An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Gaelscoil Lios Tuathail
Listowel, Co Kerry

Uimhir rolla: 20013U

Date of inspection: 11 February 2011
This is a translation of the original report which was submitted in Irish

1. Introduction

Gaelscoil Lios Tuathail was established in September 1993. The school is located in temporary accommodation on the Kerry Education Services site. Gaelscoil Lios Tuathail is a DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools) Band 2 school with an enrolment of 111 pupils. The current principal was appointed in January 2011. Great efforts are made to promote an all-Irish education ethos among the school community. The board of management 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 board of management is deserving of praise for the provision of the new classrooms which were made available earlier this year.
- The principal operates in a professional manner and has set out an action plan to direct her work.
- An energetic and enthusiastic school staff supports the promotion of an all-Irish education ethos.
- There is a good standard of teaching and learning evident in the majority of classes.
- Pupils are well mannered and undertake learning enthusiastically.
- Parents work diligently to provide resources for the school.

The following main recommendations are made:

- It is recommended that the board of management convenes formal meetings on a regular basis; that accurate, comprehensive minutes are recorded; that financial records are independently certified.
- It is recommended that the role of in-school management in promoting curricular leadership be further developed.
- It is recommended that the whole-school plan for learning support be reviewed.
- It is recommended that assessment for learning strategies be further developed.

3. Quality of School Management

- Members of the board of management work diligently to support the work of the school. Records of minutes and financial accounts are maintained however, these are incomplete and inadequate. It is recommended that minutes of meetings are recorded regularly and
that financial records are accurately maintained. It is also recommended that financial records are independently verified in keeping with the provisions of the Education Act (1998). Only one formal meeting of the board was held in 2010. It is recommended that, in compliance with the rules of the Department of Education and Skills, formal meetings of the board are held on a regular basis. The board is commended for the efforts it has made to provide appropriate school facilities.

- The newly-appointed principal undertakes her duties in a professional manner. She demonstrates a clear vision for her role and for the school. The in-school management team, who have clearly defined roles, provide strong support for the principal. It is recommended that greater emphasis be placed on the instructional leadership role of the management team and that curriculum implementation be monitored on an ongoing basis. This practice would support the self-evaluation process within the school.

- New prefabricated classrooms were recently provided on the site and repairs were carried out to the school yard. Good efforts are made to keep the physical environment neat and tidy. A wide variety of teaching resources is provided which enhances the effectiveness of teaching and learning.

- There is an active, energetic parents’ association in the school. Their role is predominantly one of raising funds. It is recommended that the role of the parents’ association be further developed in order to develop their input into the life of the school. Parents enjoy open, regular communication with the principal. At the pre-evaluation meeting and in responses to questionnaires distributed during the evaluation, parents stated that the teaching is good and that the school is well regarded within the local community.

- Mutual respect is evident between pupils and teachers. Pupils were well behaved and courteous. Anti-bullying and code of behaviour policies are implemented on a whole-school basis. In their responses to the questionnaire completed as part of the evaluation process the majority of pupils stated that their lessons are interesting.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- A wide variety of curricular and administrative policies have been formulated. A plan for policy review was set out to direct the work. The chairperson of the board should sign all policies when they have been ratified by the board. A comprehensive three year DEIS plan has been developed.

- A good beginning has been made in relation to the self-evaluation process. However it would be worthwhile, at this point, to offer a central role to all participants in this process. A strategic structural plan was developed for the period 2011-2013. In addition, a practical action plan for the year has been devised to guide the work of the principal. In the interests of assessing the effectiveness of the plan, it would be worthwhile to monitor curricular plans on a regular, phased basis.

- Appropriate teaching plans are developed by individual teachers. A whole-school template was developed to direct planning. This work would be more effective if teaching were based on clear objectives. This approach would also encourage the development of appropriate differentiation strategies in order to serve the learning needs of all pupils. Pupil progress is recorded every month however this information should be based on the learning objectives which the pupils have achieved.
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 and learning was good in the majority of lessons. In the course of the evaluation a wide variety of effective teaching methods and worthwhile resources were observed in some lessons. It is recommended that this good practice be extended throughout the school. In general, pupils are successful in their learning. It is recommended that this achievement be built upon through the further development of assessment for learning strategies.

