An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Currane National School
Achill, Westport, County Mayo.
Uimhir rolla:16295L

Date of inspection: 10 May 2010
WHOLE-SCHOOL EVALUATION

A whole-school evaluation of Currane National School was undertaken in May 2010. This report presents the findings of the evaluation and makes recommendations for improvement. The evaluation focused on the quality of teaching and learning in English, Irish, Mathematics and Geography. 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.

INTRODUCTION – SCHOOL CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

Currane National School is a small rural school, situated on the Currane peninsula, adjacent to Achill Island. It is a Gaeltacht school, although English is the mother tongue of the majority of pupils. The majority of the families in the locality have returned from England and accordingly very little Irish is spoken in the community. This provides a challenge for teachers in catering for the learning needs of the pupils and at the same time, ensuring that Irish is the language of the school. Enrolment in the school has been decreasing over the past number of years. The school participates in Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS), part of the Department of Education and Science’s programme to alleviate educational disadvantage.

The following table provides an overview of the enrolment and staffing in the school at the time of the evaluation:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pupils enrolled in the school</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainstream classes in the school</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers on the school staff</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainstream class teachers</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers working in support roles</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special needs assistants</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT

1.1 Characteristic spirit, mission or vision

This school is under the patronage of the Catholic Archbishop of Tuam. A mission statement has not been published and there is an absence of a shared vision for the school. Although it is officially a Gaeltacht school, English is the language of communication amongst staff members. It is recommended that the school cultivates Irish as the first language of the school.

1.2 Board of management

The school does not have a properly constituted board of management. The chairperson of the board is the language assistant in the school and as such, is not eligible to sit on the board. The board meets regularly and works hard in the interests of the school and the pupils. The school is clean and well maintained and an attractive library/resource room has been recently provided. However, members of the board do not have a clear understanding of their responsibilities regarding issues such as the status of Irish in the school, staffing or teaching and learning. Consequently the board is reminded of its statutory responsibilities under the Education Act (1998) and is advised to access training to assist them in fulfilling their role effectively.
1.3 In-school management

The in-school management team consists of the principal and deputy principal. The principal, who was appointed in October 2007, is hardworking and committed to the school. She has a commendable focus on raising standards in the school and is making good strides in this regard. The immediate challenge facing the principal is the creation of a culture that is characterised by co-operation, teamwork and a commitment to ongoing school improvement. The development of Irish is also a significant challenge that needs to be addressed. It is advised that the principal seek support from the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST) to provide assistance in leading school improvement.

The role of deputy principal has not been fully developed. There are gaps in the range and balance of duties that have been assigned to the post-holder. This post needs to be reviewed in line with Circular 07/03 to ensure that the duties of the post-holder reflect the school’s current needs. The board is reminded of its responsibilities to ensure that appropriate training and support for professional development is provided to the staff.

1.4 Management of relationships and communication with the school community

Parent representatives on the board of management were interviewed as part of the evaluation process and expressed satisfaction with the quality of education provided by the school. The DEIS co-ordinator has successfully organised a range of activities that promotes parental involvement in the education of their children such as the Maths for Fun, Literacy for Fun and Science for Fun programmes. Parent-teacher meetings are held in the last term of the school year and an annual written report is issued in June. There is evidence that in some cases the school has had some difficulties in addressing parental concerns. It is advised that communication systems within the school are reviewed to ensure that such matters are addressed at the earliest opportunity.

1.5 Management of pupils

The behaviour of pupils in this school is good. It is evident from interactions with pupils during the evaluation that they are courteous and polite. Some of the pupils do not always exhibit pride in their work. The staff is advised to make a greater effort to encourage the pupils to use Irish amongst themselves in the classrooms and in the yard.

2. Quality of School Planning

2.1 Whole-school and classroom planning

Good progress has been made on the development of the school plan. It has been recently reviewed and all of the curricular plans and some of the organisational plans are available in Irish. Organisational plans are succinct, specific to the needs of the school and user-friendly. There is a need, however, to ensure that written policies are reflected in practice. Curriculum plans in Irish are clearly written with a useful emphasis on the language needs for curriculum implementation. There is a need to ensure that curricular plans reflect this school’s particular multi-grade context and assist the implementation of the curriculum at classroom level.

