

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**

**Department of Education and Skills**

**Whole School Evaluation  
REPORT**

**Kilcolgan Educate Together National School  
Colgan Court, Kilcolgan, Co. Galway  
Uimhir rolla: 20326S**

**Date of inspection: 30 January 2013**



## 1. Introduction

Kilcolgan Educate Together NS is a multi-denominational, six teacher mainstream school under the patronage of *Educate Together*. The school was established in 2008 with an initial enrolment of 20 pupils. A steady increase in pupil numbers since then has led to the current enrolment of 153. While the attendance of the majority of pupils is very good, a small number of pupils are absent for extended intervals. The school should continue to explore strategies to increase the average levels of annual attendance.

This whole-school evaluation focused on the quality of teaching and learning in Irish, English, 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.

## 2. Summary of Findings and Recommendations for Further Development

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

- Teachers implement a commendable range of methodologies and approaches in their teaching. In the majority of settings, the quality of teaching and learning ranged from good to very good. Instances of excellent practice were also observed.
- In English, many of the pupils achieve very high standards, particularly in reading and oral language.
- Commendable progress has been made in the use of information and communications technology (ICT) as a teaching tool.
- Strong, proactive and dynamic leadership is provided by the school principal. The board of management also contributes very significantly to the school's overall performance.
- There is a marked culture of collegiality in the school. This has led to a sharing and development of expertise, which has contributed to the successful implementation of a range of effective initiatives and programmes.
- The active participation of parents in the provision of additional learning experiences for pupils is encouraged and facilitated.
- Pupils' behaviour, attitude, and engagement in the learning process are excellent.

The following **main recommendations** are made:

- The steps being taken to provide additional accommodation for the projected increase in enrolment are acknowledged. However, in the shorter term, the board needs to provide more suitable accommodation for pupils who require additional support.
- The current practices in outlining and monitoring targets for pupils who receive learning support and supplementary teaching should be reviewed and improved.
- Sa Ghaeilge, tá gá le tuilleadh béime a leagan ar fhorbairt na scileanna éisteachta agus ar úsáid na Gaeilge mar theanga gnáthchumarsáide laethúil. *In Irish there is need for*

<i>greater emphasis to be placed on the teaching of listening skills and on the use of Irish as an informal means of daily communication.</i>
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### **3. Quality of School Management**

- The board operates very effectively. Frequent meetings are held in which decisions are carefully recorded. Follow through on these decisions is accorded high priority. School accounts are carefully managed, certified and reported annually to parents. The chairperson of the board is proactive and has a close involvement in the day-to-day running of the school. The division of tasks and responsibilities among board members is clearly delineated. This allows the principal to focus primarily on curriculum leadership. At present the work of the board is dominated by issues relating to the current school accommodation and the future provision of permanent premises. The board's efforts in this regard are acknowledged. However, in the shorter term, steps need to be taken to improve the accommodation and resources available for pupils who require additional support.
- The principal is a strong, effective leader who exercises sound judgements in a measured fashion. Her strengths in building a united and focussed team are commendable and most noteworthy. The principal is well supported by the deputy principal who manages a range of tasks capably. The willingness of staff members to undertake additional responsibilities and to share in leadership tasks contributes greatly to the effective running of the school.
- Attractive learning environments, with ample displays of supportive materials, are a feature of the mainstream class settings. Commendable efforts have been made by the board and the teachers to acquire high-quality resources. There has been considerable expenditure on these resources, as exemplified by the purchase of a suite of tablet computers. The physical restrictions of the building and school grounds are notable. Play space for pupils is very limited. Parking arrangements pose some difficulties but these are well managed.
- The parents' association is actively involved in a broad range of school activities, including fundraising, social events, art, music, drama, the teaching of French, and the organisation of various workshops. The association communicates very effectively with the principal and with the general body of parents. The analysis of parents' questionnaires indicates that the vast majority of parents feel that the school regularly seeks their views on school matters. The analysis also indicates very high levels of satisfaction with parent teacher meetings and with overall school performance. The school has piloted pupil-led conferences as an innovative means of celebrating pupil achievements and sharing pupil progress with parents. Records of these conferences are compiled in pupil assessment portfolios along with goal-setting for future learning.
- The quality of pupil management is very good; teachers are particularly affirming of pupils and consistently draw attention to positive behaviour. The students' council provides a useful vehicle for training in citizenship. The members of the council were highly articulate when interviewed, and represented the views of their peers in an admirable fashion. Questionnaire responses indicate that a high percentage of pupils enjoy learning and have a positive attitude towards their work in Mathematics especially.

