Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Doocharcy National School
Doocharcy, Co. Donegal
Roll number: 16837V

Date of inspection: 21 November 2011
1. Introduction

Doochary National School is a small, coeducational, Gaeltacht primary school with 22 pupils on roll. It is expected that enrolment will remain constant in the short-term. The school is under the patronage of the Bishop of Raphoe. The staff of the school is favourably disposed to the Irish language and to Irish heritage. There is a truly Irish atmosphere in the school and the language is promoted in a creditable manner as the medium of communication and instruction of the school. However, the school faces a challenge as a decline has taken place in the number of families who speak Irish in the home. The majority of the pupils start school without any knowledge of the language. The school participates in the school support programme, Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS), and in the Language Assistants Scheme which is funded by the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht. It is evident from the roll books that the pupils’ attendance at school is good. The evaluation focused on the quality of teaching and learning in Irish, English, Mathematics and Drama. 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 members of the board of management work with particular zeal and effectiveness to provide the school with innovative curriculum resources.
- The principal teacher displays very good leadership in regard to the education of the pupils.
- A wide range of good practice is to be observed throughout the school and the teaching methods that are in use are varied and effective
- Effective teaching and support are provided for pupils with additional learning needs.
- The structured and integrated use of information and communications technology for teaching and learning purposes is managed very effectively.

The following main recommendations are made:

- It is recommended that a development plan be put in place for the improvement of the accommodation with particular reference to further extending classroom space.
- It is recommended that the pupils’ communication skills in Irish be developed to a greater extent.
- It is recommended that the participation of the learning support teachers in staff meetings be promoted.
- It is recommended that a plan for e-learning be developed so that the integrated and structured use of information and communications technology across the curriculum can be set out in the school plan.
- It is recommended that the principal teacher provide the board of management with an annual report on the progress of the pupils in all areas of the curriculum.
3. Quality of School Management

- The members of the board of management work effectively on behalf of the school community. Meetings are held at regular intervals and minutes are kept. It would be of benefit to have the school accounts audited regularly. Policies that meet the statutory requirements of the Education Act have been put in place by the board. Classes for parents are provided in order to give strong support to the speaking of the Irish language in the community. It is recommended to the board that these efforts be increased in order to further strengthen this bond and to assist in maintaining Irish as the main language of the community in accordance with Section 9 of the Education Act. It is also recommended that information about the work of the board be shared with the school community as a high number of parents indicated in their responses to the questionnaires that were distributed as part of this evaluation that they lacked knowledge about the work of the board on behalf of the school.

- The principal teacher cultivates an open atmosphere in the school and she carries out her duties very well. She and the other member of in-school management focus commendable attention on the standard of education in the school and on the promotion of Irish culture, particularly in the areas of sport and music. It is recommended that the principal teacher provide the board of management with an annual report on the progress of the pupils in all areas of the curriculum.

- Significant development of the school building has taken place over a number of years but further work is required in order to increase the amount of space that is available in the classrooms. The management of teaching resources is of a high order, particularly in regard to information and communications technology and library facilities. The school succeeded in winning a prize in the tidy towns competition and this beneficial cooperation between the school and the community is worthy of praise.

- One of the school’s most distinctive qualities is the good and open lines of communication that have been built up with the school community. A number of the parents’ representatives expressed the view that the transparency and openness of the teachers are laudable. They stated that parents are welcome to express their opinions and to discuss educational matters. A formal meeting with parents to discuss their children’s progress is organised once a year. It would be of benefit to form a parents’ association, which would be affiliated to the National Parents’ Council, and to strengthen the role of parents through the whole school planning process. The majority of the parents agreed in their responses to the questionnaires that teaching in the school was good and that they were satisfied with the school.

- The management of the pupils is excellent. A pleasant learning atmosphere is cultivated and excellent discipline is implemented. Suitable responsibilities are given to pupils, for example, senior pupils organise recycling activities in order to earn a Green Flag. The organisation, Taisce, awarded the school a Green Flag for the first time in 2010. The majority of the pupils indicated in their questionnaires that they get on well with the other pupils in the school but a good number of them also indicated that the teachers do not discuss how to deal with bullying with them. It is recommended that this aspect be included when the school’s anti-bullying policy is reviewed.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- The school plan is laid out carefully. The teachers make continuous preparation for teaching that includes timetables, long-term schemes of work, short-term schemes, individual learning programmes and monthly progress records.
• 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**

• Overall, the quality of teaching and learning in Irish is good. Very skilful use is made of e-learning from the interactive white board in the senior classes where it is used to promote the discussion of themes. Good use is made of story-telling in the junior classes to enrich the pupils' language. The pupils have learned a wide range of songs, rhymes and poems. However, it is perceived that, in general, scope for the development of their communication skills and their continuous use of the language exists among the pupils. The majority of them achieve a good standard in reading and most of them comprehend the content. Writing skills are taught well by assigning the pupils a varied range of exercises. It is recommended that the school plan be reviewed with a view to developing integrated cross-curriculum themes and to using standardised strategies of assessment.

• The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in English is good. Appropriate emphasis is placed on the learning of phonics and rhymes to support early literacy skills. Beneficial use is made of class readers and class novels. Pupils display a great interest in reading and standards in reading are good. Pupils are enabled to express themselves effectively through a wide range of writing tasks. Writing is promoted across the curriculum to good effect and technology is used skilfully to promote the writing process among pupils. Teachers use formative assessment effectively to ensure that all pupils make satisfactory progress in literacy.

• The quality of teaching and learning in Mathematics is very good. A structured programme is organised with emphasis on mental work, problem solving and language development as regular practice. As Irish is not the first language of many of the pupils a bilingual approach is used skilfully to explain concepts in the higher classes. A further reason for this approach is the fact that some of the pupils go on to attend a post-primary school which is not situated in the Gaeltacht. It is recommended that self-assessment strategies be developed for Mathematics in order to extend the range of assessment strategies that are used at present.

• The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in Drama is good. Drama is successfully integrated with other curriculum subjects. Mime, role-play and creative presentation are used to develop the pupils’ imagination and self-esteem and to enable them to express their feelings. The pupils’ talents are celebrated regularly in a commendable way and they participate in national competitions in dancing and recitation.

• Overall, the quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement is good. The pupils’ skills are developed continuously while individual differences and pupils with particular needs are catered for in a commendable way. The pupils are assigned challenging tasks in the course of the project work which is organised for them. Active methodologies are also used during teaching and learning. The results of assessment show that the pupils make good progress in reading and Mathematics. It is recommended that the use of methods of team teaching be developed in the school.
6. Quality of Support for Pupils

- The quality of the teaching methods and the interventions for pupils with special educational needs is very good. The resource teacher and the learning support teacher, who are based in other schools in the area, carry out their work in a capable manner. These teachers are to be commended for the professional development in the area of special education that they have undertaken in order to enable them to meet the pupils’ needs effectively. The work of the special needs assistant is directed competently. It is recommended that care is taken to ensure that the learning support and resource teachers are informed about staff meetings, when special education issues are on the agenda, so that they can discuss the pupils’ progress formally.

- A book rental scheme is operated in the school.