

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Scoil Fhionnáin
Falcarragh, Co. Donegal

Roll number: 17704H

Date of inspection: 30 January 2013



A N R O I N N | **DEPARTMENT OF**
OIDEACHAIS | **EDUCATION**
AGUS SCILEANNA | **AND SKILLS**

1. Introduction

Scoil Fhionnáin is a co-educational Gaeltacht school under the patronage of the Bishop of Raphoe. It participates in the school support programme, Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools, and it also partakes in the Language Assistants Scheme which is funded by the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs. During the period of evaluation, two substitute teachers were employed in the school. There are 184 pupils on roll and the attendance of the majority of them is good but it is recommended that the board of management continue to develop suitable strategies to promote and sustain regular attendance throughout the school year. The school evaluation focused on the quality of teaching and learning in Irish, English, Mathematics and History. 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.

2. Summary of Findings and Recommendations for Further Development

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

- This is a co-educational Gaeltacht primary school which is functioning very effectively. A high standard of education is provided for the pupils through the medium of Irish.
- The board of management provides the school with very effective leadership.
- The principal teacher fulfils her curriculum leadership and organisational duties very capably and with notable professionalism.
- The in-school management team functions in a very beneficial manner in carrying out curriculum, administrative and pastoral care duties that respond to the needs of the school.
- Leadership in the area of support and resource teaching is highly effective.
- Overall, pupil achievement is of a high standard with particularly fruitful provision being made in Mathematics.
- A very friendly atmosphere is cultivated in the school and the quality of the relationship between parents and teachers is high.

The following **main recommendations** are made:

- It is recommended to the board of management that it continue to develop suitable strategies to promote and sustain regular pupil attendance throughout the school year.

3. Quality of School Management

- The board functions effectively in accordance with the rules of the Department of Education and Skills and its members take a very active part in managing the school. It strongly supports the promotion of the schools' ethos and culture.

- The principal teacher fulfils her curriculum leadership and organisational duties very capably. She guides teaching and learning very gainfully by carrying out her instructional leadership role in a structured and consistent manner. She sets about seeking high standards from the pupils and from the teaching staff in its entirety. The in-school management team work co-operatively to meet the current needs of the pupils and the school. The teachers attend ongoing professional development courses and they are given opportunities to gain experience in teaching a variety of classes over a period of time.
- The school's human and material resources are managed very effectively. Two special needs assistants, one full-time and one part-time, have been appointed to the school. They work diligently in helping particular pupils to take part in classroom activities and to function as independent learners. A part-time secretary provides very valuable support to the daily operation of the school. Investment in the area of information and communications technology, in developing a child-centred school library and in the provision of a range of suitable resources to support teaching and learning has been excellent. A fine school garden has been developed as well as extensive playing resources to facilitate additional curriculum activities.
- A very active parents' association is in place which fully supports the board of management and the teaching staff. The principal teacher attends its meetings to discuss the school's policies and routine activities with the members. During the evaluation, the parents on the board of management reported that they were very satisfied with the standard of education in the school, with the work of the staff and with communications between the school and the home. The responses to the questionnaires distributed to parents confirmed this view as a high number of them considered themselves to be satisfied with the school, deemed teaching and learning to be good and thought that their children were getting on well.
- A code of conduct and an anti-bullying policy are implemented effectively. School assemblies are organised and the talents and progress of the pupils are celebrated throughout the school. The pupils' responses to the questionnaires that were distributed to them showed that the majority of them feel safe and secure and that they are contented in school. Consideration should be given to the establishment of a pupil council in the school.
- Although the school is situated in the Gaeltacht, a high number of the pupils come to it from a background in which Irish is not the main language of the home. A very commendable effort has been made by the staff to meet the sociolinguistic needs and challenges that arise from such a language background in a Gaeltacht area.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- The quality of school planning is of a high standard. A wide range of administrative policies and curriculum plans have been drawn up and they give guidance to the work of the school. The process of self-evaluation is comprehensive and it impacts very well on the pupils' learning. An action plan focused on the development of numeracy skills has been prepared and many of its targets have been achieved with very good defined learning outcomes recorded. Questionnaires are distributed regularly to the teachers and the pupils seeking their opinions for inclusion when the progress of the action plan is being closely considered.

