

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**

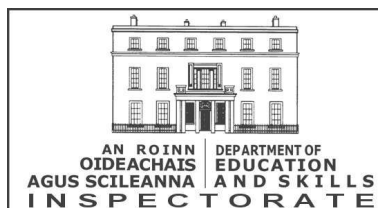
**Department of Education and Skills**

**Whole School Evaluation  
Management, Leadership and Learning**

**REPORT**

**Scoil Naomh Dar Earca,  
Ballyhearney, Valentia, Co. Kerry  
Uimhir rolla: 19483E**

**Date of inspection: 16 October 2013**



## Whole-School Evaluation – Management, Leadership and Learning Report

### Introduction

A Whole-School Evaluation – Management, Leadership and Learning (WSE - MLL) was undertaken in Scoil Naomh Dar Earca in October 2013. This report is based on a selection of lessons observed in a range of learning settings in the school, interaction with pupils and review of their work, meetings with the principal and with board and parent representatives, completed parent and pupil questionnaires, and a selection of school documents. 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.

Scoil Naomh Dar Earca is a co-educational school under the patronage of the Catholic Bishop of Kerry. It participates in *Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools* (DEIS) Band 2 rural scheme. It is situated on Valentia Island and has an enrolment of sixty-six pupils. Pupil attendance has improved in recent times.

The school has **strengths** in the following areas:

- The school has a committed and dedicated teaching staff.
- Some high quality teaching was observed during the evaluation.
- Pupil attainment levels in literacy and numeracy are very good. They co-operate willingly with their teachers and are eager to learn.

The following **main recommendations** are made:

- It is recommended that the board of management fulfills the required minimum number of annual meetings. It should also review its roles and responsibilities and avail of appropriate training to assist it in fulfilling its duties.
- Accounts should be independently certified annually.
- The school perimeter should be secured immediately to ensure the safety of persons on the grounds. Adequate supervision should be in place at all times while pupils are in the playground.
- Good practice was observed in some class settings in relation to implementing a wide variety of methodologies and it is recommended that this practice be extended on a whole-school basis. A broad and balanced curriculum should be implemented in all classes.
- The implementation of an early intervention programme such as *Aistear* would benefit pupil learning and support the School's Improvement Plan for literacy.

### Findings

#### 1. The learning achievements of pupils

- Overall learning achievement is good. Learning outcomes in numeracy and literacy are very good. Results of standardised tests in both curriculum areas support this finding. The standard of handwriting is very poor and requires significant development. A review of monthly progress reports indicate that creative writing in

both English and Gaeilge is not a regular feature of pupils' learning in all classes. Pupils' attainment in Irish is good with pupils displaying an understanding of the language. They have good pronunciation and a broad vocabulary. Pupils are making suitable progress commensurate with their abilities in all aspects of the curriculum observed during the evaluation.

- No pupils attending the school have been identified as presenting with special education needs. Pupils experiencing learning difficulties are progressing well, commensurate with their abilities.

## **2. Quality of teaching**

- The overall quality of teaching in the school is good. High quality teaching was observed in some classrooms during the evaluation. Whole-class teaching and textbook-based learning are the preferred methodologies used in some classes. The wide variety of approaches observed in a minority of class settings should be extended on a whole school basis. Pair-work and group work are features of some lessons. Information and communications technologies (ICT) are also effectively used in some classes. An examination of monthly progress reports for the past school year indicates that not all strands of the curriculum are taught. It is recommended that the school ensures that a broad and balanced curriculum as set out in the Primary School Curriculum (1999) be implemented.
- Teachers provide appropriate planning documents to inform their teaching and monthly progress records. A common approach to planning, on a whole-school basis, with specific objectives identified would benefit pupils' learning experiences. There is a need also for more specific planning for differentiated learning activities in these documents.
- The quality of teaching provided for pupils who are experiencing learning difficulties is good. One teacher, who is shared with another school, provides learning support on a withdrawal basis. In this context, group and individual learning plans are provided with appropriate objectives and targets. It is recommended that a greater balance be achieved between withdrawal of pupils and in-class support. Technology is a regular feature of pupils' learning experiences to develop and consolidate concepts.

## **3. Support for pupils' well-being**

- Pupils are well behaved and courteous. They co-operate willingly with their teachers. Due to the layout of the grounds the school should ensure that all pupils are visible to supervisors at all times during breaks. To facilitate current School Bus timetables, relevant pupils are discharged from school before the end of the school day. It is recommended that this matter be addressed by the board in the context of *Circular 11/95, Time in School*. Respondents to pupil questionnaires administered at the time of the evaluation stated that their teachers explain things clearly to them. They also stated that the use of computers is not a regular feature of their learning. This finding should be further explored at school level.
- Confirmation was provided that the board of management has formally adopted the *Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools* without modification. However, the school has not brought the above to the attention of new parents. The policy is not reviewed annually. A child protection report is not provided at all board meetings. It is strongly recommended that the board complies with all requirements in relation to the aforementioned procedures.

#### **4. Leadership and Management**

- The board of management does not comply with the minimum requirement of five meetings annually. A financial report is provided at most meetings. It is recommended that accounts are independently certified in compliance with the provisions of the Education Act (1998). It would benefit the effective operation of the board if it accessed training on its roles and responsibilities as members have not availed of such training to date. The Chairperson also acts as treasurer at the request of the patron. He meets with the principal on a weekly basis to discuss school issues. An examination of board minutes indicate that policy development and pupil attainment are not regular features of meetings. It is recommended that the board familiarises itself with pupil attainment levels and gives due consideration to policy development on a regular basis. The board should also act immediately to secure the school's perimeter to ensure staff and pupils' safety while at school.
- The in-school management team consists of principal and deputy principal. The principal maintains all school registers appropriately. He is ably supported in his duties by the deputy principal. It is recommended that the duties of the deputy principal be formalised in order to comply with the provisions of Circular 17/00 Appointments to Posts of Responsibility. To enhance their leadership roles, it is now recommended that a more structured and focussed approach be progressed to monitoring and implementing the curriculum across the school.
- The parents' association, although affiliated to the National Parents' Council (Primary) has not met in three years. In a meeting with parents' representatives on the board of management, it was stated that parents are satisfied with the standard of education provided at the school. However, a significant percentage of respondents to questionnaires administered at the time of the evaluation stated they are unhappy with aspects of school life. These issues need to be addressed by the board. Parent-teacher meetings take place annually and written reports are issued.

#### **5. School Self-evaluation**

- Staff members attended a seminar on School Self-Evaluation (SSE) earlier this year. An appropriate report and school improvement plan have been devised and are being implemented. Clear targets have been identified in the plan to raise pupil attainment levels in literacy. Strategies are being implemented on a whole-school basis to achieve these targets.
- The school administers standardised tests in literacy and numeracy twice yearly. Results are analysed and compared with national norms. Teacher observation and teacher designed tasks and tests are also administered regularly. The development of assessment for learning would greatly benefit the planning of learning activities which address pupils' learning needs. Developing a system of monitoring individual pupil progress would enhance current practice.

#### **Conclusion**

The school's capacity to develop further and engage in school improvement would benefit from availing of external support services to help guide development in a clear and cohesive manner.