An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

SN Coill a tSidheáin,
Tourmakeady, Co. Mayo.
Roll Number: 12626L

Date of inspection: 11 May 2011
This is a translation of the original report which was written in Irish.

1. Introduction

Coill a tSidheáin National School is situated in Tourmakeady, on the shores of Lough Mask in west Mayo. The school patron is the Catholic Archbishop of Tuam. Twenty-two pupils are enrolled. Pupil numbers have been falling in recent years. This is a Gaeltacht school even though for the majority of the pupils English is their first language and they come to the school without any fluency in Irish and a significant number of them have difficulties with speech or language. This creates a challenge for the teachers to cater for the learning needs of pupils while at the same time ensuring that Irish is the language of communication in the school. 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:

- Strong relationships have been established between teachers and pupils in Scoil Náisiúnta Coill a tSidheáin
- Pupils are courteous and well mannered.
- Teachers in the school are native speakers and have beautiful Irish.
- The work of the learning support teacher is of a very high quality.
- A stimulating learning environment is created for students.

The following main recommendations are made:

- It is recommended that Irish is promoted as the first language in the school and that every subject is taught through the medium of Irish.
- The development of school leadership is recommended.
- It is recommended that every teacher promotes oral skills in English and in Irish.
- A review of the differentiation provided in mainstream classrooms for pupils with special educational needs is recommended. 
- It is recommended that the school engages in the self evaluation process.
3. Quality of School Management

- The board of management is properly constituted. Business is conducted through the medium of Irish and the board provides good support to the school. Board meetings are held once a term. It is recommended that the board holds at least five meetings per year. It is also recommended that school accounts are certified by the board.

- The quality of the work of the in-school management team is of a low standard. Although school responsibilities are discussed informally amongst the teachers no staff meetings are held. It is now recommended that these should be begun and an in-school management system, including the responsibilities of the principal, would be developed to reflect the needs of the school.

- Management of resources is good. A good number of resources are available in the school. It is recommended that staff ensures that effective use is made of these resources.

- Pupil management is good. Pupils are treated in a kind, friendly and understanding manner and are well cared for in the school. Pupils’ responses to questionnaires administered during the evaluation indicate that they like school and that pupils are well behaved. It is recognised that strategies to encourage pupils to use Irish have been implemented and that these have had some effect. It is necessary however to continue with these strategies and to build on them to ensure that Irish is used as the normal language of communication in the school.

- Parents’ representatives on the board of management praise the openness of the school. A parent-teacher meeting is held once a year. A written report on pupil progress is issued to parents on an irregular basis. However, parents’ responses to questionnaires administered during the evaluation illustrate a lack of certainty regarding the usefulness of these reports. It is recommended that these reports be issued every year, stating clearly the standards that pupils have attained. The questionnaires also indicate a lack of clarity regarding the homework policy. A review of these aspects of school life is recommended.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- The quality of the school planning process is satisfactory. Comprehensive administrative policies are available. These are written in Irish with an English version provided where necessary. Curricular plans are all based on the Primary School Curriculum and, on the whole, are of a good standard. These should now be reviewed to ensure that that they provide clear guidance to staff. It is recommended that the multiclass context is recognised in the planning. School self-evaluation procedures have not been introduced in the school as yet.

- Teachers provide short- and long-term preparation for their work and in some cases this planning is of a high standard. It would be worthwhile to adopt an agreed approach, based on the good practice existing in the school.

- A well-written individual education plan (IEP) is available for every pupil with special educational needs. These IEPs include recommendations from psychological reports as appropriate.
School authorities provided evidence that, in compliance with Primary Circular 0061/2006, the board of management has formally adopted the Department’s Child Protection Guidelines for Primary Schools. Evidence was provided to show 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.

5. Quality of Teaching, Learning and Pupil Achievement

- The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement is fair overall. A variety of teaching and learning practices are in use in different aspects of the curriculum although excessive emphasis is placed on textbooks in the senior classroom. It is recommended that a review of classroom practices be carried out and the influence of textbooks reduced. It is recommended also that the central importance of the environment and a differentiated approach be recognised in the school’s education programme.

