An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Charleville National School
Church View, Tullamore
County Offaly
Uimhir rolla:10353P

Date of inspection: 12 February 2010

AN ROINN OIDEACHAIS AGUS SCILEANNA | DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND SKILLS

WHOLE-SCHOOL EVALUATION

A whole-school evaluation of Charleville National School was undertaken in February 2010. 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 Drama. 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

Charleville National School is located in the town of Tullamore. It is a co-educational primary school, under the patronage of the Church of Ireland diocese of Meath and Kildare. The school has a wide geographical catchment area and the majority of pupils come from families that are of the Church of Ireland or one of its ecumenical partners. At present the school does not have enough places for all who wish to enrol. This is an indication of the high regard in which it is held by the community. The school moved recently to a new school building a short distance from the old schoolhouse in which it had been located for many years. In addition to its curricular programme, the school offers a range of extra-curricular activities. During the evaluation, a team from the school won first place in a local schools quiz competition.

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	101
Mainstream classes in the school	8
Teachers on the school staff	4
Mainstream class teachers	4
Teachers working in support roles	2
Special-needs assistants	2

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT

1.1 Characteristic spirit, mission or vision

The school is to be commended for the deliberate, structured way in which it fulfils its pastoral role in the lives of the pupils. The social, personal and moral development of the pupils is regarded as a key part of the work of the school. This is reflected in the school's ethos statement and in observation of the daily operation of the school during the evaluation. There is a strong sense of the school as a community. Twice a week there is a whole-school assembly, which includes readings and song. Pupils have opportunities to work with pupils from a nearby special school and with the users of a local day-care centre for senior citizens. Overall there is a strong sense of moral purpose in the work of the school, which contributes to a positive, caring atmosphere.

1.2 Board of management

The board of management is properly constituted and meets regularly in accordance with requirements of the Department of Education and Skills. Minutes of board meetings were available for inspection. The board of management is to be congratulated on the work that was involved in the recent building project and in the move to the new location. The board members report that they are appreciative of the school's friendly atmosphere, its sense of community and the diligence and commitment of the teaching and non-teaching employees. The general school policy that is given to parents and the timetables contained in the school plan contain conflicting statements regarding the length of the school day. It is recommended that this be resolved and that the school opening and closing times be communicated clearly to parents. The school is reminded that a full school day comprises a period of not less than five hours and forty minutes, as set out in Department Circular 11/95.

The person employed by the board of management to provide resource teaching for pupils with special educational needs does not have any teaching qualification. As stated at the post-evaluation meetings, it is recommended, as a matter of urgency, that the school employ a qualified teacher with the knowledge and skills required to perform the duties of this position.

1.2 In-school management

The principal oversees the day-to-day operation of the school with courtesy and efficiency, as well as teaching two classes. It is evident that she provides effective pastoral and administrative leadership to the school. The provision of a holistic education in a happy environment is central to the principal's vision for the school. It is very clear that she has been successful to date in making this vision a reality.

There is a need now for a greater focus on leading teaching and learning in the school. In particular there is a need to increase the school's capacity to implement the *Primary School Curriculum*. It is recommended that the school agree and implement a policy on professional development for teachers. The school is reminded that Leadership Development for Schools (LDS), a national programme established by the Department, provides professional-development opportunities for principals and deputy principals. It is recommended that staff meetings be held regularly with a view to fostering and supporting a whole-school approach to implementing the *Primary School Curriculum*.

The school's deputy principal shows great commitment to the school and provides valuable support to the principal. It is recommended that the responsibilities assigned to the deputy principal be revised, with a view to ensuring that the post has an appropriate balance of curricular, organisational and pastoral duties. It is recommended also that the school provide a contract for the deputy principal, in accordance with Department circular 17/2000.

1.4 Management of relationships and communication with the school community

The management of relationships and communication with the school community is very good. The school reports to parents on the educational progress of their children at annual parent-teacher meetings and a written report is issued at the end of each school year. Parents of pupils commencing in the school are given copies of key school policies. Parents have been consulted regarding school policies prior to their ratification by the board of management.

The school has a parents' association that is affiliated to the National Parents Council (Primary). The chairperson of the association meets regularly with the school principal. The association organises various fundraising and social events for the school community. As part of this

evaluation the inspector interviewed officers of the parents' association, who spoke positively about the work of the school.

