolla:20189L

Date of inspection: 25 March 2010
WHOLE-SCHOOL EVALUATION

A whole-school evaluation of Tullamore Educate Together National School was undertaken in March 2010. This report presents the findings of the evaluation and makes recommendations for improvement. The evaluation focused on the quality of teaching and learning in English, Irish, Mathematics and Science. The board of management of the school was given an opportunity to comment 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

Tullamore Educate Together NS was established in 2004. The school was originally located in the centre of Tullamore but moved in 2008 to new purpose-built premises about three kilometres from the town centre. The number of pupils enrolled in the school has doubled in the past two years and this rapid growth is projected to continue into the foreseeable future. English is an additional language for approximately 60% of the pupils. Most of the teachers are in the very early stages of their teaching careers.

The following table provides an overview of the enrolment and staffing in the school at the time of the evaluation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pupils enrolled in the school</td>
<td>129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainstream classes in the school</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers on the school staff</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainstream class teachers</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers working in support roles</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special-needs assistants</td>
<td>2</td>
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</tbody>
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1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT

1.1 Characteristic spirit, mission or vision

The school is under the patronage of Educate Together, the representative organisation of Educate Together schools. The school’s mission statement expresses its commitment to principles of partnership, co-operation and respect. It is evident that these principles inform the daily work of the school. In addition to the Primary School Curriculum, the school implements an ethical-education curriculum for half an hour each day. Parents who wish to organise specific doctrinal instruction in the school building outside of school hours are facilitated in doing so by the board of management.

1.2 Board of management

The board of management is properly constituted and is supportive of the principal and staff. The board meets regularly and members have availed of training that has been provided by Educate Together. There is evidence of very good communication between the board and other members of the school community. The board is to be congratulated on the successful completion of the building project and the move to the new school. The board is to be commended also on the good
work that has been done on whole-school planning since the appointment of the current principal in 2007.

The board of management was not in a position to supply financial statements at the time of the evaluation. Nor could it provide confirmation or evidence that accounts have been certified annually. It is recommended that the board manage its finances in accordance with the Education Act 1998 and the Department’s Constitution of Boards and Rules of Procedure.

1.3 In-school management
The current principal was appointed in January 2007. She demonstrates great dedication to the aims and ethos of the school. The principal’s commitment to fostering an atmosphere of mutual respect, trust and openness within the school community is particularly commendable. It is clear that she provides the direction that the school requires while also encouraging and empowering other teachers to show leadership in various areas. Since her appointment, the principal has provided necessary and effective leadership in the organisational and pastoral areas of school life. Now that the needs in those areas are being addressed, there is an opportunity to place more emphasis on leadership of teaching and learning.

It is evident from classroom observation and from examination of school policies that there is a need for the teaching staff to be given more guidance in teaching and learning, with a view to developing and consolidating good practice in all classrooms. This is especially important given the limited teaching experience of the majority of the teachers. The principal’s own considerable pedagogical expertise will be of benefit as she leads and monitors the implementation of revised curricular policies, with a view to ensuring continuity and progression in the pupils’ learning.

At the time of the evaluation, the school principal was teaching in a special-education setting. It is recommended that the school adhere to Department circular 07/03 with regard to the assignment of special-education posts.

There is evidence of very good communication and co-operation between the principal and deputy principal, who is the only other member of the in-school-management team. The deputy principal is very supportive of the principal and shares her commitment to the philosophy and aims of the school. Among other things, she is responsible for co-ordinating the regular staff meetings that take place. The school plan includes a description of the duties attached to the post of deputy principal. It is recommended that this post description be revised so that it identifies the curricular area(s) in which provision is to be co-ordinated by the deputy principal.

1.4 Management of relationships and communication with the school community
The management of relationships and communication with the school community is very good.

The school provides information to parents on their children’s progress at school through annual parent-teacher meetings and a written end-of-year report. There is evidence of effective ongoing communication during the school year. Monthly newsletters and a school website are used for general communication with parents and the wider community.

