

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**

**Department of Education and Skills**

**Whole School Evaluation  
Management, Leadership and Learning**

**REPORT**

**St Colmcille's National School  
Tulla, Ballynahown  
County Galway**

**Roll Number: 18514H**

**Date of Inspection: 14 January 2016**



**A N R O I N N | D E P A R T M E N T O F  
O I D E A C H A I S | E D U C A T I O N  
A G U S S C I L E A N N A | A N D S K I L L S  
I N S P E C T O R A T E**

## Whole-School Evaluation – Management, Leadership and Learning Report

### Introduction

St. Colmcille's National School is a Gaeltacht primary school. The school is located in Tulla, in the Cois Fharráige area, around thirty-two kilometres west of Galway City. The Roman Catholic Archbishop of Tuam is the school's patron. The school is participating in the national scheme *Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools* (DEIS) and in the *Language Assistants Scheme*.

A Whole-School Evaluation – Management, Leadership and Learning (WSE – MLL) was carried out in the school in January 2016. At the time of the evaluation there were 132 pupils, both boys and girls, enrolled in the school. This report is based on a selection of lessons observed in a range of learning settings in the school, interaction with pupils and review of their work, meetings with the principal, the in-school management team, and board and parent representatives, completed parent and pupil questionnaires, and a selection of school documents. 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.

The following are the **key findings**:

- St. Colmcille's National School is a Gaeltacht school in which the staff strongly promote the Irish language as the language of communication and teaching.
- A commendable emphasis is placed on promoting the Gaeltacht culture in the school.
- The school community provides support to the school but structures should be established to give parents a truly meaningful role in school life.
- Great care is taken with regard to pupil management and the staff promote a positive learning atmosphere in the school.
- The standard of teaching and learning is good for the most part. More emphasis should be placed on the use of differentiated strategies and the implementation of the school improvement plan should be closely monitored.
- The school has a child protection policy and it is a top priority of the newly appointed board of management to review and update that policy.

The following **main recommendations** are made:

- It is recommended that the school plan be developed further and an annual review carried out on the child protection policy.
- It is recommended that an emphasis be placed on the use of differentiated strategies to provide for pupils' individual differences.
- It would be worthwhile to encourage parents to establish a parents' association affiliated with the National Parents' Council.
- It is recommended that the leadership role of the in-school management team be developed so as to support the monitoring of the implementation of the school improvement plan.

### Findings

#### 1. Learning achievement of pupils

- The quality of learning is good overall. Pupils in most classes demonstrate good listening and communication skills. They work with confidence and enthusiasm and they gain a good understanding of what is taught. It would be advisable to specify the learning outcome across the curriculum in some of the classes.

- It is clear that the Irish language and Gaeltacht culture are greatly respected by the pupils. The vast majority of pupils are very fluent in Irish. Each class knows songs and poems and the standard of sean-nós singing is very high.
- The results of standardised tests in Irish, English and Mathematics show a wide variation in pupil achievement. Differentiation strategies should be used widely in the school in order to meet individual pupil needs. The range of assessment strategies should be extended to guide the selection of learning activities and to ensure that pupils' progress is in line with their level of ability.
- Pupils engage in reading and writing activities enthusiastically in both Irish and English. In some classes pupils write truly interesting stories with good spelling, accurate syntax and good imagination. It is recommended that a greater emphasis be placed on reading fluency and reading with appropriate expression. It would also be worthwhile to focus on the integration of work in the different curriculum areas in order to give pupils regular opportunities to practice writing in different genres in both languages.

## **2. Quality of Teaching**

- The standard of teaching is good for the most part.
- All teachers plan their work and make an effort to create a stimulating environment. In general, textbook content has a significant influence on planning. It is recommended to focus on the development of the school plan so that it can be used to guide planning, subject selection and teaching approaches, and so that textbooks are only used as a teaching support.
- The teachers work enthusiastically together and with special-needs assistants to provide for pupils with difficulties or special needs. An early intervention programme is in place and both withdrawal from class and in-class support are provided. It is recommended that individual education plans be reviewed now in order to set out specific learning goals for pupils. It would also be worthwhile to consider starting early intervention earlier and organising station work in certain classes.
- All teachers have excellent Irish, in terms of fluency, richness and accuracy. Immersion education is practised very successfully to establish Irish as the primary language of the school at an early stage. To ensure that pupils have a high standard of Irish in the future, it would be worthwhile to clearly define the language area for all classes in the school plan by setting out themes and subthemes, which include the key language requirements that support learning in other curriculum areas. It is recommended that an all-school grammar programme be agreed and taught.
- English is taught formally from senior infants onwards. It is clear in some of the classes that specific time periods are set aside for oral language teaching and that novels, in particular, are used very effectively to expand understanding and promote vocabulary. This good practice should be consolidated and an oral language programme should be set out for the school and taught consistently from class to class.
- A range of reading resources is available in the school and it is used effectively in certain classes to organise group work. This practice should be extended throughout the school to ensure that pupils in every class tackle an appropriate range of reading material in Irish and English.
- The care taken in particular classes to teach early penmanship skills, promote cursive writing and foster neatness in written work is commendable. An emphasis should be placed on a whole school basis on the need to guide pupils to record all problem solving steps in their mathematics copybooks.

### **3. Support for pupils' wellbeing**

- Great care is taken with regard to pupil management. It is a great advantage to the school that it has a fully equipped multi-sensory room and a yard with a special surface. Pupils are involved in a wide range of events, including school concerts, drama festivals and sports events.
- The school authorities confirmed that the board of management has formally adopted *the Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools*, without modification or amendment. The school has a child protection policy and it is a top priority of the newly appointed board of management to review and update that policy. The board is reminded that a report on child protection should be recorded in the minutes of all board meetings.

### **4. Leadership and Management**

- The principal works diligently to share a realistic vision for the school's development with the various parties. The principal has regular meetings with the chairman of the board of management and the teaching staff. The principal works effectively with the deputy principal, with a teacher with a post of responsibility and other staff members to administer school business. Formal meetings should be held with holders of posts of responsibility and the leadership role of the in-school management team should be further developed.
- The school has a newly appointed board of management. The board has resolved to gradually review a range of school policies, as well as play a meaningful role in the self-evaluation process. Arrangements are being made by the board to have the school's accounts certified in accordance with *Section 18 of the Education Act*.
- The board recognises the importance of managing communication with the school community. It is recommended that the board should support parents in establishing a parents' association affiliated with the *National Parents' Council*.

### **5. School self-evaluation**

- A serious effort is being made by the teaching staff to foster a culture of self-evaluation in the school. A school self-evaluation report and a school improvement plan have been developed by the staff.

### **Conclusion**

The school has good capacity to develop further due to the high level of interest and positive attitude demonstrated by the staff.