An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Whole-School Evaluation
REPORT

SN Bhríd, Grange
Tullow, County Carlow
Uimhir rolla: 04077I

Date of inspection: 15 March 2010

AN ROINN OIDEACHAIS AGUS SCILEANNA | DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND SKILLS

WHOLE-SCHOOL EVALUATION

A whole-school evaluation of Scoil Náisiúnta Bhríde, was undertaken in March 2010. This report presents the findings of the evaluation and makes recommendations for improvement. The evaluation focussed on the quality of teaching and learning in Irish, English, Mathematics and Physical Education. 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.

INTRODUCTION – SCHOOL CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

Scoil Náisiúnta Bhríde, Grange, is a co-educational school in a rural setting approximately five kilometres outside the town of Tullow in Co. Carlow. It caters for pupils from infants to sixth class. 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	90
Mainstream classes in the school	8
Teachers on the school staff	5
Mainstream class teachers	4
Teachers working in support roles	1
Special needs assistants	0

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT

1.1 Characteristic spirit, mission or vision

The school is under the patronage of the Catholic Bishop of Kildare and Leighlin. The school's ethos focuses on enabling every pupil to actively participate in all school activities regardless of physical or learning ability, gender, religion or race. It is also committed to preparing every pupil for life by promoting a sense of value and respect for all.

1.2 Board of management

The board of management is constituted properly and regular meetings are held. Detailed minutes of these meetings are maintained. Accounts are audited as mandated by Section 18(1) of the Education Act 1998. The requirements set down by the Department of Education and Skills regarding class size, the retention of pupils, the integrity of the school day, and the length of the school year are observed. Pupil attendance is satisfactory and enrolments are increasing. The board has published a health and safety statement, an attendance strategy, a code of behaviour and an enrolment policy in line with legislative requirements. A review of the enrolment policy is recommended to guarantee due adherence to the Education Act 21(2) in relation to the enrolment of pupils with special educational needs. Board members have availed of training provided by the Catholic Primary School Managers' Association. The development and review of the school plan is regularly discussed at board meetings. The board signs, dates and ratifies all policies. Board members have been assigned specific duties which they undertake conscientiously. During the evaluation the board expressed concern over the lack of a general purpose room and the small size

of classrooms, as members feel that this impacts on the school's ability to implement the curriculum in its totality.

1.3 In-school management

The school's diligent and committed principal displays a very good facility to lead all aspects of school life. She demonstrates excellent organisational and management skills. She capably leads the whole-school planning process. She successfully nurtures a positive and welcoming school climate and enjoys the confidence of the staff, the board and the parents. She manages and supports staff effectively at a curricular and pastoral level. The principal is ably supported in the execution of her duties by an in-school management team consisting of the deputy principal and the special-duties post holder. The process of school development and improvement is integral to the work of this team. They contribute effectively to building a positive school climate. Each team member has a clearly defined role in line with Circular 07/03. Post holders' duties are reviewed every year to reflect the changing priorities of the school. Regular in-school management meetings are convened and staff meetings are used as a forum for the dissemination of information of relevance to each post.

1.4 Management of resources

Teachers are deployed in line with Department of Education and Skills guidelines. All staff members are cognisant of their particular role and responsibilities and undertake these diligently. Opportunities for the effective implementation of the *Primary School Curriculum (1999)* are provided through the appropriate organisation of the multi-grade classes. The school's policy on staff allocation ensures mobility within the mainstream setting and between mainstream and special educational settings. There is a wide range of resources, including information and communication technology (ICT) in the school to support teaching and learning. Specifically, resources in the curriculum areas observed were particularly good.

1.5 Management of relationships and communication with the school community

The parents' association, which is affiliated to the National Parents' Council, supports the work of the school. The association is involved in shared reading, fundraising and sacramental and extra-curricular school events. Parents have access to all school policies and were involved in the development of the health and safety statement. It is advised that strategies be formulated to ensure optimal parental involvement in the whole-school planning process. Annual parent-teacher meetings and end-of-year reports inform parents of their child's progress. Termly newsletters from the parents' association keep the general parent body abreast of upcoming school events and achievements. The parents' association acknowledges the welcoming, inclusive atmosphere that exists in the school. They recognise and appreciate the caring and supportive attitude that prevails with regard to parents' concerns.

1.6 Management of pupils

The management of pupils is of a very high standard. Teachers and pupils interact respectfully. Pupils are very well-behaved and they display pride and interest in their work and co-operate willingly with their teachers during all class activities. They are eager to engage in discussion and participate fully in guided and discovery-based learning situations. Teachers acknowledge and praise pupils' efforts regularly.