1.5 Management of pupils

The management of pupils, as observed during the evaluation, was good. The parents interviewed had particular praise for the way that the teachers manage and support pupils with challenging behaviour. The school's code of behaviour includes specific measures to prevent bullying.

2. QUALITY OF SCHOOL PLANNING

2.1 Whole-school and classroom planning

The overall quality of planning is fair.

The whole-school planning process involves the principal and teachers in drafting policies that are presented to the board for ratification following consultation with parents. Key policies such as the code of behaviour and the enrolment policy are made available to parents. The school plan contains most of the organisational policies that are required by legislation or by Department circulars. The need to include or to amend policies regarding equality of opportunity, pupil attendance, special educational needs, dignity in the workplace and procedures for dealing with complaints/grievances was discussed at the post-evaluation meetings.

The school plan includes a statement for each curricular area. These are generally not sufficiently specific to be useful in co-ordinating and improving the work of the school. It is recommended that the school conduct a full review of its curricular policies in the light of this report's recommendations regarding teaching and learning.

As discussed at the post-evaluation meetings, it is recommended that each teacher state clearly in her classroom planning what pupils are expected to learn and how that learning will be assessed. It is recommended that the same planning and recording templates be used by all teachers. Sample templates are available at www.ppds.ie .

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

Ar an iomlán, tá caighdeán an teagaisc agus na foghlama sa Ghaeilge lag.

Bhí dea-chleachtas i dteagasc na Gaeilge le sonrú i gcuid de na ranganna. I bhformhór acu, áfach, níor sonraíodh prionsabail nó modhanna teagaisc *Churaclam na Bunscoile* á gcur i bhfeidhm. I gcuid de na ranganna, is inmholta gurb í an Ghaeilge an teanga amháin a chloiseann na daltaí ón múinteoir le linn an cheachta Ghaeilge. Cuireann sé seo go mór le héifeacht an teagaisc agus le dearcadh na ndaltaí i leith na teanga. I ranganna eile, áfach, is é an Béarla an phríomhtheanga theagaisc agus chumarsáide sa cheacht agus i gcásanna iarrtar ar na daltaí ábhar teanga an cheachta a aistriú go Béarla. Moltar don scoil féachaint chuige go dtumfar na daltaí i ngach rang sa Ghaeilge le linn na gceachtanna Gaeilge.

Níor sonraíodh an cur chuige cumarsáideach in úsáid sa scoil. Is léir go mbíonn an iomarca béime ar théacsleabhair na ndaltaí le haghaidh ábhar an chláir agus an cheachta. Bíonn an iomarca béime freisin ar rangtheagasc. Níor breathnaíodh obair bheirte nó grúpobair i dteagasc na Gaeilge i rith na meastóireachta. I seomra amháin bhí foclóir agus líofacht na ndaltaí á gcothú go héifeachtach. I seomra eile bhí cúlstór réasúnta focal ag na daltaí ach ní raibh na daltaí ábalta abairtí a chruthú leis an bhfoclóir seo. I bhformhór na ranganna bhí inniúlacht na ndaltaí sa teanga lag. Ba léir go raibh easpa taithí acu ar úsáid na Gaeilge mar theanga chumarsáide. Moltar go gcuirfeadh an scoil an cur chuige cumarsáideach i bhfeidhm mar atá sé leagtha amach i *gCuraclam na Bunscoile: Gaeilge – Treoirlínte do Mhúinteoirí* (52-115). Moltar don scoil tacaíocht a lorg ón tSeirbhís um Fhorbairt Ghairmiúil do Mhúinteoirí (www.ppds.ie).

Tá díolúint ó fhoghlaim na Gaeilge ceadaithe ag an scoil do thart ar dheich fán gcéad de na daltaí. Moltar don scoil cloí le Ciorclán 12/96 maidir leis seo.

Irish
Overall, the quality of teaching and learning in Irish is weak.

There was evidence of good practice in some classes. In most cases, however, there was no evidence that the principles or teaching approaches that are recommended in the Primary School Curriculum were being implemented. In some classes, it is praiseworthy that Irish is the only language spoken by the teacher during the Irish lesson. This is conducive to more effective teaching and to fostering a more positive attitude to the language among the pupils. In other classes, however, English is the main language of instruction and communication during the Irish lesson and in some cases, pupils are asked to translate the language content of the lesson to English. It is recommended that the pupils in every class be immersed in Irish during Irish lessons.

