An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

St Cianan's National School
Cushinstown, County Meath
Uimhir rolla: 17029S

Date of inspection: 12 May 2010

AN ROINN OIDEACHAIS AGUS SCILEANNA | DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND SKILLS

WHOLE-SCHOOL EVALUATION

A whole-school evaluation of St Cianan's National School, Cushinstown, County Meath was undertaken in May, 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 History. The board of management was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the report; a response was not received from the board.

INTRODUCTION – SCHOOL CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

St Cianan's National School caters for pupils from junior infants to sixth class and is under the patronage of the Catholic bishop of Meath. The building was originally constructed in 1934 and it was extended in 2007.

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	70
Mainstream classes in the school	3
Teachers on the school staff	4
Mainstream class teachers	3
Teachers working in support roles	1
Special needs assistants	0

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT

1.1 Board of management

The school benefits from an active and committed board of management. Meetings are held regularly, with minutes being taken at each meeting. Each year the treasurer prepares a financial statement for the board. To build on such good work, it is recommended that the board arrange to have the school's accounts formally certified or audited on a regular basis as required under Section 18 of the Education Act 1998. The board concerns itself primarily with the upkeep, maintenance and financial management of the school. It also invests effort in promoting a warm and inclusive school environment and in supporting the teachers and school staff in the delivery of their responsibilities.

It is the practice of the board to ratify all school policies. While the board is involved in the formulation of school organisational policies, it is recommended that it become more involved in the future development of school curriculum policies. While pupil attendance at the school is very satisfactory it is recommended that the current approaches which the school has developed to promote attendance be formulated into a school policy. The board encourages parents to become actively involved in a number of school organisational matters, such as trips to the theatre and sporting events. The board stated that it is satisfied with the way in which the curriculum is taught and with the achievement levels of the pupils.

1.2 In-school management

The school is led by a committed and dynamic school principal. He takes a keen interest in the progress of all pupils in both the academic and pastoral domains. He actively supports and empowers staff in their work, successfully creating a warm and nurturing school climate in so doing.

The in-school management team consists of the principal and deputy principal. Duties pertaining to the post of deputy principal span a number of curricular, pastoral and organisational domains. It is recommended that those duties be delineated in a more specific manner in the school plan. The principal and deputy principal meet very regularly, largely on an informal basis, and liaise closely with other staff members to ensure the smooth and effective operation of the school. More formal liaisons are undertaken at school staff meetings. It is recommended that the minutes of all staff meetings be recorded and retained on file.

1.3 Management of resources

The school is presented in a very tidy and attractive manner. The pupils benefit from the use of a football pitch located on its site and a tarmacadam basketball court. The school has a wide selection of resources and it has been proactive in securing further resources to support the implementation of the curriculum. Plans are in place to further develop the school's information and communication technology (ICT) resources, particularly the installation of interactive whiteboards in all mainstream classrooms. The school benefits from the dedicated assistance of a school secretary.

1.4 Management of relationships and communication with the school community

The school operates an open-door policy to communicating with the parent body and school community. Through the use of fliers, memos and an annual school newsletter, parents and the community are informed about school activities, events and successes. In the past, the school had a website. There are plans to re-establish this website and these should be progressed. Parent-teacher meetings are held in the first term of each academic year and pupils receive a written report on their progress in the third term. Parents are welcomed to the school and are frequently involved in school trips, school events and after-school activities. New pupils to the school receive an induction pack which includes policies on homework, behaviour, anti-bullying, and healthy eating. It is recommended that such policies be distributed to parents of pupils at other class levels at more frequent intervals.

The school is supported by an industrious parents' association. The association meets regularly and it is focused and dynamic in its efforts to support the work of the school. These efforts include fundraising activities such as poker classics, supermarket bag-packing and the organisation of a Christmas Concert every two years. Parents also finance a range of school activities and resource requirements such as swimming classes, computers, jerseys and school trips.

