WHOLE SCHOOL EVALUATION

A whole-school evaluation of Scoil Naisiúnta Dhúigh was undertaken in April 2010. This report presents the findings of the evaluation and makes recommendations for improvement in the work of the school. The evaluation focused on the quality of teaching and learning in English, Irish, Mathematics and Social, Personal and Health Education. The board of management was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the report; a response was not received from the board.

INTRODUCTION – SCHOOL CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

Scoil Naisiúnta Dhúigh is a co-educational Gaeltacht school situated in the Anagaire region on the northwest coast of Donegal. The school is making excellent efforts to fulfil its duties relating to promoting Irish and culture in the school community. Most of the pupils attend an all-Irish pre-school located in the school before coming to the school. The school participates in the Department’s support programme called DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunities in Schools). There is a particular focus on attendance matters in the school and the attendance of most of the pupils is very good in general.

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

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
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<tr>
<td>Pupils enrolled in the school</td>
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<td>Mainstream classes in the school</td>
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<td>Teachers on the school staff</td>
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<td>Mainstream class teachers</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teachers working in support roles</td>
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<tr>
<td>Special needs assistants</td>
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<tr>
<td>Part-time language assistant</td>
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1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT

1.1 Characteristic spirit, mission or vision

This school is under the patronage of the Catholic Bishop of Raphoe. Though this school has a Catholic ethos, all are welcome. The school staff do their best to develop individuality, self-confidence, positive attitude, cooperation and friendship among the pupils. The management and staff of the school make every effort to establish a strong foundation in learning matters. There is a very good communications system in place in the school.

The school has attained many targets over the years in sporting and athletics activities especially. As it is a Gaeltacht school every effort is made to promote the Irish-language culture among the whole school community.

1.2 Board of management

The board takes an active part in the management of the school and it functions effectively in accordance with the Department’s rules. The chairperson provides very effective support to the school. The members have specific responsibilities and they give generously of their time for the benefit of the school. Financial matters are dealt with properly. Careful minutes are
kept of meetings. The board fulfils its obligations regarding the promotion of Irish in accordance with section 9 of the Education Act 1998. The board strongly supports the promotion of the school’s culture and ethos. The board’s priorities are to provide high-quality education to the pupils, to develop the building appropriately and to maintain a good link with the school’s community of parents.

The staff of the school present the policies and the organisational and curricular plans to the board and they are discussed and ratified. The board reviews the pupils’ progress at a board meeting at the end of the school year and arising from that the school plan is added to as necessary. The board reported that the school’s strongest features were the cooperation among the staff and the excellent support from the school’s parents.

The board of management has a continuous incremental plan for maintenance and development. The pupils have extensive playing fields and plenty of play areas and the classrooms are neat and tidy. The board has employed a person to keep the school clean and tidy and this work is done commendably well. A part-time secretary is employed and she gives excellent support to the teachers concerning administrative work and office organisation. The secretary also works as a language assistant under the Language Assistants’ Scheme, she provides support in language acquisition and enrichment for the junior and middle classes.

1.3 In-school management

There are two teachers in the in-school management team: the principal and the deputy principal. The principal was appointed at the start of the school year having functioned as the school’s deputy principal for many years. The principal works conscientiously and he fulfils his duties capably and effectively. He takes a productive leadership role in every aspect of the school’s life. He receives full cooperation from the school staff. The principal is aware of the teachers’ talents and strengths and from the start of the school year he has divided curricular and organisational duties fairly. He guides the school planning review process in an incremental and structured manner. He keeps the school records carefully. The principal ensures that the main focus is on learning and teaching in the school.

The deputy principal supports the principal productively and effectively. He fulfils curricular, administrative and pastoral duties which correspond to most of the school’s requirements. The deputy principal has particular skills and interest in computing and sport matters and he shares these skills generously with other members of the staff for the pupils’ benefit. The in-school management team readily accept their leadership responsibilities and they are commended for their efforts.

Though excellent use is made of information and communications technology (ICT) in some classes to teach aspects of the curriculum and as an aid to research in the class, it would be worth extending the best practice concerning the use of technology as a teaching resource to each room. There is computer room in the school and at least one computer in each classroom. The school’s environment has been very well developed by outlining maths trails in the schoolyard.

1.4 Management of relationships and communication with the school community

This school is a central part of the community from which it comes and has a close link and positive relationship with the various partners. Good communications are fostered with its parents via regular information leaflets. It would now be worthwhile developing a website to strengthen communications even further. The school fosters a link with the community by displaying the pupils’ creative work in the church and by taking an active part in preparation for Holy Communion and for Confirmation also. Parents take a very active part in organising
a sports day and in other cultural activities in the school. At a meeting with the inspectors during the evaluation the parents on the board reported that they were completely satisfied with the standard of education and with the communications between the school and home.

