Whole-School Evaluation
REPORT

Scoil na gCeithre Maol,
Killala Road, Ballina, Co. Mayo
Roll number: 20084U

Date of inspection: 3 December 2009
WHOLE-SCHOOL EVALUATION

A whole-school evaluation of Scoil na gCeithre Maol was conducted in December 2009. This report presents the findings of the evaluation and makes recommendations for improvement. The evaluation focused on the quality of teaching and learning in English, Irish, Mathematics and Social, Personal and Health Education. 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.

INTRODUCTION – SCHOOL CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

Scoil na gCeithre Maol was founded in 1998. During its foundation period (eleven years), the school was based at a temporary site in the centre of the town which was unsuitable for the needs of the school in terms of either space or facilities. The school moved to a temporary location in an industrial estate at the end of August 2009. The new building is clean and neat. It is decorated in a stimulating and attractive manner with educational charts and examples of pupils’ work on display. The majority of the pupils enrolling in this school have very little Irish and it is a particular challenge to the school staff to support the use of Irish among the school community in general. The poor level of attendance among the pupils of the school is noted. The school takes part in the school support programme for the Delivery of Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS).

The table below gives an overview of the school staff and of the pupils enrolled in the school when the evaluation was being conducted:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pupils enrolled in the school</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainstream classes in the school</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers on the school staff</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainstream class teachers</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers working in support roles</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special needs assistants</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT

1.1 Characteristic spirit, mission or vision
The Foras Pátrúnachta na Scoileanna Lán-Ghaeilge Teo is the patron of the school. Because it is an All-Irish school, the Irish language has a central part in the life of the school and it is evident that the principal and staff are succeeding in creating a very positive atmosphere for the pupils. The school is making a praiseworthy effort in recent years to increase the number of all-Irish activities in the school and to promote the use of Irish among the school community.

1.2 Board of management
The composition of the board of management did not fully accord with the rules of the Department of Education and Skills at the time of the evaluation. The board of management undertakes its responsibilities capably and meetings are convened as recommended in the guidelines of the Department of Education and Skills and more frequently if necessary. The meetings are normally conducted through the medium of English and, during the evaluation,
some of the meetings with the board were conducted in English at the request of the members. Some of the board members have fluent Irish and every member can use a number of Irish phrases. It is recommended that increased use be made of Irish at meetings of the board of management. The board is commended for the support given to the staff in providing fine facilities for the school. Spending is carefully managed and minutes and financial statements were made available for this inspection. It is recommended that the board provide a health and safety policy for the new building as soon as possible. It is also recommended that the role and function of the home/school/community liaison co-ordinator be reviewed. The board is advised to monitor patterns of pupil attendance and to develop a strategy to improve attendance at the school.

1.3 In-school management
The school has a principal, a deputy principal and one other teacher with a post of responsibility. The principal was recently appointed and she deserves great praise for the improvement in school life which has resulted from the effective leadership she gives to the school community. She does her work diligently and conscientiously. She deserves particular recognition for her efforts to promote Irish as the language of communication and instruction in the school. The principal envisages the school growing and developing in the future. She gets admirable help and cooperation in this work from the deputy principal. The school staff collaborates very effectively.

1.4 Management of relationships and communication with the school community
A parents’ council was founded recently in the school. At the pre-evaluation meeting, the parents’ council indicated its satisfaction with the educational provision in the school. The teachers make a great effort to encourage every parent to participate in the education of their children and they are concerned that some of the parents have very little contact with the school. It is recommended that the home/school/community liaison co-ordinator investigate ways of supporting parents in taking a greater part in the education of their children. A monthly newsletter is published to keep parents informed of school events. Parents are welcome at the school to discuss matters concerning their own children. Meetings are organised on an annual basis to discuss pupils’ progress with their parents and a written report on each pupil is sent home at the end of the school year.

1.5 Management of pupils
The pupils are effectively managed. They are regularly affirmed and the teachers have created a positive learning atmosphere in the classrooms. The staff looks after the health and safety of the children. It is recommended that they make a greater effort to encourage the pupils to use Irish among themselves in the classrooms and in the school playground. Some teachers organise an after-school homework club. The School Completion programme defrays the expenses involved in this. Since this club operates in the school building, the board of management should formulate a policy concerning it.