The school parents’ association, which is affiliated to the National Parents Council (Primary), was established in June 2007. There are two committee meetings each term and the officers of the parents’ association meet the principal every two weeks. The association’s annual general meeting includes a statement of accounts and an address by the chairperson of the school’s board of management. The officers of the association are given drafts of school policies for their views before the policies are ratified by the board of management.
Overall, it is clear that this is a particularly active, well-informed parents’ association, which makes a very important contribution to the operation of the school. The association co-ordinated and subsidised school transport for a period following the move to the new school premises and it currently co-ordinates the supervision of religious instruction after school. The association assists in the organisation of certain co-curricular and extra-curricular activities, including book fairs, drama workshops and school plays. It also organises a wide range of social and fundraising activities. The parents’ association has set up a subcommittee to support the use of information and communication technology (ICT) in the school.

At a meeting with the inspector, arranged as part of the evaluation, the officers of the parents’ association expressed a high level of satisfaction with the work of the school. It was reported that parents are particularly happy with the ethos, atmosphere and environment of the school.

1.5 Management of pupils
Overall, the management of pupils in this school is good. There is a strong emphasis in the school’s policy and practice on the social and personal development of the pupils. The school’s code of behaviour is stated in commendably positive terms and there is also a very good policy with regard to the prevention of bullying. A ‘friendship tree’ in the recreation area provides a focus for the development of a supportive ethos between pupils.

2. Quality of School Planning

2.1 Whole-school and classroom planning
The quality of the whole-school planning process is very good. There is exemplary collaboration and consultation within the school community in the formulation and review of policies. Teachers, parents and board members have appropriate roles in this process. An impressive suite of policies has been produced in the three years since the appointment of the current principal teacher. These are divided into organisational and curricular policies.

The overall quality of the organisational policies that have been produced is very good. As well as policies mentioned elsewhere in this report, the school’s critical-incident policy and its policies regarding health and safety, anti-harassment and staff welfare are particularly good. The need to amend the enrolment policy and the need to adopt an agreed procedure for dealing with parental complaints were discussed at the post-evaluation meeting.

The quality of whole-school curricular policies is fair. Aspects of some policies, including English reading, English poetry and Science, are very good. The plans for other areas, however, are often not specific enough to be useful. It is recommended that the school produce clear whole-school plans that provide appropriate guidance and direction for teachers in each subject. This would enable the school to provide a broad, balanced programme for pupils in every class and ensure that the pupils would experience continuity and progression in their learning as they move from one class teacher to another. In the short-term, the school should agree interim policy statements that would provide greater consistency in teaching and learning throughout the school.

The quality of the planning done by individual teachers varies considerably from one classroom to another. In some classrooms, there were broad long-term plans that set out clearly the sequence in which content was to be taught, and how that content was to be differentiated to cater for the different learning and language needs in the class. Short-term planning in these classrooms included specific learning outcomes. The quality of the planning in these classrooms was
reflected in effective teaching and learning. In order to build upon this existing good practice, it is recommended that the teaching staff agree and implement a common approach to classroom planning and that this be adopted as a whole-school policy in the school plan. It is recommended that the weekly timetable in each classroom be in accordance with the Department’s recommended minimum weekly time allocations, as stated in Primary School Curriculum: Introduction, page 70.

2.2 Child protection policy and procedures
Confirmation was provided that, in compliance with Department of Education and Science Primary Circular 0061/2006, the board of management has formally adopted the Child Protection Guidelines for Primary Schools (Department of Education and Science, September 2001). Confirmation was also provided that these child protection procedures have been brought to the attention of management, school staff and parents; that a copy of the procedures has been provided to all staff (including all new staff); and that management has ensured that all staff are familiar with the procedures to be followed. A designated liaison person (DLP) and a deputy DLP have been appointed in line with the requirements of the guidelines. It is recommended that the child-protection policy statement be updated to reflect a recent personnel change in the position of deputy DLP.

3. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

3.1 Language
Gaeilge

Irish
Overall the teaching of Irish in this school is good. The approach that is taken to the pre-communicative phase of the learning is particularly effective. A good variety of printed materials is displayed in the classrooms, which supports the learning and use of the language by the pupils. Lesson content is presented effectively. Pupils are given opportunities to practise new vocabulary and language structures in pairs. There is beneficial use also of verses and songs. In some cases, speaking opportunities for pupils are not frequent enough for them to achieve suitable proficiency in spoken Irish. Individual teachers were advised in this regard. It is recommended that every teacher implement the communicative approach as it is presented in Curaclam na Bunscoile: Gaeilge – Treoirlínte do Mhúinteoirí (52-115).

