Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Gaelscoil Chill Mhantáin, 
An Casadh Meidhreach, 
Rathnew, County Wicklow
Roll number: 20045K

Date of inspection: 15 October 2010
1. Introduction

Gaelscoil Chill Mhantáin was established in September 1996. It is situated at the edge of Rathnew village, approximately a mile from Wicklow. There were 222 pupils enrolled in the school on 30 September 2010. The board of management was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the evaluation; a response was not received from the board.

2. Summary of Findings and Recommendations for Further Development

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The following are the main strengths of the work of the school:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• All the teachers are open and diligent in their work. The school has adopted a range of good practices. Teaching methodologies being used by the majority of teachers are varied and effective. The teachers are professional and competent and they carry out their work in the interest of the pupils.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The principal fosters a cooperative atmosphere among staff. He has a clear and certain vision for the future of the school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The pupils are polite, courteous and habits of good behaviour are fostered in them. In general, they demonstrate an interest in and a good understanding of their learning and they take an active part in the various events which are organised for them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• There is an active and hardworking board of management in the school. This greatly enhances the running of the school. The board is developing connections with the Gaelscoil community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Participation and input from parents in various events is always welcome.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The following main recommendations are made:

| • It is recommended that more emphasis be placed on curricular leadership in the school. It would be worthwhile to set out a strategic plan regarding the development of curricular policies. There should be regular monitoring of the implementation of the various subjects on a phased basis throughout the school and good practice in subjects should be disseminated. |
| • It is recommended that the school’s approach to assessment on a whole school basis as well as the details of various assessment strategies be systematically used to support teaching and learning. |
| • It is recommended that the teaching staff ensure consistency in short term planning to consolidate the standard of pupil learning and achievement. |
| • It is recommended that the vital linguistic elements and the relevant language for various subjects pm the curriculum be recorded and included in planning and classroom practices. |
| • It is recommended that the board of management review the School Enrollment Policy, the Policy for Pupils with Special Needs as well as ensuring that the Policy in Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) be made available. |
3. Quality of School Management

- The members of the board of management work diligently on behalf of the Gaelscoil. The basic aims of the board are to find a suitable site for the school and to build a permanent building. The board is commended for the amount of support given to the principal and the staff in creating an attractive learning environment despite the challenges provided by the current accommodation.

- The board ensures contact with members of the teaching staff by holding a meeting with them each year. This good practice is noted. It is reported that there will be a change in the structure of the teaching staff from now on. As a result of this change and by request of the board of management, the walking principal will be responsible for a mainstream class until the end of the current school year. It is recommended that the board makes certain that the principal receives full support in fulfilling his roles as a teaching leader.

- The policies are submitted to the board of management on a regular basis. It is recommended that the School Enrolment Policy be reviewed, the Policy in Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) be made available, and that the Policy for Pupils with Special Needs be reviewed.

- The principal fosters an open atmosphere in the school and he undertakes his duties with a clear vision. The post holders are assigned specific responsibilities. The in-school management staff meet together informally. They are conscientious in ensuring that the conditions of all responsibilities are met. It is now recommended that more emphasis be placed on the role of principal as a teaching leader and that extra attention be given to the process of directing teaching and learning. To this end, it is vital that post holders’ duties be reviewed. The principal and various members of the in-school management staff should operate together on a formal basis as curriculum coordinators. This would aid monitoring of the phased and systematic implementation of subjects throughout the school.

- The school’s physical environment is kept clean and the secretarial service is a great support for the effective running of the school. There is a reasonably broad range of teaching resources available, including technological equipment and these are put to good use in consolidating learning. On both the school corridors and in certain classrooms, material in Irish is widely visible. The use of such a practice is commended and is recommended for all classrooms. In the main, teachers regularly exchange class groups.

- Recently, a parents’ association was established in the school. During the evaluation process, most of the parents were of the opinion that teaching was good in the school, that the school welcomed them and that teachers treat their children well. Parents’ input in various school events is welcome and effective methods of communication have been developed between the parties.

- Good habits of behaviour are fostered among the pupils. They are polite and friendly to visitors and they show respect for one another. It was evident during the evaluation that most of the pupils related well with each other and that they were proud of the school.
4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- School planning documentation is of a good standard. A comprehensive action plan details the priorities of this school year which provide a basic guide to self-evaluation events within the school. Results of standardised tests in English are carefully monitored. In the interests of assessing the influence and effectiveness of planning, a review and an evaluation should be systematically carried out on the quality of pupil achievement.

- Individual preparation is carried out for both long term schemes and short term planning for mainstream classes and preparation is also provided for individual learning support programmes. Because of the variety of practices observed in individual planning, it is recommended that consistency be ensured in short term planning. It is worth concentrating on the specific learning objectives and further emphasising differentiation so as to better serve the needs of individual pupils. In the interests of making monthly progress records more effective, a balance between the material taught and the skills possessed by the pupils must be recorded and this information should be used as a resource to measure pupil progress.

Child protection policy and procedures

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

- Throughout the school, there is a broad range of good practices evident and the pupils demonstrate good understanding of what they are learning. The members of the school staff are dedicated, serious and competent. Worthy attempts are made in the provision of a broad range of curricular areas throughout the school. Good structures and explanations are evident in all lessons and effective methodologies are practiced in the majority of classes. There is a positive atmosphere of work to be felt in all classrooms and good cooperation between pupils and teachers is evident. In general, the pupils display good understanding of the material covered. Some effective methods of assessment were seen in certain settings and many pupils demonstrated that they are given good advice regarding the improvement of their work. To increase the pupils’ standard of achievement, assessment strategies should now be developed in every curricular area and they should be implemented on a whole school basis.