The parents' association actively endeavours to involve parents in the life of the school. In so doing, it is creative and effective in availing of the expertise and talents of many of the parents and community members. Parents are involved somewhat in the formulation of school policies. It is recommended that they be consulted to a greater degree in the formulation of school policies. The representatives of the association stated that it is satisfied with the education provided in the school.

1.5 Management of pupils

The management of pupils in this school is of a very good quality. Pupils present as content and cooperative in this environment. Teachers interact with them in a warm, respectful and affirming manner and this is equally reciprocated by the pupils.

2. QUALITY OF SCHOOL PLANNING

2.1 School planning process and implementation

The quality of school planning is good. The school has written detailed policies for each curriculum area. Content is clearly delineated with very good provision for continuity and progression. The school has also developed a large number of detailed and very user-friendly organisational school policies. In the design and creation of these plans, the school adopts a collaborative approach, with each plan being carefully written and discussed at school planning meetings and staff meetings. It is recommended that attention be given to updating the school's policy on behaviour management with specific reference to procedures for suspension and dismissal. It is also recommended that all school policies contain the date of ratification and a date for review.

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 Department's *Child Protection Guidelines for Primary Schools* (Published 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.

2.2 Classroom planning

All teachers prepare plans to guide teaching and learning in their classrooms. In the main, these plans give a clear outline of content to be covered within both short-term and long-term frameworks. As there is considerable variety in the scope of these plans and the degree of detail in them, it is recommended that the school examine its approaches to classroom planning. Such an examination should investigate the creation of common approaches to planning across the school and should consider pedagogical areas such as learning objectives, content, teaching methods, assessment, integration and differentiation. All teachers write up monthly reports. As there is also considerable variety in the level of detail in these reports, it is recommended that the school examine current approaches to writing monthly reports with a view to establishing a more uniform approach.

3. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

3.1 Language

Gaeilge

Tá plean scoile soléir and cuimsitheach scríofa ag an scoil chun múineadh na Gaeilge a threorú. Sa chéad athbhreithniú eile den phlean seo, b'fhiú cur síos níos iomláine a dhéanamh ar straitéisí chun scileanna saorscríbhneoireachta na ndaltaí a fhorbairt. Moltar díograis na n-oidí maidir le teagasc na Gaeilge. Déanann siad gach iarracht an teanga a úsáid le linn an lae. Dá bhrí sin,

éiríonn go geal leo atmaisféar taitneamhach agus ómósach a chothu ó thaobh na Gaeilge de. I gcásanna áirithe, baintear úsáid as Béarla chun foclóir nua a chur in iúl, agus moltar an cleachtas seo a sheachaint. Baineann na hóidí úsáid éifeachtach as drámaíocht agus fearais sna ceachtanna chun suim na ndaltaí a mhúscailt agus chun iad a mhealladh chun cainte. Dá bharr san, tá éagsúlacht sna ceachtanna, le béim chuí ar rannpháirtíocht ghníomhach na ndaltaí. Is léir go mbaineann na daltaí taitneamh as na ceachtanna agus go bhfuil siad ag baint tairbhe astu. I gcásanna áirithe, baintear úsáid as obair bheirte chun foclóir nua a chleachtadh agus a fhorbairt. B'fhiú an cur chuige seo a úsáid ar bhonn níos leithne chun deiseanna labharta sa bhreis a thabhairt do na daltaí agus chun a gcumas labharta a fhorbairt. Cuirtear béim inmholta ar rannta agus dánta oiriúnacha sna ranganna go léir.

Déantar an léitheoireacht agus an scríbhneoireacht a nascadh go tuisceanach leis an obair ó bhéal i rang a dó ar aghaidh. Tá caighdeán ard léitheoireachta á bhaint amach agus léann daltaí le brí agus le líofacht. Freagraíonn siad ceisteanna go cumasach bunaithe ar an léitheoireacht. Tá cló i nGaeilge le feiceáil sna ranganna go léir, ach b'fhiú níos mó ábhar clóbhuailte a chur ar taispéaint i dtimpeallacht ghinéaralta na scoile. Eagraítear gníomhaíochtaí scríbhneoireachta éagsúla go rialta, bunaithe go mórmhór ar an teacsleabhar. Déantar monatóireacht inmholta ar shaothar scríofa na ndaltaí. Moltar gan scríbhneoireacht i nGaeilge a dhéanamh go foirmeálta le rang a haon.