2. QUALITY OF SCHOOL PLANNING

2.1 Whole-school and classroom planning

The quality of whole-school planning is good. A comprehensive range of administrative policies is in place in line with relevant educational legislation and in response to the evolving needs of the school. Curriculum planning is undertaken collaboratively, is clearly structured and reflects the principles of the *Primary School Curriculum (1999)* in all instances. Detailed whole-school plans for Irish, English, Mathematics and Physical Education are particular to the needs of this school. The Relationship and Sexuality Education policy has yet to be formulated. The immediate development of this policy is recommended. A comprehensive special educational needs policy is in place. Some good practice is evident with regard to the reviewing of particular whole-school plans. To ensure a consistent approach to planning it is advised that an action plan be set out to address policy review in a cyclical manner.

All teachers prepare both long-term and short-term plans. The quality of this planning varies. Elements of good practice include the identification of clear learning objectives and methodologies which indicate a comprehensible understanding of the principles of the curriculum. In many instances, planning does not fully reflect curriculum guidelines and is overly focussed on content with insufficient attention given to planning for the development of pupils' skills and attitudes. Monthly progress records are diligently maintained. It is recommended that planning for differentiation takes place at all class levels so that the needs of all pupils are catered for. A challenge for the school now is to ensure the successful link between whole-school planning and individual teacher planning.

2.2 Child protection policy and procedures

Confirmation was provided that, in compliance with 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

English

There is a good standard in relation to the quality of learning and teaching in English. Teacher-directed, whole-class teaching is the predominant methodology used with some group work for various aspects of particular lessons. Resources are plentiful and are carefully chosen to support teaching and learning in this curriculum area. A print-rich environment complements lesson presentation in all classrooms. Well-stocked libraries are used optimally across the school. Opportunities for pupils to extend their oral language competence are provided through discrete oral language lessons and through the careful integration of this strand with other curriculum areas. Story, poetry and rhyme are used judiciously to consolidate learning and to improve pupils' competence in English. Due attention is given to the development of reading strategies at all class

levels. The majority of pupils read accurately and are developing appropriate comprehension skills. Further development of the present provision of differentiated programmes of reading for those pupils experiencing difficulties, through the targeted and specific use of graded reading schemes should now be considered. Suitable emphasis is placed on the development of pupils' writing skills and pupils at all levels write for a variety of audiences in a variety of genres. Samples of pupils' work are displayed attractively and celebrated in all classes. Opportunities for pupils to draft and edit their own writing are facilitated by the use of ICT.

Gaeilge
Múintear an Ghaeilge go sásúil agus is iomaí samplaí de dea-chleachtas atá le sonrú. Cothaítear suim na ndaltaí sa Ghaeilge trí cheachtanna a chur i láthair go bríomhar, spreagúil ar an iomlán. Bunaítear an t-ábhar foghlama ar théamaí a bhaineann le saol agus le taithí na ndaltaí agus roghnaítear téacsleabhair éagsúla chun tacú le múineadh agus le foghlaim. Baintear úsáid éifeachtach as acmhainní, amhráin, dánta agus rannta sna ranganna. Tríd an scoil, cruthaítear timpeallacht phriontála éifeachtach sa Ghaeilge. Baintear úsáid as an nGaeilge mar mheán teagaisc i rith na gceachtanna. Baintear feidhm éifeachtach as éagsúlacht modheolaíochtaí mar obair bheirte fhiúntach agus gníomhaíochtaí chumarsáide chun an teanga nua a dhaingniú. Léiríonn formhór na ndaltaí tuiscint oiriúnach ar Ghaeilge shimplí. Glacann na daltaí páirt i ngníomhaíochtaí ó bhéal le muinín. Dírítear aird chuí ar an léitheoireacht agus léann na daltaí le brí agus le tuiscint. Bunaítear an scríbhneoireacht ar an iomlán ar na leabhair shaothair. Moltar deiseanna sa bhreis a thabhairt do na daltaí sna hardranganna raon níos leithne scríbhneoireachta a chleachtadh.

Irish
The teaching of Irish is satisfactory with many areas of good practice in evidence. Pupils' interest in Irish is fostered through the presentation of lively, stimulating lessons in many instances. Lesson content is based on topics that relate to pupils' experiences, with particular textbooks chosen to support teaching and learning. Effective use of resources, songs, poetry and rhyme are features of good practice in all classes. Good work is undertaken in the development of a print-rich Irish environment throughout the school. Irish is used consistently as the medium of communication during lessons. Varied methodologies, including focussed pair-work and communication activities, are used effectively to reinforce new language and the majority of pupils display an appropriate understanding of basic Irish. Pupils exhibit confidence in oral language activities. Satisfactory attention is paid to the teaching of reading and pupils read for meaning and with understanding. Writing activities are generally workbook based. Further opportunities for senior pupils to write in a variety of genres in Irish are advised.