English
The quality of teaching and learning in English varies from good to fair. There is evidence of good teaching in English reading and writing in a number of classes. This good practice should be consolidated and extended through the whole-school planning process. There is a need for a greater emphasis on oral-language development throughout the school.
It is recommended that the principal and teachers devise and implement a whole-school approach to oral-language development. This is necessary if the large numbers of pupils with English as an additional language (EAL) are to be enabled to engage meaningfully with the Primary School Curriculum. The whole-school approach should comprise a programme of oral-language content to be delivered through dedicated oral-language lessons, and a range of language-development strategies to be used in other subjects. These strategies should include the identification, display and consolidation of key vocabulary for each lesson. The school may find the EAL resources available at www.ppds.ie/pcsparchive useful.

The quality of teaching in English reading is good overall. There is a systematic and thorough approach to phonics. Teachers should ensure, however, that pupils with EAL have adequate receptive vocabulary before the commencement of formal literacy. This would involve an increased emphasis on oral-language development in the junior infants class in particular. Pupils would benefit also from an increased use of large-format books. All of the classrooms have an abundance of printed materials on display. It is recommended that classroom libraries be developed so that they are well stocked, attractive and accessible to all pupils.

There is evidence of very good work in English writing. The quality of the creative writing seen in the senior classes was particularly good. Pupils have developed good habits with regard to the presentation of their written work.

3.2 Mathematics
The quality of teaching and learning in Mathematics is very good in some classes. At a whole-school level, however, provision for Mathematics is fair. The good practice observed included the provision of opportunities for pupils to learn through practical activities with suitable mathematical equipment, a good emphasis on the development of mathematical vocabulary and close monitoring of the pupils’ written work. It is recommended that this practice be extended and consolidated through the whole-school planning process.

During the evaluation, the pupils responded well to questioning in some areas, especially the strand Shape and space. Responses were not as good, however, in the strand Number. There is evidence of a need for an increased whole-school focus on the development of numeracy. This would include the provision of further guidance for teachers in this area.

The school’s records of pupils’ performance in the most recently administered standardised attainment tests in Mathematics show that a disproportionate number of pupils are scoring poorly in the test. There is a recommendation in this regard in section 3.4 of this report.

3.3 Science
The school plan for Science is good. It is especially useful that it makes specific reference to how the local natural environment should be used as a resource for teaching and learning. The Science lessons observed during the evaluation provided opportunities for pupils to engage in practical activities and it is evident that this is an ongoing feature of practice in some classrooms. It is evident that some good work has been done on the strands Living things and Environmental awareness and care.

Classroom observation and interaction by the inspector with pupils indicate that there are weaknesses in classroom practice that affect pupils’ acquisition of knowledge and skills in Science. It is recommended that the time given to Science in every classroom be in accordance with the Department’s recommended minimum weekly time allocations. It is recommended that
there be a dedicated display area for Science in every classroom, to stimulate pupils’ curiosity and to consolidate learning. It is recommended that the staff devote a portion of a staff meeting to reviewing the extent to which current school practice accords with the *Primary School Curriculum: SESE – Science* and the accompanying *Teacher Guidelines*, especially the sections *Working scientifically* and *Designing and making*.

### 3.4 Assessment

The school administers the Middle-Infant Screening Test to all pupils and subsequently implements the Forward Together programme to support pupils in accordance with their identified needs. Standardised attainment tests are administered annually in Mathematics and English reading. It is recommended that the school collate and analyse the results of these tests over a period of several years with a view to monitoring and improving whole-school achievement and the achievement of individual pupils. A template and tutorial for this task are among the useful resources available at [www.ppds.ie](http://www.ppds.ie) under the heading ‘DEIS’.

Each teacher uses a range of checklists and teacher-designed assessment instruments in the various curricular areas. In some classes the setting of clear, measurable learning outcomes in short-term planning provides a good basis for assessment and recording in monthly progress records. It is recommended that this good practice be implemented in all classrooms.