1.5 Management of pupils

Behaviour and anti-bullying codes are being implemented effectively. There is a respectful atmosphere and commendable courtesy is fostered among the staff and among the pupils and as a result the pupils are well-mannered, cooperative and keen to learn. The pupils are active in the learning and group work is fostered productively. The pupils show a great interest in learning and they undertake the schoolwork diligently. The staff are commended for the efforts made to promote a comprehensive learning environment. Certificates such as *Gaeilgeoir na Seachtaine* (Irish-speaker of the Week) and *Dalta na Seachtaine* (Pupil of the Week) are awarded to pupils in the various classes and to develop this good practice it would be worth developing an all-school assembly to celebrate the pupils’ work regularly.

2. **QUALITY OF SCHOOL PLANNING**

2.1 Whole-school and classroom planning

The quality of whole-school planning is very high. The principal provides very good leadership for the planning process. The staff have developed a work diary for administrative and curricular matters and each teacher takes a particular duty to implement the various objectives. An action plan has been prepared to recognise the school’s priorities and to guide reviews of policies. Comprehensive definite planning is available for the four subjects under assessment based appropriately on the curricular principles and on the school’s context.

A whole-school approach is in place for teacher’s planning and the quality of planning by each teacher is very high. They provide effective short-term and long-term preparation for their work. They are in accordance with the learning objectives outlined in the curriculum and directed on incremental learning and on the pupils’ learning needs. The monthly progress reports are kept carefully on a whole-school basis.

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

*An Ghaeilge*

Baineann caighdeán ard le múineadh agus le foghlaim na Gaeilge sa scoil seo. Le linn na meastóireachta chonaicnas ceachtanna den scoth i dteagasc agus i bhfoghlaim na Gaeilge. Cruthaigh an timpeallacht phhrionnta shaibhir i ngach seomra ranga. Cé nár bhf an Ghaeilge an chéad teanga do mórchuid na ndaltaí is inmholta mar a éirionn leis na hoidh a dhéanamh an teanga a
The teaching and learning of Irish is of a very high standard in this school. During the
evaluation, very good lessons in teaching and learning Irish were observed. A print-rich
environment is created in each classroom. Though Irish is not the first language for most of
the pupils the teachers succeed admirably in moulding and consolidating the language in
different contexts in the school. There is an emphasis on active listening in the junior classes.
Various appropriate strategies are used and the pupils’ vocabulary is extended through
effective use of suitable pictures and software. There is an emphasis on drama and on learning
language through story-telling and role-play. Pupils are given worthwhile opportunities to
practise the Irish they have learned and suitable situations are created for them to make real
communication. There is very good integration of lessons to give the pupils the chance to use
the new language in other subjects.

A phonological programme for Irish is followed and grammar is taught on a formal basis in
the senior classes so that the pupils have a good understanding of the syntax of the language.
The pupils in each class have a good fluency and a number of them reach a high standard of
understanding and accuracy, especially in the middle and senior classes. Most of the pupils in
the senior classes are able to give a very good description of themselves, their environment
and tourism issues in the area.

A very good foundation for reading is set in the early years by giving pupils opportunities to
read from various flash cards and books. A very wide range of books is available in each class
for Irish to develop paired reading. A very good scaffolding of vocabulary is made and the
teachers give the pupils opportunities to work in pairs and in groups to practice, read and write the new language. The pupils in the middle and senior classes read from a wide range of textbooks with very good pace and accuracy and they answer comprehension questions well.

There is very good integration in the classrooms of writing across the curriculum. There is a very good emphasis on sentences and on construction of sentences in the junior and middle classes. Good examples were observed of the pupils’ written work in copybooks, files, projects and exhibits on the walls of the school during the evaluation. The school participates in the *Scríobh Leabhar* competition and the books compiled by the pupils for this competition are commended. It was clear from the examples seen that the pupils have attained a high standard in creative and functional writing.

**English**

The overall quality of teaching in English is very good. Teaching methodologies are relevant and purposeful and the teachers work diligently to make the programme purposeful. In the junior classes, there is good emphasis on oral language development. The pupils are taught successfully to listen to others and to take turns in speaking. In the middle and senior classes, there is also very good emphasis on talk and discussion. Some teachers timetable discrete oral language activities on a weekly basis and during this time specific oral language skills are taught and practised. This should be extended to every classroom. There is effective focus on poetry and recitation in all classrooms.

In the junior classes, there is a systematic approach to the teaching of reading. There is a purposeful rich-print environment and a range of appropriate emergent reading techniques is employed. Plentiful resources are used including early literacy schemes, phonological awareness programmes and a selection of large-format books. A graded-reading scheme is used and the pupils’ reading standards are very good. Parallel readers and class novels form part of the school’s reading programme. Comprehension materials are used very well in the senior classes to develop the pupils’ reading and comprehension. It is recommended that in-class support is provided by the support teacher as a means of enhancing the use of reading groups and differentiated reading materials. The reading lessons observed in the middle and senior classes were effective and well organised. Most pupils are confident and achieving well in reading. Teachers use novels effectively to supplement the reading programme. Reading for pleasure is cultivated successfully.

