An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Gaelscoil Faithleann
Killarney, Co. Kerry

Roll number: 19941I

Date of inspection: 10 December 2010
1. **Introduction**

Gaelscoil Faithleann was founded in September 1989. The school is situated on the outskirts of Killarney town. There are eleven teachers on the staff, an administrative principal, eight class-teachers and two learning-support and resource teachers. There were 191 pupils enrolled in the school on the 30th September 2010. The school is succeeding well in providing education through the medium of Irish for the children of the area. 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:

- The school has a committed, competent teaching staff. In the main, a wide range of good practice and methodologies is evident throughout the school.
- The principal is professional and effective and fosters an open, co-operative atmosphere throughout the school.
- It is evident that there is mutual respect between pupils and staff.
- The board of management strongly supports to the functioning of the school.
- Parent participation and input into the planning process and into the various school events are ensured.
- An Irish ethos is promoted in the school and the teachers’ commitment in this regard is commended.

The following **main recommendations** are made:

- It is recommended that the role of in-school management in promoting curriculum leadership be further developed.
- It is recommended that a deeper analysis of pupil progress be undertaken, in order to have a clearer whole-school insight into levels of achievement. Arising from this analysis, differentiation strategies should be developed which would specifically serve the individual pupil’s learning needs.
- It is recommended that the board of management reviews the school’s enrolment policy to ensure it complies with current equality legislation.
3. **Quality of School Management**

- The board of management strongly supports the running of the school. Members work actively and productively to ensure that there are open communication structures among the school community. A professional record is kept of school finances. School policies are regularly discussed and appropriately ratified. The board is commended for ensuring a high standard of accommodation is provided.

- The principal works professionally to foster an effective learning atmosphere throughout the school. He has a clear and definite vision for the school's future development. He fulfils his responsibilities diligently and facilitates a co-operative culture among the members of the in-school management team. It is now recommended that the role of the management team, as educational leaders, be further emphasised and that additional attention be paid to directing the progress of the teaching and learning. This would facilitate the development of systematic and incremental self-evaluation throughout the school.

- The school building is maintained to a very high standard. Great care is taken to keep the physical environment of the school neat and stimulating. An annual resource budget is provided for every teacher and good use is made of ICT resources to support the presentation of lessons.

- There is an active, energetic parents’ association in the school. Parents’ involvement and input into the planning process is ensured, as well as their participation in various school events. They enjoy open, regular communication with the principal and with the teachers. Parents articulated the view that the teaching is good and that their children are doing well in the school.

- Mutual respect is evident between the pupils and teachers. Pupils demonstrate good norms of behaviour and, in general, they show a good understanding of their learning. The majority of the pupils indicated, through questionnaires, that they are succeeding well with homework and that lessons are clearly explained to them.

4. **Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation**

- A wide range of curriculum and administrative policies is available in the school. Some policies are being specifically reviewed at present. All policies should be signed by the chairperson of the board on ratification. It is recommended that the school admissions policy be reviewed, to ensure that it complies with equality legislation. A planning process is promoted, which is inclusive of all partners. A creditable start has been made on the self-evaluation process and a structured strategic five-year plan has been formulated. To assess the effectiveness of the planning, incremental monitoring of the curriculum plans on a regular basis would be beneficial. This review process would help to strengthen the influence of planning on classroom practice.

- Teachers provide suitable individual planning and a whole-school template is used to guide the planning. It is now recommended that this planning be based on definite learning objectives which would serve the learning needs of the individual pupil. Extra attention should be paid to specifying particular learning objectives to guide differentiated teaching strategies. To maximise the effectiveness of the monthly reports, the information regarding subject-matter taught and the skills the pupils have acquired should be used as an aid to measuring pupil progress.
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 also 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 and learning in the majority of classes in the school is good. Effective teaching methodologies are well used in some classes, including co-operative work, use of concrete materials, reinforcing pupils’ higher-order thinking skills, productive differentiation strategies and appropriate assessment methods. It is now recommended that these good practices be extended throughout the school. Pupils are successful in their learning. To maximise their levels of achievement, it would be beneficial to undertake a deeper analysis of pupil progress. This analysis would give a clearer whole-school overview of individual learning needs and it would help to focus attention more widely on differentiation during teaching.