- The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in Irish could be improved. Even though this school is located in a Gaeltacht area, Irish is not heard on the corridors or in the school yard. The teachers have beautiful Irish. A good beginning is made in the junior classroom to develop oral proficiency in Irish. Pupils are prepared to participate in drama and in general a positive attitude towards the language is fostered throughout the school. In the course of the evaluation visit pupils displayed a good understanding of the language. However, it was noted that many of the senior pupils had difficulty in writing sentences in Irish. Even though a small number of pupils read a variety of texts accurately, it was evident that many had difficulty in reading and understanding the material.

- The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in English is fair. A good emphasis is placed on the development of oral language skills in the infant and junior classes. It is recommended that this good practice now be extended across the school. Some differentiation is provided to meet individual pupils’ needs. Better collaboration between class teachers and the learning-support teacher would enhance this practice. It is recommended that more opportunities for independent writing in a greater variety of genres be provided to improve the quality of pupils’ written work.

- Pupils achieve a reasonable standard in Mathematics, as is demonstrated by the results of standardised tests and by the competence of pupils in answering questions on the topics they have studied. Some senior pupils experience difficulty in understanding basic concepts and in basic problem-solving. More emphasis on teaching mathematical terminology is required. On occasion learning tasks are adapted to pupils’ ability levels and more emphasis on this approach is recommended in order to better accommodate the diversity of pupil ability in Mathematics. In some classes, greater attention should be paid to the layout of work in copybooks.

- The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in Music is good overall. Usually the junior classroom teacher competently teaches music across the school and pupils derive both enjoyment and benefit from participating in the lessons. Good attention is paid to the three strands of the music curriculum.
• There is variation, from class to class, in the quality of teaching and learning in History. In the junior classroom effective use is made of appropriate timelines to explain the concept of chronology. Textbooks exercise a central influence on the scheme of work in the senior classroom. A greater emphasis on the more frequent use of local history resources would be worthwhile. It is recommended that vocabulary and language specific to history be taught in order to facilitate pupils to speak with assurance and confidence about historical topics.

6. Quality of Supports for Pupils

• An excellent learning support service is provided in the school. Targets with realistic time limits are recorded and these are regularly monitored and assessed. A good range of aids have been made available to support learning and a stimulating learning environment has been created.

• In-class support provision has been introduced. Where possible this good practice should now be extended in order to avoid segregation. A very effective learning programme for pupils has been developed in collaboration with parents and class teachers. It is recommended that copies of the programme be made available to parents.
Appendix

SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

Submitted by the Board of Management
Observations on the content of the school report:

1. We thought that the report was too negative, because the Board is satisfied with the work of the school and the questionnaires of the parents and pupils demonstrated this also.
2. It was not taken into consideration that 66% of the pupils in the senior room are receiving help from the learning support teacher, a factor which has greatly effected the results in Irish, English and Mathematics.
3. There were historical circumstances for the standard of Irish being low in the school. Four years ago 50% of the pupils in the junior room were attending Speech Therapy because of speech and language problems, this created significant difficulties in progressing with Irish. We are pleased that the inspector recognised that an improvement has occurred.
   All subjects are taught through Irish and Irish is the language of the school.
4. Although there were not any formal staff meetings, the school was being managed satisfactorily, policies done, lots of resources available, pupil progress discussed regularly and good communication between all members of the school community.

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

1. Irish:
   - The school staff has met with other schools to get information on strategies and good practice to strengthen Irish.
   - The school staff sought help from the PPDS cuiditheoir.
   - The school had a meeting with parents to seek help and support to strengthen Irish. They were very positive about promoting the Irish language.

2. We have commenced formal staff meetings this year.
3. The responsibilities of the teacher have been set out.
4. The oral English policy has been reviewed and we have started using the Jolly Phonics programme to develop literacy in the school.
5. There was differentiation in the school but it has been reviewed.
6. School accounts will be certified from now on.
7. The school will be undertaking more comprehensive self evaluation in the future.