2. Quality of school planning

2.1 Whole-school and classroom planning
The quality of planning in this school is very good. A wide range of administrative and curriculum policies has been clearly laid out and is being implemented. The policies are written in Irish and some of them are translated to English as necessary. Every member of staff participates in the planning process. The board of management discusses the plans and policies regularly. The teachers thoroughly undertake both short-term and long-term planning for their teaching. The support teachers have done very good preparation for their work. The very attractive presentation
and organisation of all classrooms by the teachers is praiseworthy indeed, as is the celebration of pupils’ work.

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

Gaeilge

The quality of learning and teaching of Irish in Scoil na gCeithre Maol is good overall. The richness of the teachers’ oral language is praiseworthy. The teachers work hard at encouraging the pupils’ interest in Irish and a satisfactory standard of understanding and speaking Irish is apparent in many of the classes. An appropriate emphasis is placed on the development of listening skills in the junior classes and the pupils have a good understanding of the language. The teachers encourage the pupils to communicate with one another through Irish at an early stage. The infants have memorised a good collection of action-songs and rhymes in Irish and the pupils recite poems enthusiastically in the other classes. Good use is made of the Séideán Sí programme to reinforce the pupils’ vocabulary. A compact disc is used to support listening exercises and the pupils follow the directions enthusiastically. In the middle and senior classes, although a rich print environment and plenty of illustrative material are provided, and the teachers use stimulating teaching methods to promote Irish, it is evident that their efforts are not succeeding in developing authentic communication among the pupils themselves. It would be worth putting more emphasis on the communicative approach and affording the pupils opportunities to use the vocabulary and phrases they know to develop their fluency.

Reading is carefully promoted and the pupils in general read with understanding and with accuracy. Writing exercises are organised regularly for the pupils and, on the whole, a praiseworthy standard is achieved. It is thought that the main challenge facing the staff is to raise standards further in the future and to promote the use of Irish as the language of communication in a purposeful manner.

English

The quality of teaching in English is satisfactory. Many of the pupils can speak about themselves, their interests and a variety of other topics articulately and enthusiastically. It is advised that greater emphasis be placed on skill development in the discrete oral-language lessons, with an increased use of pair work to facilitate pupil engagement.

Currently, the teachers are effectively emphasising the development of the pupils’ literacy skills as part of the school’s three-year DEIS plan. There is evidence of conscientious differentiation of tasks and reading materials to cater for the needs of pupils. In-class tuition from the learning-support teachers in the infant and junior classrooms to support pupils’ learning and to prevent
literacy difficulties is an effective part of the school’s early intervention policy. Good attention is
given to the pupils’ emergent sight vocabulary in the infant classes and structured programmes
are used to develop the pupils’ phonological skills. Commendably, regular analysis of the
standardised test results is undertaken and teachers are making every effort to improve standards
in this area.

The school has engaged with the support services and praiseworthy efforts are being made with
the First Steps programme. It is evident from the monthly progress reports and from the samples
of pupils’ work available that pupils engage in writing in a variety of genres. The writing process
is emphasised and celebrated in many very attractive displays throughout the school. While some
very high quality samples of free writing were observed, there is a need to improve penmanship
and presentation of work in some cases.

3.2 Mathematics
The school has reached a good standard in the teaching of Mathematics. A range of equipment is
used to develop concepts and practice skills. In some classes, effective use is made of groupwork
to teach interesting lessons. Good use is made of the Maths Recovery scheme to support certain
pupils. Appropriate support is provided for pupils who have learning difficulties in this subject.
During the evaluation, good examples of direct teaching and of class games were observed. It is
noted, however, that quite a number of pupils had significant difficulties in answering questions
on basic concepts in various curricular strands, especially in oral problem solving. It is
recommended that mental mathematics be emphasised and regular revision practised. It is
necessary to differentiate the learning programmes for pupils’ ability levels and to utilise group-
teaching to implement the programme. It would be useful also to exploit the school environment,
inside and outside, to reinforce the pupils’ grasp of mathematical terms and concepts.