- There is a good standard of teaching and learning in Irish. Lessons are effectively illustrated in most classes and, in general, there is a print rich environment in evidence. Suitable listening activities are conducted and pupils show a good understanding of the matter presented. Pupils demonstrate good oral skills. They are capable of describing, composing and answering appropriate questions. In the majority of classes, pupils eagerly recite a good selection of poems and proverbs well. Figures of speech and language functions are appropriately explored and analysed at certain levels. Pupils read fluently and with a good understanding of the text. In some classes, there is an emphasis on formally broadening reading skills. It would be worthwhile extending these good practices throughout the school. It is now recommended that the Drumcondra Assessment Profiles for Irish in Gaeltacht Schools and in Irish-medium Schools be used to formally assess pupil achievement. Written tasks in pupils’ copybooks are well monitored. To ensure the development of pupils’ independent writing skills in a wide range of genres, various writing genres should be practised and a structured approach implemented on a whole-school graded basis.

- English is well taught in the school. Discrete, effective oral language activities are frequently engaged in and the regular use of rhymes and poetry forms an integral part of oral language tasks. A specific phonics programme is taught competently in all classes. Appropriate pre-reading exercises are implemented, and a variety of reading texts, including the use of the novel, is explored. Free writing and an integrated language approach to writing are features of some lessons. It is now suggested that this good practice be extended to all classes. While some development of writing genres was evident, it is recommended that pupils be afforded greater opportunities to engage in a wider variety of writing exercises for a range of audiences.

- Mathematics is competently taught in the majority of classes. In those classes where best practice was observed, a fruitful mathematical environment is created, where there is an appropriate emphasis on the development of mental mathematics, group-teaching to serve the various ability-levels of the pupils is practised and activity work is well used, as well as concrete materials and ICT resources. The majority of pupils have attained a good standard of learning in Mathematics. It is now recommended that regular assessment strategies be adopted in every class and that a regular record is kept of pupil
progress. This approach would facilitate the implementation of differentiated strategies in teaching and provide a clear indication of pupil achievement.

- An effective two-year Science programme is provided for every class group. It is now suggested that the necessary subject specific language should be recorded, both in planning and in classroom practice. Monthly reports indicate that a broad curriculum is made available, with a good blend of information and skills. The pupils show a clear understanding of a range of fair testing. Appropriate tasks involving design and make are regularly undertaken and effective opportunities are created in the majority of classes, for pupils to play an active part in the lessons. It is recommended that this good practice be extended on a whole-school basis. Regular use is made of the school’s environment to develop pupil awareness of the environment and the importance of caring for it. A fine school garden was created, the responsibility for which lies with the pupils to promote this aspect of the programme.

6. **Quality of Support for Pupils**

- Good support is provided in literacy and numeracy. This support is provided mainly on a withdrawal basis. It is recommended that a greater balance be achieved between withdrawal and in-class support. Appropriate early intervention is made in some classes and it is recommended that this practice be extended. Regular meetings with parents are held, to discuss the needs and progress of pupils. Individual education plans have been drafted collaboratively with class-teachers and parents. It would be beneficial to provide a copy of these plans for parents of each pupil. Good use is made of a wide range of diagnostic tests, to assess the specific needs of pupils.

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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 this report. The Board wishes to acknowledge that the inspection was conducted professionally in the school and that the inspectors were kind and understanding to the pupils.

The board accepts the recommendations contained in the report, they provide direction to the board and to the school staff.

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 has amended the admissions’ policy to comply with current equality legislation. It is important to explain that our policy was based on suggestions of St Senan’s trust. The other recommendations will be implemented as part of the school’s strategic plan.

*The above is a translation of the school response submitted by the board.*