Irish

A clear and comprehensive school plan has been written by the school to direct the teaching of Irish. In the next review of this plan, it would be worthwhile to describe in greater detail strategies to be used to develop pupils' creative writing. Teachers' commitment to the teaching of Irish is commended. They make every effort to use the language during the day. As a result, they capably succeed in promoting a respectful and enjoyable atmosphere in relation to Irish. In some instances, English is used to present new words and it is recommended that such practice should be avoided. Teachers make effective use of drama and resources in lessons to awaken pupils' interests and to encourage them to converse. As a result, lessons have variety with appropriate emphasis on the active involvement of the pupils. It is evident that pupils enjoy the lessons and that they derive benefit from them. In some cases, use is made of pair work to practise and develop new vocabulary. It would be worthwhile to make greater use of this approach to provide more speaking opportunities for pupils and to develop their oral competencies. Commendable emphasis is placed on rhymes and poems in all classes.

Reading and writing is integrated discerningly with oral work from second class upwards. A high standard in reading is achieved and pupils read with fluency and meaning. They capably answer questions based on the reading. Irish print can be seen in all classes, but more print could be displayed in the general school environment. Various writing activities are organised regularly, based largely on the textbook. Pupils' written work is monitored commendably. It is recommended that writing in Irish should not be undertaken formally in first class.

English

Teaching and learning in English is guided by a very good curriculum plan, which makes clear and commendable provision for the sequential development of content across the three areas of reading, writing and oral language. It is recommended that in the next review of this plan, consideration be given to the creation of a class-by-class phonological overview which could be added as an appendix to the plan.

Literacy standards in the school are high. Lessons are delivered in a lively and engaging manner, with suitable provision for the development of oral-language skills. Pupils are encouraged to ask

questions and they do so on a regular basis. There is some scope for the wider use of pair work in the development of language skills both in discrete lessons and within integrated contexts.

The school is very proactive in promoting reading standards. Lessons make very good provision for the development of word-attack skills and phonological awareness. Such provision is very ably and deliberately supported by the work of the learning-support teacher. Appropriate provision is in place for comprehension work. Pupils read with fluency and meaning, discussing books and stories with interest and enthusiasm. In a number of classrooms, teachers make use of novels. There is some scope for the wider use of novels in the senior classes of the school. Libraries are well stocked and a buddy reading programme is in operation in the junior classes. Given the success of this programme, it is recommended that the school investigate opportunities for its wider use both within individual classrooms and also between senior and junior pupils.

Pupils write capably. Teachers make suitable provision for the development of writing skills in a variety of integrated contexts and through the use of different writing genres. In doing this, very good attention is paid to grammar. Teachers correct pupils' creative writing in a careful manner. In the senior classes, pupils write an annual newsletter which serves to develop their skills in preparing scripts for publication and in writing for a variety of audiences. In some of the other classes, pupils also write mini books. In all classes, samples of the pupils' writing are on show. There is some potential for the wider celebration of this writing in the greater school environment.

Pupils reveal a keen interest in poetry, with suitable provision for the memorisation of poems. Teachers creatively integrate poetry with a number of other curricular areas, most notably Social, Environmental and Scientific Education.

3.2 Mathematics

The school has constructed a detailed and focused mathematics plan which is very clear and sets out the sequential development of content, objectives and activities from class level to class level. It is recommended that in the next review of the school plan, greater reference be made to differentiation, linkage, assessment, curriculum leadership and the role of parents.