The communicative approach was not observed in the school. It is evident that some teachers depend largely on the pupils' textbooks for the content of their programmes and lessons. There is evidence also of an overdependence on whole-class teaching. Pair work or group work were not observed in the teaching of Irish during the evaluation. In one classroom it was evident that the pupils' vocabulary and fluency were being developed carefully. In another classroom the pupils had a reasonable passive vocabulary but they were not able to construct sentences using this vocabulary. In most classes the pupils' ability to speak the language was weak. It was evident from interaction with pupils that they did not have sufficient experience of using Irish for the purposes of communication. It is recommended that the school implement the communicative approach as it is presented in Curaclam na Bunscoile: Gaeilge – Treoirlínte do Mhúinteoirí (52-115). It is recommended that the school apply for support in this subject from the Professional Development Service for Teachers (www.ppds.ie).

The school has granted approximately ten percent of its pupils an exemption from the study of Irish. It is recommended that the school adhere to Department Circular 12/96 in this regard.

English
Teaching and learning in English is generally good.

The quality of teaching and learning in English reading is good overall and the results of standardised tests are roughly in line with national norms. There is evidence of a systematic approach to phonics in infant classes. It is recommended that the school implement an agreed whole-school approach to developing phonological awareness and word-recognition skills. The school provides a good range of activities to promote positive attitudes towards books and reading. There is a well-stocked pupils' library in most classrooms. There is a need, in some cases, to make these libraries more attractive and accessible to all pupils. Pupils complete interesting exercises and activities based on books that they have read. When questioned, pupils generally showed a very good understanding of the reading material that they had encountered. Pupils enjoy hearing novels read to them in serial format by their teachers. Class novels are used effectively in the middle and senior classes. It is recommended that teachers make greater use of the class novel as a basis for oral-language development in general and for vocabulary development in particular. Pupils in some classes are enabled to recite poems with expression. It is recommended that this practice be extended to all classes.

There was evidence in the reading lessons observed of overdependence by teachers on whole-class teaching. It is recommended that teachers discuss and implement ways of making the English reading lesson more differentiated and pupil-centred. This would include greater use of pair work and group work. The resources made available by the Professional Development Service for Teachers at www.ppds.ie/pcsparchive would be a good starting point.

The school provides a range of writing opportunities for pupils and the work produced is displayed and celebrated throughout the school. The pupils' handwriting and their presentation of written work are generally very good. It is recommended that the school consider participating in initiatives such as the Write a Book project as an opportunity for pupils to learn more about the writing process.

There is scope for improvement in the school's provision for oral-language development. While there are examples of good practice, such as the use of structured play in the infant classroom, there is a need for an agreed whole-school approach. It is recommended that the principal and teachers develop and implement a whole-school approach to the development of the pupils' oral-language abilities. This would be of particular benefit to pupils who do not have English as their first language. The whole-school approach should comprise a programme of oral-language content to be delivered through dedicated oral-language lessons, and a range of language-development strategies to be used in other subjects. These cross-curricular strategies should include the identification, display and consolidation of key vocabulary for each lesson, as well as more frequent opportunities for pupils to work in pairs and small groups.

3.2 Mathematics
Overall, the quality of teaching and learning in Mathematics is good.

The structure and pace of the lessons observed were good. There was good use of suitable mathematical equipment, including the interactive white board, to provide practical learning opportunities for the pupils. Pupils responded well to questioning on a range of mathematical concepts. Pupil achievement in standardised attainment tests compares favourably to national norms. It is recommended that all teachers display charts and other illustrative materials to make it easier for pupils to understand and remember mathematical vocabulary, concepts and

operations. It is recommended also that teachers make greater use of the wide range of activities and resources that are presented by the support services at www.ppds.ie/pcsparchive.

3.3 Drama

The quality of provision for this subject is good and generally reflects the key principles of the *Primary School Curriculum*. There is evidence of breadth, balance, continuity and progression in the programme implemented. There is good use of structured pupil-pupil interaction in Drama and pupils engage well with the activities organised.

It is recommended that each class teacher work with her pupils to draw up a 'drama contract' that sets out the type of behaviour that is required in order for a drama lesson to be successful. Information and samples are available from the curriculum support services at www.ppds.ie/pcsparchive.