The quality of classroom planning is generally satisfactory. All teachers provide comprehensive written plans. In the planning at infant level greater care should be taken to ensure that curriculum content is appropriate to the needs of this age-group and that appropriate resources and methodologies are planned for. In some cases there is a need to plan for greater differentiation to ensure that individual pupil needs are met. The special-education teachers provide high quality written preparation and meticulous records are maintained of pupil progress.
2.2 Child protection policy and procedures

Confirmation was provided that, in compliance with Department of Education and Science Primary Circular 0061/2006, the board of management has formally adopted the Child Protection Guidelines for Primary Schools (Department of Education and Science, September 2001). Confirmation was also provided 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.

3. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

3.1 Language

Gaeilge

Cé gur scol Ghaeltachta í seo, is é an Béarla an t-aon teanga a bhíonn ag formhór na ndaltaí agus iad ag tosú sa scoil. Déanann na hoidí iarracht sui m sa teanga a chothú sna daltaí agus tá Gaeilge chrhuinn liofa ag na hoidí ranga. In ainneoin sin, tá caighdeán na Gaeilge lagtríd an scoil agus ní mór an Ghaeilge a chothú mar chéad teanga na scoile.

Sna ceachtanna comhrá déantar iarracht obair bheirte agus drámaíocht a úsáid mar mhodhanna múinte. Is léir afach, ó bhreathnú ar cheachtanna, nach gnách do na daltaí a dhóthain deiseanna cainte a bheith acu. Is léir freisin, ó cheistiu na ndaltaí, nach mbíonn taithí acu ar úsáid na Gaeilge mar theanga chumarsáide. Bionn deacrachtaí acu, go háirithe, le cruthú abairtí agus le húsáid na mbriathar. Tá gá le bhéim sa bhreis a chur ar an gcur chuige cumarsáideach sa Ghaeilge chun breis liofachta a chothú sna daltaí sa saor cumhrá.


Irish

Although this is a Gaeltacht school, English is the only language that most pupils have when they begin school. Teachers try to instil in pupils an interest in the language and class teachers speak Irish fluently and accurately. However, the standard of Irish is poor throughout the school and it is recommended that Irish be developed as the first language of the school.

During conversation lessons, an effort is made to use strategies such as pair work and drama as teaching methods. It is evident however, from the lessons observed, that pupils do not usually get sufficient speaking opportunities. It is evident from questioning pupils that they lack experience of using the Irish language for communication. They have particular difficulty with constructing sentences and using verbs. There is a need for greater emphasis on the communicative approach in Irish to develop greater fluency in the pupils in free conversation.

A print-rich environment is created in all of the classrooms. A good number of the pupils have achieved a reasonable standard of reading. Appropriate texts are being used to good effect throughout the school. The standard of written Irish is poor. Most of the writing activities are
based on the textbooks. There is not enough emphasis on the skill of process writing and there are not enough opportunities provided for pupils to engage in free writing. It is recommended that a comprehensive plan for process writing be implemented from the early years onwards.

**English**
The quality of teaching and learning in English varies from class to class. Some senior pupils have achieved very high standards in aspects of English. These pupils have produced very interesting creative writing samples and demonstrate very good skills in reading. The school has an attractive and well stocked library and it is evident that an emphasis is placed on reading for pleasure. Some of the older pupils demonstrate a good knowledge of genres of literature and can speak confidently about their favourite writers and genres. This good work is praised.

However, there is scope for development in the work on early literacy. There is a need to review teaching methodologies, curriculum content and early intervention strategies to ensure the early identification of literacy difficulties. The school has recently introduced a structured phonic programme in the infant classes. It is advised that this programme be extended to the junior classes also. The school is advised to implement a shared reading programme in the infant and junior classes.

At junior and infant standard the quality of pupils’ written work is fair. Some pupils in the junior room have not yet developed an appropriate pencil grip. Some of the projects, copybooks and samples on display in both classrooms indicate that a greater effort needs to be made to improve penmanship and presentation. A whole-school approach to handwriting will be effective in promoting attractively presented written work.

**3.2 Mathematics**
There is significant scope for development in the teaching and learning of Mathematics and this is reflected in recent standardised test results. It is evident from questioning the pupils that concepts that have been taught are not fully mastered. In some of the mathematics lessons observed during the course of the evaluation, appropriate use was made of concrete materials and in-class support was provided by the support teachers. However, in some cases, the mathematics lessons observed were over-reliant on whole class teaching. Some of the curriculum content delivered was not appropriate for the age group concerned. The provision of in-class support in the infant and junior classes by the support teachers is advised. This will ensure that differentiated programmes of work challenge the more able pupils and provide the necessary support for those who need it.