### **4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation**

- Significant policy development has taken place since the school was established. Both curriculum and organisational policies are carefully considered prior to ratification and

there is evidence to suggest that this work is collaborative and inclusive. Parents, teachers and the board engage in a process of annual review of the school's work. The principal also holds annual review meetings with all staff members.

- The staff and the board of management have engaged in a process of strategic planning and this experience will now prove invaluable as the partners progress the school self - evaluation initiative. Success has already been achieved in implementing various initiatives such as the exploration of writing genres and the integration of ICT across the curriculum. Closer monitoring needs to be undertaken to ensure that plans are regularly evaluated to determine their effectiveness in improving the quality of teaching and learning.
- Pupils' progress in Mathematics, English and Irish, as measured on standardised tests, is recorded for the whole-school. Assessment data are analysed and this information is constructively used to determine strengths and areas for improvement on a whole-school basis. There is scope for some of the whole-school assessment data to be further interrogated and the tracking of individual pupils' progress merits additional refinement.
- The quality of teachers' planning is good overall. Teachers approach this aspect of their work conscientiously. All teachers devise long-term and short-term plans and monthly progress reports. The school has devised agreed approaches to planning. The use of yearly planning grids and clear records of teacher reflection are positive features but these merit extension. For the most part, specific curriculum objectives are addressed in teachers' classroom planning. There is evidence that these plans have a positive impact on teaching and learning.
- Confirmation was provided that the board of management has formally adopted the *Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools* without modification and that the school is compliant with the requirements of the *Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools*.

## 5. Quality of Teaching, Learning and Pupil Achievement

- The quality of the lessons observed during the evaluation ranged from good to excellent. The use of ICT, station teaching, group work and in-class support are well established features of practice. Comprehensive strategies are in place to assess pupils' learning and the school is advised to make greater use of assessment data to further inform teaching and learning. The school has made considerable progress in broadening the range of assessment practices in place. This includes pupil-led assessment culminating in pupil-led conferences; this work is highly effective in placing the pupils at the centre of the learning experience and in identifying learning targets for individual pupils. Overall, pupil outcomes in the curriculum areas evaluated are good to very good. It is recommended that further consideration be given to the presentation of work in copies.
- Tá teagasc agus foghlaim sa Ghaeilge ar chaighdeán inmholta. Ba léir gur bhain na daltaí an taitneamh agus tairbhe as ceachtanna ina ndearnadh iarrachtaí eisceachtúla na hábhair a léiriú le cruthaitheacht agus le samhlaíocht. Sa teanga ó bhéal breathnaíodh dea-úsáid rann, dánta agus amhrán, cuid acu curtha de ghlanmheabhair. I gcoitinne cuirtear na trí thréimhsí cumarsáide i bhfeidhm go tiomanta sna ceachtanna. Moltar tuilleadh béime a leagan ar fhorbairt na scileanna éisteachta agus ar úsáid na Gaeilge mar theanga gnáthchumarsáide. I ranganna áirithe úsáidtear fíor leabhair chun taithí níos leithne léitheoireachta a sholáthar do na daltaí. B'fhiú an cleachtas seo a leathnú tríd an scoil. Ar an iomlán bhí na samplaí scríbhneoireachta a rinne na daltaí i rith an mheasúnaithe go maith. Ba thairbheach anois tuilleadh béime a leagan ar an scríbhneoireacht chruthaitheach/neamhspleách i seánraí éagsúla.