3.4 Assessment

Teacher-designed tests are used regularly in most curricular areas. Each teacher keeps a monthly account of work completed. There is scope to improve these so that they provide clear statements of the learning that has taken place in the class. There is good support and monitoring of pupils' written work. Standardised attainment tests are administered annually in Mathematics and English reading. It is recommended that the school examine the data on whole-school achievement over a number of years in these tests with a view to evaluating overall school achievement in English reading and Mathematics and making improvements as necessary. Diagnostic tests are administered as appropriate to pupils in receipt of supplementary teaching.

4. QUALITY OF SUPPORT FOR PUPILS

4.1 Pupils with special educational needs

The principal and other staff members are active in promoting an inclusive school ethos that is supportive of pupils with special educational needs. There is a need, however, for class teachers to give greater consideration, in some cases, to adapting programmes, lessons and activities for pupils with special educational needs.

The special-education team comprises a visiting learning-support teacher and a person who provides resource teaching for pupils with special educational needs and supplementary teaching for pupils with English as an additional language. The latter employee does not have any teaching qualification.

The quality of the planning, preparation, teaching and assessment carried out by the learning-support teacher is very good. Supplementary teaching is provided for pupils with difficulties in literacy. The main focus is on developing the pupils' phonological awareness, sight vocabulary, reading fluency, comprehension and writing ability. The teacher presents a welcoming, stimulating learning environment in the learning-support room. There is evidence that she is familiar with a wide range of assessment instruments and types of intervention. An individual profile and learning programme (IPLP) is prepared for each pupil. These contain specific statements of the targets to be achieved and clear descriptions of the activities to be used in achieving these targets. The need to include more specific information about the role of the class teacher in implementing the IPLP was discussed during the evaluation. The teacher prepares a detailed weekly planning and progress record for each pupil. The teaching observed was effective and purposeful and the teacher showed considerable skill in motivating pupils.

The quality of the resource teaching that the school provides for pupils with special educational needs is poor. It is recommended that the school employ a qualified teacher with the required knowledge and skills to provide resource teaching for pupils with special educational needs.

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

The school has an inclusive ethos that promotes respectful interactions between all members of the school community. Supplementary teaching is provided for pupils with English as an additional language. A suitable programme is followed and there is an appropriate emphasis on developing the pupils' vocabulary and fluency. It is recommended that the school revise its attendance policy so that it describes the strategies that are used to promote attendance.

5. CONCLUSION

The school has strengths in the following areas.

- The quality of the school accommodation is very good. The school community is to be congratulated on the successful completion of the building project and the move to the new school.
- The school is to be commended for the deliberate, structured way in which it fulfils its pastoral role in the lives of the pupils.
- The day-to-day management of the school is very efficient.
- The school has very good relations with its parish and the wider community.
- The quality of learning and teaching is good in Mathematics and in aspects of English.
- The supplementary teaching that the school provides for pupils with literacy difficulties and high-incidence learning disabilitites is very good.

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

- It is recommended that the school increase its capacity to implement the *Primary School Curriculum*. This will involve liaison with the Professional Development Service for Teachers, a greater emphasis on the role of in-school management in curricular leadership, regular staff meetings, a policy on teachers' professional development, and a revised approach to school planning and classroom planning.
- It is strongly recommended that the board of management employ a qualified teacher with the requisite knowledge and skills as resource teacher for pupils with special educational needs.
- It is recommended that the school adhere to Department Circular 12/96 with regard to granting exemptions to pupils from the study of Irish.

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

Published, December 2010

Appendix

SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

Submitted by the Board of Management

Area 1 Observations on the content of the inspection report

- All exemptions to pupils from the study of Irish when granted did adhere to the Departments Circular 12/'96.
- Feedback from secondary schools suggests no evidence of weakness in Irish standard among past pupils.
- We felt that comments about the quality of the resource teaching in our school were unduly harsh.

Area 2 Follow-up actions planned or undertaken since the completion of the inspection activity to implement the findings and recommendations of the inspection

- A fully qualified resource and language teacher is now employed in the school.
- The duties of the Deputy principal have been revised and a contract has been drawn up.
- Other policies recommended have been put in place.
- The staff have undergone a training day with a facilitator in English with special emphasis on Oral language. A phonics policy through the school is now in place.
- At present we await word from the PPDS for an cuiditheoir for Gaeilge and efforts are being made to implement the communicative approaches as in Curaclan na Bunscoile.