3.3 Social, Personal and Health Education
The quality of learning and teaching in Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) is very
good. The staff work diligently to promote healthy relationships and to persuade the pupils to
behave in a courteous manner. Work on SPHE is supplemented with appropriate material from
various other programmes. Effective use is made of the Stop Think Do scheme to develop
interpersonal skills. A positive learning environment has been created in the school. There is an
easy relationship and good communication among the different educational partners and the norm
is that pupils behave politely towards the teachers, towards one another and towards visitors.

3.4 Assessment
The teachers are commended for the wide range of assessment tools used in the school to monitor
the pupils’ progress. Among them are standardised tests, diagnostic tests, teacher observation,
checklists as well as tasks and tests designed by the teacher. The school sets non-reading
intelligence tests for the pupils and individual pupils’ scores on this test are compared with their
scores on other standardised tests. The staff is praised for this valuable work. The results are
recorded systematically and carefully and the information shared as appropriate.

4. Quality of Support for Pupils

4.1 Pupils with special educational needs
This school has given high priority to pupils with special educational needs and learning
difficulties. At infant level emphasis is placed on early identification to avoid learning difficulties.
There is regular communication between class teachers and support teachers and there is a
praiseworthy emphasis on early intervention, with teachers working in partnership with one
another in the classrooms. Suitable teaching programmes are provided for individual pupils and for particular groups as appropriate and a range of assessments is used. An accurate record of progress is kept. The advice given by psychologists is acted on and it is evident that there is a high level of co-operation and discussion between the school and the professionals who participate in the work.

4.2 Other supports for pupils: disadvantaged, minority and other groups
The school gets support from a home/school/community liaison co-ordinator for the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) scheme. This teacher was appointed in September 2009. She is based in Scoil Phádraig and visits Scoil na gCeithre Maol for three hours each week. It is recommended that the role and functions assigned to the co-ordinator be reviewed, as well as the sharing of time between this school and Scoil Phádraig. Parents are supported through home visits and courses are also organised for them. The co-ordinator also has an important role in supporting the school in developing effective attendance strategies and in promoting the development of a school-attendance culture. It is recommended that pupil attendance be systematically monitored and that strategies be devised to improve school attendance. It is also recommended that closer links be forged with the families of pupils whose attendance is unsatisfactory. It would be advisable for the co-ordinator to attend staff-meetings in this school, so that communication and advice on parental participation can be developed.

5. CONCLUSION
The school has strengths in the following areas:

- The board of management gives considerable support to the school.
- The very effective leadership provided by the principal enhances the work of the school.
- The principal deserves great praise for the work she has done to improve school life for the pupils, the parents and the teachers.
- The teaching staff collaborates commendably.
- A pleasant learning atmosphere, which is open and welcoming, is apparent in the school.
- There is effective co-operation among the teachers in the area of special education.
- The school plan is clear and based on the needs of the school.
- A very attractive learning environment has been created in the school.

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

- It is recommended that the board draw up a health and safety policy for the new building as soon as possible.
- It is recommended that the board should focus its attention on pupil attendance, with a view to improving it.
- It is recommended that the role and function of the school’s home/school liaison co-ordinator be reviewed.
- It is recommended that the teachers promote oral language skills in English and in Irish.
- It is recommended that the teachers place more emphasis on mental mathematics and practise regular revision in their teaching of Mathematics.

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.
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 of Gaelscoil na gCeithre Maol would like to thank the inspector for the report on our school. It was a pleasure to have her here and to demonstrate all the hard work that is carried out in the school. We found her observations to be fair and strive to better our school on a daily basis.

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 Health and Safety statement arrived for the new school building in which the inspection was carried out one week after the inspection. More implements have been put in place to improve school attendance. The HSCL is now working more closely with the school. More emphasis is now put on oral English and Gaeilge by allocating a particular time each day. Mental Maths is now part of everyday school life for all students.