

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

**Whole School Evaluation
REPORT**

**Scoil na gCeithre Máistrí
Ascaill Lios Uí Mhulláin
Lios Uí Mhulláin, Áth Luain
Contae na hIarmhí**

Roll Number: 19948W

Date of inspection: 25 February 2010



**AN ROINN OIDEACHAIS
AGUS SCILEANNA | DEPARTMENT
OF EDUCATION
AND SKILLS**

WHOLE-SCHOOL EVALUATION

A whole-school evaluation of Scoil na gCeithre Máistrí was undertaken in February 2010. This report presents the findings of the evaluation and makes recommendations for further improvement on the work of the school. The evaluation focused on the quality of teaching and learning in English, Irish, Mathematics and Drama. 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.

INTRODUCTION – SCHOOL CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

Scoil na gCeithre Máistrí provides education through Irish for boys and girls from infants to sixth class. The school was established in 1990, with two teachers. In September 2009 the school re-located to the new building where it operates currently. This is the first whole-school evaluation that has been conducted in the school.

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

	Number
Pupils enrolled in the school	246
Mainstream classes in the school	8
Teachers on the school staff	14
Mainstream class teachers	9
Teachers working in support roles	4
Special-needs assistants	2

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT

1.1 Characteristic spirit, mission or vision

The school is under the patronage of the Catholic Bishop of the diocese of Ardagh and Clonmacnoise. A statement on the school ethos can be found in the school plan and it is clear that the day-to-day operation of the school is in accordance with this statement. A pleasant atmosphere is cultivated in the school and the various members of the school community show respect for each other.

1.2 Board of management

The board of management is constituted properly and there is evidence that it functions in accordance with the rules of the Department of Education and Skills. One meeting is convened each term and other meetings are convened as required. Minutes of the meetings are maintained carefully and professionally. The board has nominated a treasurer and the school accounts are certified on an annual basis by an independent accountant. The board of management deserves credit for the work done to provide a new building. They also deserve special praise for the range of resources available in the school, including information and communications technology (ICT).

The most significant challenge facing the board at present is the development of structures and procedures for middle management and whole-school planning that meet the needs of the school and its pupils.

1.3 In-school management

The principal was appointed in the year 2007. It is clear that she works diligently on behalf of the school community and that the well-being, welfare and development of the pupils underpin all of her work. Her aim is that the school would provide a broad education for the pupils and that the pleasant friendly and open atmosphere that has been cultivated since the foundation of the school would be preserved. The place of the Irish language at the heart of the school is very important to her. It is clear that the principal is devoted to her own professional development. She has participated in suitable courses as part of the programme *Leadership Development for Schools (LDS)* with a view to developing her leadership skills. She teaches pupils in senior classes as part of the project *Modern Languages in Primary Schools*.

Classroom observation and an examination of the documentation made available during the evaluation indicate that there is a need for more effective co-ordination of important aspects of the work of the school. The most significant challenge facing the principal now is the development of structures and procedures for middle management and whole-school planning that meet the needs of the school and its pupils.

The school has six posts of responsibility: deputy principal, assistant principal and four special-duties teachers. The majority of these teachers work diligently and contribute to various aspects of the work of the school. There is a written contract for each of the posts. However, there is a lack of emphasis on curriculum matters in the contracts. The date on which the responsibilities attaching to the posts were agreed, the review date for the responsibilities and the signature of the chairperson of the board of management have been omitted from all the contracts. Some of the posts have not been reviewed for many years even though the school's needs have changed a lot in that period. While there are six teachers with posts of responsibility, there are many important aspects of the work of the school in which co-ordination is lacking and in which a consistent whole-school approach is not evident.

It is recommended that the school identify a list of the school's current needs, including those which have been identified in this report. It is recommended that responsibilities corresponding to these needs be allocated to the various posts of responsibility as appropriate. It is recommended that the school agree contracts with the relevant staff members in accordance with Circular 07/2003. It is recommended that a date by which the responsibilities will be reviewed, the signature of the staff member and the signature of the chairperson of the board of management be included in each contract. It is strongly recommended that the co-ordination of special education in the school and support for newly appointed teachers be included in the responsibilities to be allocated.

1.4 Management of relationships and communication with the school community

Parent-teacher meetings are convened in the school every autumn and a report on the progress of each pupil is issued at the end of the school-year.

The parents' association in the school is affiliated to the *National Parents Council (Primary)*. The association organises various fundraising and social events and provides opportunities for parents to participate in the work of the school. Representatives of the association were interviewed as part of this evaluation. The representatives indicated that they were very satisfied generally with the work of the school. Special reference was made to the openness, the ability and the professionalism of the school staff.

The officers of the association suggested that there could be more effective communication between the parents' representatives on the board of management and the officers of the parents' association. It is recommended that the board of management consider ways of ensuring effective communication between the two groups.

The school has regular contact with a wide range of community groups in the interest of the pupils' learning. An Irish-language pre-school and an after-school care service operate in the school.

