An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Whole-School Evaluation
REPORT

Scoil Náisiúnta na Rinne
County Waterford
Uimhir rolla: 17295Q

Date of inspection: 29 September 2010

AN ROINN OIDEACHAIS AGUS SCILEANNA | DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND SKILLS

1. Introduction

This is a co-educational Gaeltacht school with a teaching staff of four under the patronage of the Bishop of Waterford and Lismore. The school serves 103 pupils and it is envisaged that the enrolment will increase in the short term. The catchment area of An Rinn is still a strong Gaeltacht district, although the influence of English in the community may recently be discerned. Despite this challenge, the board and staff succeed in fostering a strong Gaelic atmosphere in the school. Some of the pupils enter school without a knowledge of Irish but it is apparent that the parents favour education by total immersion through Irish. The board of management was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the evaluation, and the response of the board will be found in the appendix to this report.

2. Summary of Findings and Recommendations for Further Development

The following are the **main strengths** of the work of the school:

- The teaching staff and the whole school community are to be complimented on fostering a truly Gaelic atmosphere in the school and surrounding district.
- The pupils have attained a high standard of spoken Irish and of reading in both Irish and English. The teaching of Mathematics and Drama is also effective.
- The pupils' good behaviour, manners, courtesy and application to learning are commendable.
- Pupils with learning difficulties and special educational needs are well catered for.
- The diligence and collaboration of the staff, as reflected in their efforts to implement a balanced curriculum in the interests of pupils, is praiseworthy. The teachers' attitude towards experimenting with new approaches, strategies and teaching methods for the good of the pupils is commendable.

The following **main recommendations** are made:

- It is recommended that a development plan embodying specific objectives would be drawn up, requiring that the board of management and staff would systematically and regularly review the school plan in collaboration with the parents. It is essential that the child protection policy would be reviewed without delay and that the various partners would be informed accordingly.
- It is recommended that the teachers' system of planning would be reviewed and that a stronger emphasis would be placed on identifying specific learning objectives and on assessment for learning.
- It is recommended that further emphasis would be placed on providing structured, daily opportunities for practising passages of free writing under the direction of the teachers on a whole-school basis.
- It would be worthwhile making greater use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in the classrooms.
- A stronger emphasis could be placed on the assessment of the pupils' attainments in Irish.

3. Quality of School Management

- The composition of the management board is in accordance with Departmental regulations. The board and school community work unstintingly at promoting the school's

ethos, tradition and culture as a Gaeltacht school. Meetings, which are conducted through the medium of Irish, are convened at least five times per year and discussions are largely concerned with administrative and financial matters relating to the school. The board acknowledges that the main strength of the school is the good relations which exist between the staff and the community of parents.

- The questionnaires completed by parents indicate that they are satisfied in the main with the work of the school, but that about half of them think that they are not afforded sufficient opportunities to voice their opinions in the school planning process.
- The quality of in-school management is good. School records are carefully kept. The principal performs his duties with diligence and in particular he ensures that a proper emphasis is placed on attaining the best standards possible for the pupils. He receives on-going professional support in his work from the school staff as a whole and especially from the deputy principal. It is recommended, in accordance with Circular 07/03, that special duties would be reviewed regularly under the headings curriculum, administration and pastoral care and these duties should be recorded in the school plan.
- The school's resources in general are effectively managed. A part-time secretary is very supportive in the daily functioning of the school. A stimulating environment is created for the pupils and the school is cleaned on a daily basis. A good range of teaching aids has been made available and these are used reasonably well. The three special needs assistants provide skilful support for the pupils under their care. It was apparent that the pupils had not been distributed evenly among the various classrooms. A total of 37 pupils was assigned to one classroom. While the support team gives additional support in this case, it must be ensured in future that the pupils will be divided equitably among the class-groups so that the differential between the largest class-groups and the smallest class-groups will be kept to a minimum. The parents plan to supply interactive boards for the classrooms. It is recommended that computers would be installed in all classrooms so as to facilitate learning by means of technology.
- The management of pupils is of a high standard. A specific programme of supervision is followed at break times and the code of behaviour is implemented positively and effectively. The pupils are well-mannered, co-operative, respectful and confident in their interactions both with other pupils and adults. The pupils indicated in the questionnaires that they felt safe and secure in school and that they were treated fairly by the teachers.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- The staff has undertaken productive work in drafting the obligatory school administrative policies and the policies for all curricular areas. The implementation of the school plan is regularly reviewed at staff meetings. However, it is clear that until now the management board has played little part and has had little influence on the development and ratification of school policies. With a view to assisting with the direction of the school's work, there is now a need to implement a more systematic approach to the school's process of planning, review and self-evaluation, before the board officially adopts the various policies. It is also essential that the parents' committee would play a more active role in the planning process. It is recommended that the board would devise a strategic development plan and, as an initial step in this process, that a plan of action incorporating three-year targets would be drawn up as soon as possible. The recommendations outlined in this report could act as a guide towards the realisation of appropriate objectives. For example, it would be worthwhile devising a development plan for the use of Information and Communication Technologies as an aid to learning.
- All teachers fulfil their obligations as regards planning for teaching, both short-term and long-term. A variety of practices prevails in relation to the recording and the level of detail of teaching notes and monthly records. The most impressive schemes observed were based on the curricular objectives and it would be worthwhile building on this good practice.