On the whole teaching and learning in Irish is good. Worthwhile listening activities were observed and pupils demonstrate a good understanding of the subject. Pupils display effective oral skills generally, and they enthusiastically recite a range of poems, rhymes and songs. The language enrichment achieved in certain classes is to be commended. The further extension of this good practice on a whole-school basis is recommended. In general, pupils read with fluency and understanding. A wide variety of reading materials is provided. Some opportunities for creative writing are offered to pupils, however, increased opportunities would enhance pupils’ independent writing skills.

English is generally well taught in the school. Some discrete, effective oral language activities were observed. It is recommended, however, that a more structured programme be implemented with a specific focus on discrete oral language development. Pupils confidently recite a range of rhymes and poems. A specific focus is placed on the effective teaching of phonics. Appropriate pre-reading exercises are implemented and a variety of reading texts is explored creatively throughout the school. An early intervention programme in reading and writing is implemented effectively in some classes. An integrated language approach to writing is a feature of some lessons. Further extension of this good practice would enhance pupils’ writing skills.

In a number of Mathematics classes the approaches used in teaching and learning concepts are effective. A supportive mathematical environment is created and significant focus is placed on oral activities and on memorising. The use of concrete materials to demonstrate concepts is constructive. Effective use is made of group-work to consolidate concepts. Pupils display good understanding of their learning in a wide variety of Mathematical strands. Pupils’ written work is neat and accurate and teachers monitor the work on a regular basis.

In the drama activities observed clever use was made of storytelling to stimulate pupil participation in role play. Pupils’ collaborative skills were appropriately developed during these activities. A safe space is provided for them and appropriate focus on the drama contract is a feature in certain classes. The further development of this practice on a whole-school basis would be very worthwhile. Discrete lessons are presented and drama is creatively integrated with other aspects of the curriculum.

Standardised attainment tests are used annually to assess pupils’ progress in literacy and numeracy. Non-standardised tests are administered on a regular basis in various areas of the curriculum. It is recommended that a deeper analysis be carried out on the results of
these tests at a whole-school level in order to support and promote the assessment for learning process. It is recommended that Profílí Measúnachta don Ghaeilge sna Scoileanna Gaeltachta agus Scoileanna lán-Ghaeilge: Droim Conrach (Drumcondra Irish Test for Irish-Medium Primary Schools) be used in order to formally assess pupils’ achievement in Irish on a regular basis.

6. Quality of Supports for Pupils

- A diligent learning support team provides additional support to pupils. The Reading Recovery programme is being effectively implemented for specific pupils. Very accurate records are maintained on the progress being made by these pupils. Appropriate early intervention is implemented effectively in some classes. Further extension of this good practice is recommended. All of the additional learning support in literacy and numeracy is provided by withdrawing pupils for mainstream classes. It is recommended that a greater balance be developed between withdrawal and in-class support. Regular liaison with class teachers is carried out informally. The development of a formal system to accommodate this communication would be worthwhile. Regular meetings with parents to discuss pupils’ needs and progress are arranged. Individual education plans (IEPs) have been prepared in consultation with parents. While appropriate use is made of diagnostic tests to assess the specific needs of pupils, it would be worthwhile to extend the range of tests used. A plan has been prepared for learning support in the school. A review of this plan should be carried out, however, in order to comply with the requirements of Circular 02/05, Organisation of Teaching Resources for Pupils who need Additional Support in Mainstream Primary Schools.

- The home-school-community liaison scheme and the school completion programme provide good support to pupils and their families. An examination of the roll books indicates that arising from this support pupil attendance has significantly improved. There is close collaboration between teachers and personnel from these services to respond effectively to the identified needs of the pupils.

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Appendix

School response to the report

Submitted by the Board of Management
This is a translation of the School Response that was submitted in Irish

Area 1: Observations on the content of the inspection report

We are very pleased that the Department Inspector recognised all of Gaelscoil Liostuathail’s positive aspects. We agree that the school’s children are very happy here, a matter that was highlighted for us in the questionnaire responses. They are engaged and active and have a wonderful rapport with their teachers. We are very proud of this fact.

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’s board meets regularly, detailed clear minutes are kept and the financial accounts are audited every year.

In staff meetings a lot of work is undertaken in relation to the plans and policies of the school and on keeping them up to date.

We implemented in-class learning support but the children were not benefiting from it. We thought that withdrawal or support in small groups suited the pupils better and that they benefited more from it. As a staff, we are agreed that different modes of support suit different pupils and we are happy to make use of in-class support again as it suits the individual learner.