- It is evident from the planning of each individual teacher that they take the progress of the pupils into consideration very effectively. They make worthy use of the results of standardised and classroom tests as well as observation and assessment meetings to focus their classroom planning and teaching methods as necessary on the specific needs of the pupils.
- 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

- A very good standard is attained in teaching, learning and the achievements of the pupils in Irish. With the aid of the teaching programme, *Séideán Sí*, the listening, speaking, reading and writing strands are developed in an integrated manner. The pupils' ability to speak and understand the language is good. Emergent and wider reading skills are developed by providing a selection of Irish books in the classroom and school libraries. The reading ability of the majority of the pupils is of a high standard. In order to further enhance the quality of the work, it would be worth extending the practice of group reading to all classes. The standard of writing is very good and samples in the pupils' copybooks and the tasks which they completed during the evaluation show that they are given ample opportunities to write in a range of genres. Irish poetry is taught capably and it is evident that the pupils have an appreciation of it.
- The standard of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in English is very high. Phonics and phonological awareness are taught very successfully. The work under way in developing pupils' comprehension skills is highly commendable. The implementation of the *Aistear* programme is advised as it would be supportive of the pupils' emergent oral language skills. Reading and writing standards are very good. Writing activities are linked beneficially to class novels and the pupils' creative writing work is of a very high quality. The teaching of poetry is highly commendable.
- The quality of the work in Mathematics is very high and a whole school effort has taken place over the past three years to raise the standard of the pupils' learning in numeracy. Very beneficial emphasis is placed on problem solving skills and the pupils work in groups to solve problems and to put and answer challenging questions. The ability of the pupils in all sections of the school is of a high standard and the results of standardised tests verify this.
- A very high standard is achieved in teaching History right across the school. The ability and understanding of the pupils in this area of the curriculum is very good. They are motivated to work as historians and their grasp of time and chronology is developed very effectively through the use of time lines and basic historical evidence.
- Overall, the quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement is very effective. The school puts before it a vision of providing the pupils with a high standard of education. Very productive work has been carried out by the teachers in implementing the three year action plan in Mathematics. The full participation of the pupils in learning activities is cultivated through good use of motivating methods and of suitable material and technological resources.
- Very effective systems of assessment are used in the school and a start has been made on the use of pupils' self-assessment folders in some of the classes. The results of the

Drumcondra Irish Test show that the majority of the pupils scored very well in the listening and reading strands while the results of standardised tests in English and Mathematics provide confirmation that most of them have attained a very high standard.

6. Quality of Support for Pupils

- Very effective leadership is evident in the provision being made for pupils with learning and resource needs. The support team works very capably in close co-operation with the class teachers in developing learning targets. Use is made of strategies such as parallel and in-class teaching in accordance with the pupils' needs. Best practice such as early identification and early intervention are implemented and positive outcomes are evident in the pupils' progress.
- The quality of the home-school partnership proves to be very beneficial. Commendable efforts are made to nurture community involvement in the life of the school. Activities are organised for the community and pupils after school hours in joint efforts with Donegal VEC and with the HSE. A very cordial atmosphere is created in the school and the various needs of pupils who are disadvantaged are met in a very fruitful manner.
- Extensive projects have been completed to earn the school's four green flags and the work is attractively displayed throughout the school. Knowledge gained from these projects is used skilfully from time to time to enrich the learning. A very favourable link has been established with transition year students in Pobal Scoil Chloich Cheann Fhaola in order to ease the transition of pupils to second level education. A book rental scheme is operated throughout the school.

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 welcomes the WSE report and the board is very satisfied that the school is operating very effectively and that a high standard of education is provided for the pupils. The board would like to thank the inspectorate team for the report and for their professionalism throughout the WSE. The board congratulates the staff, teachers, parents and pupils for the ongoing good work in the school.

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 accepts the recommendation in relation to attendance and the school staff will continue to implement the strategies outlined by the board.