3.2 Mathematics

In Mathematics, a broad and balanced curriculum is provided where pupils have access to all the strands each year. Attractive mathematics areas in classrooms are used constructively to consolidate learning. Well-structured lessons incorporating directed talk and discussion are the norm. Suitable focus is placed on the development of pupils' mathematical language in all classes. Appropriately challenging teacher-questioning is in evidence. Relevant resources, including ICT are used well to facilitate a hands-on approach to learning. Pupils are provided with regular opportunities to develop their problem-solving skills and they demonstrate competence in mental mathematics activities. Written activities consolidate learning and are suitably differentiated for the multi-class setting in all instances. To build on this good practice it is advised that the specific needs of individual pupils be addressed through explicit differentiated objectives and written activities. Pupils engage willingly in mathematics lessons and they demonstrate a good understanding of a particular concept at each class level.

3.3 Physical Education

The teaching of Physical Education is very effective. Staff members are to be praised for the successful delivery of a broad and balanced programme across the strands despite the lack of indoor facilities. Pupils are provided with opportunities to participate in aquatics training at defined intervals during their time at school. A wide range of resources is well-utilised to support the successful implementation of this curriculum area. Well-structured lessons with suitable emphasis on skills development and safety are the norm. Due attention is given within individual lessons to the practice of warm-up, skills, games and cool-down activities. Lessons are aptly integrated with other curriculum areas and there is appropriate progression from strand to strand and within strands. Pupils participate fully in lessons and demonstrate positive attitudes towards Physical Education.

3.4 Assessment

Levels of attainment in Mathematics and English are assessed on an annual basis by means of standardised tests. A screening test is used to identify pupils in senior infants in need of specialist support. Teacher observation and teacher-designed tests are highlighted as the main modes of classroom assessment. Written work is monitored consistently and affirmed positively in all classes. A review of the assessment policy is recommended to guide teachers in the assessment of pupils' progress in all curriculum areas. This policy should also include strategies for the structured monitoring of classroom assessment over a period of time in order to identify strengths and areas for development in pupils' learning. It is advised that information gathered in this manner be used to inform future planning for all pupils, including more able pupils.

4. QUALITY OF SUPPORT FOR PUPILS

4.1 Pupils with special educational needs

The school employs a focussed and well-organised approach to the delivery of support to pupils with special educational needs. Parental involvement is prioritised in the selection of pupils for learning support and again if this support is no longer considered necessary. Pupils are generally withdrawn in small groups for supplementary teaching. All junior infant pupils presently avail of a weekly early intervention language programme, which is delivered by the learning-support teacher to pupils in small groups on a withdrawal basis. It is recommended that this early identification and prevention programme is implemented through in-class support and that junior infant pupils are not withdrawn from class. This will further enhance collaboration between the class teacher and the learning-support teacher. Commendably, the learning-support teacher provides a weekly session of in-class support to the senior infant pupils who were identified through the previous year's early intervention programme.

The good practice in evidence within the special educational setting includes the development and cyclical review of individual educational plans in consultation with all the partners. Clear objectives are also outlined for all pupils availing of learning support, pupil-attendance records are kept and creditable learning and teaching methods are used. A commendable feature of special education provision is the facilitation of formal monthly meetings between class and support teacher to ensure a collaborative, consistent approach to each pupil's learning needs.

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

The school's mission statement promotes the spirit of inclusiveness and the principles of equality, and the school community undertakes this responsibility consistently. No pupils from minority groups in are attendance at present. Pupils from all socio-economic backgrounds are welcomed and are afforded every opportunity to benefit from all aspects of school life.

5. CONCLUSION

The school has strengths in the following areas:

- The board of management is diligent in the execution of its duties.
- The school principal competently manages the school and is capably supported by a dedicated teaching team.
- There is evidence of good quality teaching and learning across many curriculum areas.
- An ethos of collaboration ensures a caring, inclusive and holistic environment for all pupils.
- Pupils are very well-behaved and they engage enthusiastically in all school activities.
- The parents' association is supportive of the work of the school.
- There is a commitment to school improvement and review among all the partners.

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

- It is recommended that a Relationship and Sexuality Education policy be formulated.
- A review of the assessment policy is recommended to guide teachers in assessing all curriculum areas so that assessment results can be used optimally to inform teaching and learning at each class level.
- Appropriate differentiated planning should be organised at each class level to support all pupils, including the more able.
- It is recommended that the school further explores opportunities for in-class support at all class levels as proposed by Circular 02/05

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

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