- There is a good standard of teaching and learning Irish. Suitable emphasis is placed on informal and formal listening activities and the pupils demonstrate a good understanding of the subject. It is recommended that a formal aim for listening be given to the pupils during storytelling activities. In most classes, a broad range of poems and songs in Irish is recited eagerly. The pupils are able to give an account of something orally, to describe things, to compose and answer suitable questions. In certain classes, the subject, oral structures and new vocabulary are ably consolidated. The development of literacy is well served by a preparatory programme throughout the school. Good use is made of various reading schemes and it is clear that the majority of pupils read with appropriate fluency and understanding. It is now recommended that use is made of Proifíl Measúnachta don Ghaeilge sna Scoileanna Gaeltachta agus Scoileanna lán-Ghaeilge: Droim Chonrach in
order to carry out regular formal assessments of pupil achievement. It is clear from the written tasks that a suitable standard is reached in written work. Certain classes have begun to develop various types of written texts and it is recommended that this practice be adopted throughout the school on a phased basis. The Irish policy is suitable for the context of the school. A comprehensive description is given about Irish terminology which should be used in the schoolyard and language functions are provided for all classes on a systematic basis. This approach should be broadened to provide a general overview in the Irish policy regarding the objectives of the learning programme.

- Overall, the quality of teaching and learning in English is good. The teaching of oral language is guided primarily by the exploration of topics and themes and pupils in most classes recite a range of poems with interest. A majority of pupils express their views and opinions with confidence and competence. To ensure comprehensive development of all pupils’ expressive language abilities, the breadth of primary curriculum objectives should be addressed in discrete oral language lessons at each class level. A broad range of approaches to promote pupils’ reading skills, including the use of novels in a number of classes, is implemented purposefully. Most pupils demonstrate good standards of reading. In the main, pupils’ handwriting skills are developed appropriately and some praiseworthy examples of their personal writing in a number of genres are in evidence. A structured whole-school approach to the progression of pupils’ independent writing abilities across the breadth of writing genres should be implemented, including a process-writing approach to pupils drafting, editing and redrafting their work. In the school plan for English, oral language, reading and writing benchmarks have been formulated for each class group. These literacy profiles should be employed systematically throughout the school in the incremental development and assessment of the pupils’ skills.

- Mathematics is effectively taught in most classes. In the classes where the best practice was observed, the lessons are clearly paced, good use is made of active work as well as the computer, the language of mathematics is cleverly presented, the pupils get the opportunity to handle concrete materials and a regular record is kept of progress. In the interests of broadening the pupils’ higher thinking skills, it would now be worth focussing more on developing mental arithmetic. It is also recommended that places of interest and a mathematical atmosphere be created in all classrooms. When the pupils were questioned about the different strands of the programme, it was clear that they had a good idea of the appropriate mathematical concepts. No standardised mathematical tests are carried out in Mathematics at present. It was reported that the Drumcondra standardised tests will be implemented in Mathematics during the current school year. This would help to measure the pupils’ ability according to the school’s specific mathematical objectives and to analyse pupil achievement in the light of numeracy norms nationally. There is a comprehensive Mathematics policy in the planning documentation. A phased teaching programme is included and the specific learning objectives are included, at certain class levels, which are to be systematically achieved in the various strands. It was reported that a review is being carried out on the recording of these aspects in middle and senior classes.

- Good practices were evident in the teaching and learning of Science. The lessons are well structured, the pupils are carefully questioned and their interest in the subject is aroused. The participation of pupils is increased by the regular implementation of learning activities. Practical tests and experiments are used skilfully to develop the pupils’ ability to understand, to analyse and to predict. At various levels throughout the school, the pupils show suitable knowledge and understanding of the material covered. However, it is necessary to develop the pupils’ scientific language on a systematic basis, according to the level of the class. To this end, extra attention should be paid to the cognitive language of Science in order to help the pupils to come to terms with the programme. It is to the school’s advantage that it participates in Discover Primary Science and the school’s participation in the Green Schools’ Project is commended. It would be worth
ensuring that there are clear guidelines given in the Science policy regarding the breadth and balance of the programme throughout the school.

6. **Quality of Support for Pupils**

- It is noted that a review will be carried out on the special needs education policy during the current school year. In this review, Circular 02/05 should be formally implemented in its entirety.

- Pupils are supported in various settings and it is commendable that the support teachers work in cooperation with mainstream teachers in the interests of the pupils. In a small number of cases, differential learning activities are used in mainstream classes. In order to make the most of cooperative work, it is recommended that this good practice be built upon and adopted on a whole school basis. It is also recommended that an individual in-class support plan be designed in the mainstream classes for pupils at stage one on the continuum of support. It has been noted that the learning programmes for individual pupils will be improved during the current school year. The achievable learning goals should be clearly outlined in the learning programmes. Although a general record is kept of individual pupil achievement, it would now be worth accurately recording the progress made by pupils according to their recognised learning objectives.

- Many examples of good practice were observed in relation to pupils who have special educational needs. Due emphasis is placed on early intervention activities. Various teaching methodologies are implemented to develop pupils’ literacy, mathematical and social skills. Good care is taken to develop pupils’ reading, spelling and numeracy skills and strategies. Pupils’ morale and self-confidence are raised accordingly. The work of the special needs assistants is effectively directed.

*Published June 2010*