### 4. Quality of Support for Pupils

#### 4.1 Pupils with special educational needs

Supplementary teaching is provided for certain pupils by the school’s learning-support teacher and resource teacher, both of whom are recently qualified. Each teacher provides supplementary teaching in a bright, attractive setting and fosters a positive working relationship with the target pupils. There is good use of illustrative materials and other resources that make it easier for pupils to understand and remember what is taught.

Individual or group learning programmes are provided for all pupils who are in receipt of supplementary teaching. It is recommended that the individual education plans (IEP) for pupils in receipt of resource teaching be broader in scope, to reflect the priority needs of each pupil as identified by psychologists, speech-and-language therapists, occupational therapists or other relevant professionals. It is recommended also that these professionals be consulted as necessary in the formulation of the IEP. The process is described in the National Council for Special Education’s *Guidelines on the Individual Education Plan Process*.

It is recommended that the school provide an opportunity for the learning-support and resource teachers to visit experienced teachers in similar roles in other local schools, with a view to increasing their knowledge of the range of diagnostic assessment instruments available and the variety of interventions that is possible. Useful resources in this regard are available also at [www.sess.ie](http://www.sess.ie)

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

The school has two posts for teaching English as an additional language (EAL). One of these posts is filled by two teachers who are job-sharing. There is evidence of good co-ordination among the three teachers on this team and the overall quality of the work done is good. The teachers make effective use of various resources, including the materials produced by Integrate Ireland, to develop the pupils’ language and social skills. Supplementary teaching is provided in dedicated rooms which are bright and attractive, with good displays of pupils’ work and various
illustrative materials. The sessions observed were engaging and highly interactive. Teaching was generally very purposeful. Further guidance from the principal to teachers in this area with regard to setting clear learning outcomes would improve the service provided even further.

In mainstream classes, some teachers use good cross-curricular strategies to ensure that pupils with EAL can engage meaningfully with the learning activities provided in the different curricular areas. In other cases, however, it is clear that there is not sufficient cognisance taken of pupils’ language needs. There is a recommendation in this regard in section 3.1 of this report.

5. CONCLUSION

The school has strengths in the following areas.
• The quality of the whole-school-planning process is very good.
• The overall quality of the school’s organisational plans is very good.
• The quality of relationships and communication with the school community is very good.
• The school has benefited from very good leadership in the organisational and pastoral areas since the appointment of the current principal.
• The teachers show great commitment to the aims and ethos of the school and a commendable openness to professional development.
• The quality of the school building and recreation area is very good.
• The high priority accorded to pastoral issues in the school and to the pupils’ ethical development has a positive impact on school life.

The following key recommendations are made in order to further improve the quality of education provided by the school.
• It is recommended that the board manage its finances in accordance with the Education Act 1998 and the Department’s Constitution of Boards and Rules of Procedure.
• It is recommended that the school adhere to Department circular 07/03 with regard to the assignment of special-education posts.
• It is recommended that the teaching staff be given more guidance in teaching and learning, with a view to developing and consolidating good practice in all classrooms.
• It is recommended that the principal and teachers devise and implement a whole-school approach to oral-language development. This is necessary if the large numbers of pupils with English as an additional language (EAL) are to be enabled to engage meaningfully with the Primary School Curriculum.
• It is recommended that the school collate and analyse the results of standardised attainment tests over a period of several years with a view to monitoring and improving whole-school achievement and the achievement of individual pupils.

Post-evaluation meetings were held with the staff and the board of management, during which the draft findings and recommendations of the evaluation were presented and discussed.

Published, February 2011
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 Management would like to emphasise that Tullamore Educate Together NS is a developing school and this is the school’s first inspection since its inception in 2004. The Board is pleased that cognisance was taken of the following facts.

- The current Principal joined the school in 2007
- The enrolment has more than doubled in that time
- The school moved from temporary accommodation to permanent accommodation in 2008
- Six of the teachers involved in the WSE process joined the school in September 2009 and are in the early stages of their careers

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 had the accounts for 2008/09 and 2009/10 certified in accordance with the Education Act 1998 and the Department’s Constitution of Board’s and Rules of Procedure.

The key recommendations of the WSE are already being acted upon. Progress will be monitored as part of our yearly action plan for 2010/11 and thereafter.