Overall the teaching of writing is very good. Careful attention is given to pre-writing activities and early writing activities in the junior classes. Pupils are provided with regular opportunities to write in a variety of genres. The writing process is promoted to very good effect and the writing tasks completed by some pupils during the evaluation were of a very good standard. In the middle and senior classes, there is a consistent, careful approach to the teaching of writing guided to a good degree by the school plan for English. The majority of pupils write well and use age-appropriate punctuation and spelling. Written work is carefully monitored. Some teachers are promoting the pupils’ self-assessment of writing to good effect. Pupils are given opportunities to use information and communications technology as part of the writing process.

**3.2 Mathematics**

A very satisfactory standard is being reached by the majority of pupils in this school. There is a whole school approach to teaching this subject, with very good continuity from class to class. The teachers create a very good learning environment in the classrooms for the teaching of Mathematics. They make very effective use of the pupils’ experiences to present mathematics lessons. They present the teaching material to the pupils in a stimulating manner and they make suitable use of textbooks during the lessons. On the whole the pupils are
making very satisfactory progress in Mathematics and a high number of pupils have attained a very good standard in arithmetic, in particular.

The pupils’ progress is assessed by doing regular examinations and this information is used to allocate extension activities to pupils who need additional challenges. Most of the pupils have a good knowledge of addition and multiplication tables and pupils in the senior classes can solve addition problems easily. They record their work carefully.

3.3 Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE)

The standard of teaching and learning in Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) is very high. The positive atmosphere present in the school is very beneficial. This subject is regularly integrated with other subjects. The principles of equality, including gender equality, are visible in the programme set out in each class. Relationships and Sexuality Education is being implemented carefully. The teachers use circle time, debates and group work to discuss topics. Visitors come in to discuss various aspects with the senior classes and to describe growth and development and other aspects such as fire safety.

3.2 Assessment

The standard of assessment is very good. Assessment is a core part of teaching and learning in this school and the results of the analysis on the assessment show that most of the pupils are making good progress in English and Mathematics. The pupils’ Irish-language skills are assessed as set out in the Comharthai Cumais na Gaeilge assessments.

A wide range of tasks and tests is used throughout the school. Formal analysis is made of the results of standardised tests to guide the teachers’ planning and to develop differentiated planning. The support teacher and class teachers discuss this information and individual education plans are set out based on these data. Parents are kept informed of their children’s progress in literacy and numeracy and in other areas of the curriculum. Appropriate details are sent to parents at the end of the school year.

4. QUALITY OF SUPPORT FOR PUPILS

4.1 Pupils with special educational needs

There is a high standard of provision for pupils with special educational needs. The incremental approach is used to select pupils for learning support in accordance with Circular 02/05. An individual learning programme is prepared in collaboration with the class teachers and parents. The pupil’s specific learning needs are outlined and appropriate support for literacy and numeracy is organised based on those needs. Pupils’ progress is recorded regularly. The lessons observed during the evaluation were of a very high standard and very good use was made of information and communications technology during the teaching in this class setting. In order to add to the support for pupils it would be worth developing the in-class support incrementally.

4.2 Other supports for pupils: disadvantaged, minority and other groups

The standard of support for disadvantaged pupils is very high. There is a three-year plan for the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) programme and it is being implemented effectively by the school staff. There are action plans to develop the pupils’ reading skills, to strengthen school attendance and to strengthen links between the school and the community schools and the GAA.
There is plenty of progress to be seen regarding the objectives in the plan. A coordinator appointed to the project works one day per week in the school. She provides definitive plans for the work. She organises a wide range of activities to support the pupils, especially additional support in English and Mathematics. She organises reading projects from junior to senior levels. She provides valuable support to parents by arranging home visits. She organises Irish language classes for parents and other classes dealing with educational and health matters.

5. Summary of results and of recommendations for further development

The following are the strengths recognised in the evaluation:

• The quality of learning and teaching in the school is very high.
• The planning and assessment system is of a very high quality.
• The board members, parents and teachers function productively together to provide a high standard of education to the pupils.
• The chairperson of the board gives effective support in the running of the school.
• The principal works capably and he demonstrates effective leadership skills.
• The deputy principal fulfils his curricular, organisational and pastoral duties effectively.
• The teachers work collaboratively and give great support to the school’s development.
• The pupils show interest in learning and they have developed very good work habits.
• The provision for pupils with specific learning needs is of a very high standard.
• Interest in culture and the language is cultivated very well, as is the sense of community among the whole school community.

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

• To add to the support for pupils with special needs, it would be worth developing the in-class support incrementally.
• It would be worth expanding information and communications technology as an aid to teaching to every class in the school.
• It would be worth developing an all-school assembly to have a regular celebration of the pupils’ work and of winners in various competitions.

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

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