- It would be of benefit to use a template for short-term planning on a whole-school basis in order to identify more clearly the specific teaching objectives, approaches, strand content and the assessment strategies to be used. It would be advantageous also if more specific objectives were identified in the individual study programmes for pupils with special educational needs and if these objectives were shared with the teachers of mainstream classes and with the parents of the pupils in question.

Child protection policy and procedures

An assurance was given that the attention of management, school staff and parents' committee had been drawn to the procedures to be followed in relation to child protection. A designated liaison person (DLP) and a deputy DLP have been appointed in line with the requirements of the guidelines. However, it is necessary to discuss the policy on child protection and to sign off on it at board level. Reference should be made in the policy to the *Child Protection Guidelines for Primary Schools* (Department of Education and Science, September 2001), in order to ensure that the attention of management, school staff and parents have been drawn to the procedures and that all staff members are familiar with the procedures to be followed. It is also recommended that a copy of the procedures would be made available to each staff member.

5. Quality of Teaching, Learning and Pupil Achievement

- A very high standard of comprehension, fluency and pronunciation, as well as an enriched vocabulary, have been achieved in Irish in this school. An atmosphere of total immersion prevails and the school staff is highly successful at retaining Irish as the living language of communication in the school yard and environs of the school. Occasions for using the Irish language are created by means of mime, communication games, storytelling, drama and poetry. The pupils, including pupils with special educational needs, succeed in making creditable progress at Irish reading. A good effort is made to develop an interest in reading among the pupils and it is clear that the libraries throughout the school contain an extensive range of reading material. Functional writing is frequently undertaken in Irish and composition is largely based on work themes discussed in the classrooms and textbooks. While samples of writing are put on display, it would now be worthwhile placing further emphasis on the personal writing process and on the use of technology. It is recommended that the approach to the drafting, re-drafting and editing of passages of writing would be clarified in the school plan.

- The board has decided not to commence the teaching of English until the beginning of first class. Pupils from second class upwards read with understanding and with a good level of fluency, in accordance with their ability levels. Standardised test results indicate that pupils' levels of achievement are improving from year to year in English. An interest in reading is encouraged and there is a suitable selection of books in classrooms. Although a very good foundation is laid in the teaching of writing skills in infant classes, it was observed that there was a need for the standards of writing among a considerable number of pupils to be developed further. It is recommended that attention be given to the development of a structured oral language and writing programme. Additional free-writing opportunities under the guided direction of teachers should be organised for pupils. It is also recommended that cursive writing should be taught in junior classes, as recommended in the curriculum, in order to develop pupils' writing styles in a systematic manner throughout the school.

  Tá cinneadh déanta ag an mbord bainistíochta gan tosú le múineadh an Bhéarla go dtí tús rang a haon. Léann na daltaí le tuiscint agus le líofacht mhaith sa Bhéarla de réir a gcumais ó rang a dó ar aghaidh. Léiríonn na torthaí caighdeánaithe go bhfuil gnóthachtáil na ndaltaí sa Bhéarla ag feabhsú ó bhliain go bliain. Tá raon oiriúnach leabhar sna seomraí ranga agus spreagtar nós na léitheoireachta. Cé go leagtar síos bunchloch an-

mhaith do mhúineadh scileanna scríbhneoireachta sna naíonáin, sonraíodh go raibh gá le forbairt bhreise a dhéanamh ar chaighdeán na scríbhneoireachta ag cuid mhaith daltaí. Moltar aird ar leith a dhíriú ar chlár céimnithe labhartha agus scríofa a fhorbairt agus níos mó deiseanna a eagrú do na daltaí píosaí saorscríbhneoireachta a chleachtadh faoi threoir na n-oidí. Moltar freisin scríbhneoireacht cheangailte a mhúineadh sna bunranganna de réir mar atá molta sa churaclam chun stíl scríbhneoireachta na ndaltaí a fhorbairt ar bhonn córasach tríd an scoil.