1.5 Management of pupils

The management of pupils in this school is generally very good. The majority of teachers succeed very well in encouraging pupils to make a special effort in their learning and in fostering positive behaviour. Advice was given to individual teachers with a view to extending this good practice. A pupils' council has been established in the school. Senior classes elect representatives to the council. This is good practice, which prepares pupils for citizenship. There is a code of behaviour and an anti-bullying policy in the school plan.

2. QUALITY OF SCHOOL PLANNING

2.1 Whole-school and classroom planning

Policies for many aspects of schoolwork are presented attractively in various folders. Some of the policies are very clear and useful. Others are unclear or have significant omissions. It is clear from classroom observation that there are other policies which are not being implemented. At the post-evaluation meetings, the changes which are required in various policies were discussed with the staff and with members of the board of management. Many of the policy statements omit the date of ratification of the policy, the target date for review and the name of the person responsible for reviewing the policy. Many have not been signed by the chairperson of the board of management. The school context has changed significantly since some of the policies were compiled and these policies are no longer relevant.

It is strongly recommended that the in-school management team update and develop the school plan, with a view to extending and consolidating good practice. It is recommended that the board of management monitor this process in accordance with its responsibilities under the *Education Act 1998*.

There is considerable variation in the written preparation being done by individual teachers. It is not clear that a whole-school policy or approach is being implemented. In a small number of classrooms the standard of preparation and record-keeping is very good. There are, however, significant weaknesses throughout the school. The school should ensure that teachers' schemes indicate what is to be learned by the pupils and how this learning is to be assessed. The school should ensure that each teacher provides a useful account of the progress achieved in learning in the monthly report. It is recommended that the staff adopt common templates for planning and recording. Examples are available at www.pdds.ie.

Certain areas of the *Primary School Curriculum* are not included in the weekly timetable in some of the classrooms. The school should ensure that an appropriate amount of time be given to each curriculum area in every class, in accordance with the guidelines presented in *Primary School Curriculum: Introduction (Page 70)*.

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. It is recommended that these people be named in the child-protection policy.

3. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

3.1 Language

Gaeilge

The school is successful in cultivating a positive attitude towards the Irish language among the pupils. An Irish atmosphere is cultivated in the school. It is clear that the principal and the various members of staff are very committed to the preservation and development of the language. Every teacher gives good example to the pupils by speaking rich and accurate Irish with them.

In the majority of classrooms the standard of teaching and learning in Irish is very good. The following good practice, or aspects of it, is to be found in a good number of the classrooms. Teaching is purposeful and engaging. Charts, displays and various illustrative materials are used to facilitate the pupils' learning and use of new vocabulary. Pupils have many opportunities to undertake communicative tasks in pairs or in small groups. Audio-visual equipment and ICT are used effectively to support the pupils in achieving relevant objectives. Beneficial use is made of drama and the pupils are enabled to recite a good collection of well-chosen poems with feeling. Commendable breadth is evident in the reading and writing programmes.

The good practice described above was not observed in some classrooms. Advice was given to individual teachers regarding avoidance of the use of translation in the conversation lesson, the inclusion of suitable poems in the learning programme, enabling pupils to recite a range of poems, the provision of broader programmes in reading and writing and the use of pair work and group work.

The teaching of Irish could be better coordinated on a whole-school basis. The school should ensure, through the whole-school planning process, that the good practice described above is implemented in every classroom.

English

The quality of learning and teaching in English is good overall. There is scope, however, for greater co-ordination and consistency between classrooms so that the school can ensure greater continuity in the pupils' learning from year to year.

Appropriate emphasis is placed on the development of pupils' oral language. Pupils speak with confidence and competence and they are given regular opportunities to improve their communication skills. The pupils at each class level are enabled to recite rhymes and poems with

expression. This is especially noteworthy in the infant classes. It is recommended, however, that more emphasis be placed on the teaching, study and writing of poetry in some classrooms.

Most of the pupils in the school achieve good standards in English reading. A print-rich environment has been developed in each classroom. There is an appropriate emphasis on developing emergent-reading skills in the junior classes. The presentation of reading lessons in middle and senior classes is good overall. Effective use is made of novels and a range of different reading materials in these classes. It is recommended, however, that the structure of reading lessons be reviewed on a whole-school basis to enhance the learning process for all pupils.

Teachers should consider adopting a common approach to questioning strategies and the exploration of new words as part of this review.

A school library is being developed at present. This endeavour is to be welcomed. Libraries are also available in each classroom. These libraries, however, should be further developed to encourage pupils to read for pleasure. They should also be used more regularly as research centres and as a general resource for teaching and learning. The layout of class libraries, as well as the quantity, quality and range of books available at each class level needs to be addressed.

High standards in English writing are evident in some classes in the school. There is an appropriate emphasis on the writing process in these classes. Samples of pupils' written work in a variety of genres are published in class. Approaches to the teaching of writing should be discussed and agreed on a whole-school basis to ensure greater consistency throughout the school. While most teachers regularly monitor pupils' written work, more emphasis should be placed on the monitoring and correction of pupils' work in other classes.