**3.3 Geography**
The quality of teaching and learning in Geography varies from class to class. A school plan for Geography has been written but needs to be developed. A key feature of Social Environmental and Scientific Education (SESE) in the *Primary School Curriculum (1999)* is the emphasis on developing pupils’ knowledge and understanding of their own locality and using this as a platform for study of more general historical and geographical phenomena. It is recommended that the school plan for SESE should highlight the many interesting historical and geographical features in the Achill area. Some good practice observed included the reinforcement of pupils’ knowledge through projects, the use of information and communication technology and an appropriate emphasis on the development of graphical skills. However in some cases the curriculum content being taught was not appropriate to that particular age group. An effective whole-school plan and appropriate planning and preparation at classroom level will ensure that the Geography curriculum is implemented successfully. In particular, further exploitation of the immediate environment of the school is recommended.
3.4 Assessment
A wide range of assessment methods is used to monitor the pupils’ progress. Included are standardised tests, diagnostic tests, teacher observation, checklists and tasks and tests designed by the teachers. Accurate records of results are maintained. The learning-support teacher also administers non-reading intelligence tests on the pupils. Comparison of the individual pupil’s score in this test with the score in standardised tests indicates that a significant number of pupils in this school are underachieving. It is recommended that mainstream class teachers analyse and use assessment data to assist in the provision of differentiated activities and to focus programmes of work in curricular areas on identified pupil need. It is further recommended that teachers use data collected from standardised test results as a base upon which to make decisions for improvement in regard to teaching and learning experiences. The Middle Infant Screening Test (MIST) is administered in the second term in senior infants. It is recommended that the results of this test be shared with parents at the earliest possible opportunity and that the Forward Together programme be implemented.

Learning support and resource teachers use a wide range of diagnostic assessments to monitor progress and to devise learning programmes. Records are carefully maintained and pupils are given encouraging feedback about the quality of their work.

4. Quality of Support for Pupils

4.1 Pupils with special educational needs
The special education team consists of a resource-teacher based in the school and a visiting learning-support teacher shared with other schools. Currently the resource teacher does not have any pupils on her caseload in Currane NS. The visiting learning-support teacher provides support in literacy and numeracy. He has undertaken courses of professional development which has greatly enhanced the service he provides. A start has been made on the provision of in-class support. This good practice should be extended where possible to minimise segregation and withdrawal. Very good learning programmes are devised for pupils in consultation with their parents and class teachers and copies are provided to them. Realistic time-limited targets are recorded, monitored and assessed regularly. A good range of resources to support learning has been provided and a stimulating learning environment has been created. The learning-support plan should be reviewed to ensure that it incorporates the staged approach as laid out in Circular 02/05. It is advised that the school review its current learning support/resource arrangements to ensure that the most efficient use possible is made of the supports available.

4.2 Other supports for pupils: disadvantaged, minority and other groups
Effective work is undertaken by the DEIS co-ordinator in this school. Detailed planning, preparation and progress records are maintained. The co-ordinator undertakes appropriate programmes to involve parents in the education of their children. Home visits are undertaken regularly.

5. Conclusion
The school has strengths in the following areas:

- There is a positive relationship between teachers and pupils in Currane National School.
- Pupils are courteous and polite.
- Pupils demonstrate a keen interest in reading for pleasure.
- Effective provision is made for pupils with special educational needs.
• A motivating learning environment is created for the pupils.
• The school is clean inside and outside.

The following key recommendations are made in order to further improve the quality of education provided by the school:

• It is recommended that the board of management undertake training to provide them with the necessary skills to ensure the effective governance of the school.
• It is recommended that a whole-school policy be developed to give status to the school’s recognition as a Gaeltacht school and to fulfil its obligations under Section 9 of the Education Act (1998)
• It is recommended that Irish be promoted as the first language of the school and that all subjects are taught through Irish.
• It is recommended that data collected from standardised test results be used to inform decisions for improvement in literacy and numeracy.
• It is recommended that curriculum content and delivery at infant level be fully reviewed.

Post-evaluation meetings were held with the staff and the board of management where the draft findings and recommendations of the evaluation were presented and discussed.

Published, February 2011
Appendix

School response to the report

Submitted by the Board of Management
Area 1  Observations on the content of the inspection report

The board has read the report. We acknowledge the recommendations in the report. We feel we have benefited positively from the process.

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 school has formulated a mission statement.
- The board has been reconstituted correctly.
- The Board has met with parents as regards its Gaeltacht status and has approved retention of that status.
- The recommendations as regards teaching and learning are in the process of being implemented by staff.