- The teaching of Mathematics is effectively addressed and a comprehensive whole-school plan has been drawn up. A variety of resources, the mathematical environment and concrete materials are used in some classes in order to facilitate the acquisition of mathematical concepts and to awaken the pupils' interest. There is a commendable emphasis on the cultivation of mental calculation, prediction and skills of estimation throughout the school. Results of standardised Mathematics tests indicate that a high standard has been attained by the majority of pupils in relation to mathematical processes and concepts, in line with their developmental and ability levels. Pupils demonstrate competence in the accurate use of mathematical language. Some learning differentiation was noted in the case of some groups of pupils with special educational needs, but it would be worthwhile placing greater emphasis on the differentiation of learning using collaborative tasks in certain instances, so as to more effectively meet needs arising from ability differences in Mathematics.
- Drama lessons are based on the curricular strands. A coherent, appropriate plan has been devised as a guide to implementing the drama programme throughout the school. The teachers demonstrate an apt understanding of the dramatic process and of a variety of strategies for stimulating the imagination and creativity of pupils, and for fostering their self-confidence and linguistic capacities. Pupils are given opportunities of producing Irish stories and scripts and of exploring conflicts and feelings in imaginative contexts.
- In general, the quality of learning and teaching in this school is good. Each teacher has a high level of fluency in Irish and they utilise effective teaching methods. The teachers strive diligently to implement every aspect of the curriculum and they have cultivated a pleasant atmosphere throughout the school. The responses to the questionnaire for parents reveal that they are by and large satisfied with the work of the school.

6. Quality of Supports for Pupils

- Two support posts have been allocated to the school. The youngest pupils are withdrawn from their classes in order to implement an early intervention programme in English and Mathematics. The teachers work diligently and focus careful attention on the development of an awareness of phonemes and phonology. Suitable illustrative materials are used during the teaching process and the written efforts of pupils are put on display. A learning-support policy has been included in the school plan but it is apparent that there is now a need for a review and a more detailed specification of the roles and responsibilities of staff, in accordance with Circular 02/05. It would be worthwhile consulting with the teachers of mainstream classes with a view to focusing particular attention on the differentiation of other curricular subjects for pupils with special educational needs, so as to facilitate their learning.
- Proper use is made of a range of assessment methods in the school. Copybooks are satisfactorily monitored in the majority of classes and formal meetings with parents are convened in order to discuss the progress of students. Written reports are issued to all parents and copies are kept in the school. Standardised tests in English and Mathematics are administered annually to all classes from First Class onwards and a screening test is administered to the senior infant pupils.. The results of these tests are carefully considered and diagnostic tests are used in order to target the needs of pupils with learning difficulties. Teacher-designed tests are used in the majority of classes and there is a strong dependence on observation by the teacher in others. There is scope for the

increased use of checklists, work portfolios and learning profiles as a means of assessing the effectiveness of teaching and learning. It is recommended that standardised tests in Irish would be administered. In order to enhance the effectiveness of the assessments, it is now necessary to develop the assessment systems in use on a whole-school basis in accordance with the *Guidelines of the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment*.

- There are no pupils from minority groups attending the school at present. It is recorded in the school plan that each gender is accorded equal status and that students from all backgrounds and races are welcomed. A book rental scheme is made available to all pupils and the needs of any pupil from a disadvantaged background are discreetly met.
- There is strong collaboration between the school and the parents. All parties during the preliminary meetings, together with a high percentage of parents in the survey, expressed their satisfaction with the atmosphere, approach and Gaeltacht spirit of the school. Parents are free to consult with teachers concerning matters which are relevant to the school lives of their children. Parents are kept informed on school issues by regularly sending notes home and they are invited to attend various events during the school year. The parents' committee strongly supports the work of the school by collecting funds for the benefit of the school and by providing practical assistance in the area of sport and healthy living practices.

Published November 2011

Appendix

School response to the report

Submitted by the Board of Management

Area 1: Observations on the content of the inspection report

Cé go bhfuil 37 dalta i seomra ranga amháin ceapann bainistíocht na scoile gur fearr é seo ná 10 bpáiste a thógaint ón rang agus iad a chur i seomra eile ina mbeadh 3 rang ansin. I ndáiríre is rogha an dá dhíth atá ann.

Bíonn treoirlínte is déanaí ón Roinn Oideachas tríd an SESS á leanúint ag na múinteoirí a phléann le daltaí le riachtanais speisialta, a bhfuil comhairle ann maidir le spriocanna agus leagan amach na gcláracha aonair. Pléitear cúram na bpáistí le múinteoirí ranga go rialta i gcaitheamh na bliana.

Ní raibh aon trialacha caigdéanacha tré Ghaeilge ar fáil don scoil tráth na MSU, ach do ghlac an scoil páirt i scéim phíolótach dos na trialacha atá á ullmhú ag Foras Taighde Ar Oideachas, Coláiste Phádraig.

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

Tá tosaithe ar athbhreithniú a dhéanamh ar an bplean scoile i dtaca leis na páirtnéirí go léir.