3.2 Mathematics

Strengths are evident in the teaching and learning of Mathematics at every class level. Almost all of the teachers conduct Mathematics lessons in an engaging, competent manner. A small number of teachers were advised to improve the pace and structure of the lessons in the interest of pupils' learning. In almost every class the pupils show appropriate understanding and can answer accurately questions based on the concepts that have been taught. Commendable emphasis is placed on mathematical games. A wide range of strategies is used to develop skills. Appropriate emphasis is placed on the development of mathematical language and mental arithmetic. Group- and pair work are used. Integrated themes and concrete material are used to explore concepts. There is good provision for the various levels of ability in the majority of classes.

The commendable work being done in every class on number facts (tables) is particularly noticeable. Pupils are given good opportunities to develop the skills of prediction, estimation and investigation, and effective strategies are used to cultivate problem-solving skills in the majority of classes. There is good use of ICT in some classes to illustrate concepts. There is systematic monitoring and correction of the pupils' written work in Mathematics. This work is generally presented neatly and clearly. Illustrative materials for Mathematics are evident in the majority of classes. It is recommended, however, that additional charts and equipment be provided in some classrooms.

3.3 Drama

There is appropriate provision for Drama in some classes and the teaching and learning in a small number of classes is very good. Overall, however, the school's provision for this subject is fair.

Some teachers show a good understanding of the principles and approaches that are presented for Drama in the *Primary School Curriculum*. Drama conventions and rules are discussed in a useful manner in some classes prior to activities. Some teachers use story-telling effectively as a stimulus for Drama activities. Pupils in some classes engage in role-play and other suitable activities with energy and feeling.

In four classrooms, Drama was not mentioned on the weekly timetable. In some instances, a scheme for Drama was not available. It is recommended that a continuous, progressive Drama programme be implemented in every classroom in accordance with the *Primary School Curriculum*. It is recommended that there be a dedicated Drama period on the weekly timetable for every class. The school should ensure, through the whole-school planning process and the middle-management system, that the necessary leadership is provided for the provision of a broad, continuous programme for the pupils.

3.4 Assessment

Standardised achievement tests in Mathematics and English reading are administered annually. Teacher-designed tests are used regularly in a range of subjects. Monthly progress reports are prepared by the teachers. The school should ensure that these reports contain clear statements on the progress of learning.

4. QUALITY OF SUPPORT FOR PUPILS

4.1 Pupils with special educational needs

Four teachers provide supplementary teaching for pupils with special educational needs (SEN). Two of these are learning-support teachers and two are resource teachers. There is considerable variation in the approaches used by these teachers. Aspects of the work are very good. Each member of the SEN team works with particular mainstream classes, an arrangement that supports effective communication with class teachers. Good practice is particularly evident in the development of literacy. The teachers foster a positive working relationship with pupils. It is clear that they cultivate self-confidence among the pupils, which has a positive impact on learning. The teachers provide a stimulating learning environment for the pupils, with a range of displays to support their learning.

Due to issues regarding the co-ordination of SEN work and difficulties with planning in some cases, the overall quality of the school's provision for pupils with SEN is fair. It is strongly recommended that a member of the in-school management team be nominated to co-ordinate the school's provision for SEN. As part of this work it is recommended that a clear policy on SEN be agreed and implemented. The school should ensure that planning for pupils with SEN is in accordance with the Department's *Learning-Support Guidelines* and *Guidelines on the Individual Education Plan Process*.

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

At the time of the evaluation there was no pupil in the school with needs arising from membership of the above groups. The ethos and culture of the school are inclusive, which supports disadvantaged pupils.

5. CONCLUSION

The following strengths were identified during the evaluation:

- The school provides a first-class building and facilities for the pupils.
- The school deserves special praise for the provision and use of ICT.
- The school cultivates a pleasant atmosphere and effective working relationships between pupils and teachers.
- It is evident that the principal works diligently on behalf of the school community and that the pupils' welfare, well-being and development underpin all of her work.
- The teachers have a wide range of skills and talents and they show diligence and professionalism in their work.
- The standard of teaching and learning in Irish, English and Mathematics is good overall.
- The management of pupils is very good overall.

The following key recommendations are made in order to build on these strengths and to approach areas for further development:

- It is recommended that the school allocate duties that correspond to the current needs of the school to the various posts of responsibility as appropriate, and that contracts be agreed with the relevant staff members in accordance with Circular 07/2003.
- It is strongly recommended that the co-ordination of the school's provision for pupils with special educational needs be included in the duties allocated to the posts of responsibility.
- It is recommended that the in-school management team update and develop the school plan, and that the board of management monitor this process in accordance with its responsibility under the *Education Act 1998*.
- The school should ensure that an appropriate amount of time is allocated to each area of the curriculum in every class, in accordance with the guidelines provided in *Primary Curriculum: Introduction (p 70)*.
- The school should ensure that planning for pupils with SEN is in accordance with the Department's *Learning-Support Guidelines* and *Guidelines on the Individual Education Plan Process*.

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

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