- *Teaching and learning in Irish is of a praiseworthy standard. It was evident that pupils really enjoyed and benefited from lessons in which exceptional efforts were made to present the materials in a creative and imaginative manner. In oral language good use of rhymes, poems and songs was observed, some of which were memorised. In general, the three phases of the communicative approach to language acquisition are emphasized in a committed fashion in lessons. It is recommended that the development of listening skills and the use of Irish as an informal means of communication be further emphasised. In some classes real books are used to provide a broader reading experience for pupils. This practice merits wider application in the school. Overall the writing samples completed by pupils were of a good standard. A greater emphasis on creative/independent writing, in various genres, would be beneficial.*
- A high standard of teaching and learning was observed in English. Across the curriculum, pupils are given frequent opportunities to develop their competence and confidence in oral language. Pupils are expressive and confident and many of them have a broad and sophisticated vocabulary. Reading lessons are skilfully differentiated at all levels. This approach is successfully underpinned by high quality in-class support and station teaching. Aspects of programmes that effectively support the development of reading and comprehension skills are judiciously employed. Writing is very effectively taught and the work undertaken is suitably challenging. Lessons include effective exploration of linguistic features such as slogans and idiomatic language. Cursive writing is implemented at infant level. Thorough teaching is a feature of the lessons in handwriting. The majority of pupils write legibly and fluently.
- The quality of teaching and pupil achievement in Mathematics is very good overall. Pupils' outcomes in Mathematics are underpinned by regular and thorough use of very effective strategies in the teaching of number. Oral and mental maths are explored regularly, concrete materials are widely used, and the teaching of mathematical language is prioritised. Very good practical work was observed in the *measures* strand and in the teaching of fractions. In problem solving, many pupils would benefit from a more explicit emphasis on talk and discussion. This work should focus on analysing and exploring a variety of guided discovery approaches to solving problems. These approaches should allow pupils assume greater responsibility for their own learning and provide opportunities for them to present their ideas to their classmates.
- The quality of teaching and learning in Science is very good overall. School science logs and displays indicate an active and productive on-going engagement with the *Discover Primary Science and Maths* project. This ensures broad coverage of the various strands in the Science curriculum. Pupils benefit from science expertise in the local community and from parents who are invited to engage with pupils in their learning. Science skills are emphasised at each class level. ICT is very well used in the teaching of Science. Helpful presentation of audio visual materials, using tablet computers, was a feature of lessons observed. There is good emphasis on talk and discussion, the teaching of subject specific terms, and reference to pupils' experience and environment.

## 6. Quality of Support for Pupils

- Overall the provision for pupils in need of additional support is good. Three support teachers work with pupils. Two teachers are based in the school on a full-time basis and one teacher is shared with two other local schools. Support teachers and special needs assistants (SNAs) have established very positive, supportive and affirming relationships with pupils and there is effective communication with parents. A range of programmes is implemented and lessons observed were well structured and paced.

- Individual programmes of work are devised for pupils. A good emphasis is placed on incorporating the recommendations of other professionals when compiling these programmes. While priority learning needs are identified there is a need to outline more specific targets to be achieved within the instructional period. A clearer record of pupils' progress towards these targets should also be maintained. Notwithstanding the identified strengths, the limitations of the current accommodation impinge on the extent to which teachers can respond to pupils' needs. This also limits the range of activities which can be undertaken. In the short-term, there is a need for the school to address this issue.

*Published October 2013*

# **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 of Kilcolgan Educate Together National School fully embraces the findings and recommendations of our Whole School Evaluation. The school community has worked hard in creating a school where a high standard of education is delivered in an inclusive, respectful, positive and supportive environment. The Board finds the report to be affirming of the work already taking place and of the dedication and commitment of the staff, shown through a variety of initiatives in the school. We utilise internal processes for evaluation and feedback and we are delighted to have our assessment validated through the inspection. The Board wishes to thank the inspectors for their professionalism and thorough engagement with all members of our school community.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank the pupils, parents, volunteers and staff for their invaluable support and their engagement with the Board in creating a school where our young students can grow in confidence to become responsible citizens.

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

As outlined in the report, the culture of self-evaluation and planning for improvement is purposefully promoted in our school. Cognisant of this fact, the management and staff plan to use the WSE report constructively to inform the self-evaluation process currently established in Kilcolgan Educate Together National School.

The Board has engaged with senior officials in the Building Unit in the Department of Education over the past few years in the procurement of a more suitable long term premises. We are awaiting some key decisions. We have recently had a decision in relation to extending our temporary premises and have secured an extra room for LS/RT.

The LS/RT team has reviewed Individual Educational Plans and the format of these, in line with best practice and suggestions by the Inspectorate.

Táimíd ag triail clár nua sa Ghaeilge ó rang a ceathair go dtí rang a sé, le béim ar éisteacht agus labhairt. Chun tacaíocht a thabairt don éisteacht agus don labhairt tá acmhainní fíora á chur ar fail i ngach rang.

We are piloting a new Irish programme from 4<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> class with emphasis on listening and speaking skills. A number of new resources have been sourced and purchased to support listening and speaking in all classes with prime focus on authentic experiences for the children.