Pupils appear to enjoy mathematics lessons. Based on those observed during the evaluation, lessons are presented in a lively manner, serving to challenge and motivate the pupils. Pupils show interest in their work, frequently asking questions. The lessons observed had very good pace and a clear structure. They were delivered primarily as whole-class lessons. Concrete resources are used to very good effect, providing pupils with opportunities to engage in hands-on activities. It is recommended that greater consideration be given to the use of collaborative learning approaches.

Good provision is in place for differentiation according to class levels. Lesson content is effectively related to the environment and experience of the pupils. In some instances, greater provision for the development of problem-solving skills beyond those in the textbooks should be considered. In a number of instances, teachers creatively integrate Mathematics with other aspects of the curriculum.

Very good provision is in place for the development of mathematical language and number facts. Regular revision of such language and facts takes place. Classrooms are well presented as mathematics-rich environments but there is some potential for the further development of school corridors and display areas as mathematics-rich environments. Pupils' work indicates that they

have covered a broad range of strands, with notable success and focus on the area of number. This work is monitored carefully with suitable provision for self-correction.

3.3 History

The school plan for History is clear and focused. It is recommended that it make greater reference to history trails, and that these trails be compiled as an appendix in the plan. The lessons observed had very good pace and structure and made suitable use of resources. Pupils are very interested in historical topics. During lessons they ask questions about the topics being covered and discuss the content with enthusiasm and verve.

Pupils have acquired many of the skills associated with History, revealing in particular a strong grasp of chronology and cause and effect. They also reveal a keen interest in local history. As part of the history programme, pupils have undertaken some educational trips which serve to provide an experiential basis for their studies. Classrooms display some historical posters and stimuli, but there is scope for the wider use of such resources and, in particular, for the use of timelines. Lesson content is linked effectively to the life experience of the pupils. Copybooks indicate that a wide selection of themes and topics has been covered. In some instances, pupils undertake project and research work on specific historical themes and topics. It is recommended that greater opportunities for such work be investigated.

3.4 Assessment

The school has written a comprehensive assessment policy. All pupils in classes from first to sixth are tested annually in English using the *Micra-T Test.* Pupils in second and fifth classes are tested in Mathematics on an annual basis using the *Sigma-T Test.* All pupils in second and fifth are also tested using the *Non Reading Intelligence Test (NRIT).* In addition, a wide range of diagnostic tests is in use in the school. Class teachers make use of a variety of assessment techniques, which include teacher observation, teacher-devised tasks and tests, work samples, checklists and portfolios.

In some instances, creative use of running records was noted. It is recommended that the school examine wider opportunities for the sharing and dissemination of such good practice.

4. QUALITY OF SUPPORT FOR PUPILS

4.1 Pupils with special educational needs

The school has one special education teacher who is based in the school and who also provides a service to a neighbouring school. This teacher provides specific support for pupils who have been identified as needing learning-support. Included in this support are two pupils who have English as an Additional Language needs. The school has compiled a comprehensive school plan for special education. It is recommended that in the next review of this plan, greater reference be made to the staged approach.

In delivering the special education programme, class teachers and the special education teacher collaborate very regularly in an informal manner to design and monitor programmes and activities suited to the ongoing development of the pupils concerned. In facilitating the delivery of the programme, individual education plans (IEPs) are drafted for each pupil attending. These IEPs are very well constructed building on the strengths and areas for development pertinent to each child. In addition, each week, a set of targets is put in place for each child. Such concerted and focused practice is highly commended as it facilitates the regular review of pupil attainment, sets content

at progressively challenging levels and serves to support the work of the class teacher on a regular basis. It is recommended that an overview of these targets be included in each child's IEP.

Pupils are selected for additional support using a comprehensive analysis of relevant assessment information, which includes teachers' observations, standardised test scores, analysis of pupils' work and results from a wide range of diagnostic tests. Parents, pupils, the principal and other relevant professionals are also consulted. Support for pupils is delivered primarily on a withdrawal basis. While some in-class support does occur and while some small groups are withdrawn for support, it is recommended that the school investigate wider opportunities for group support sessions and for further in-class support.

The school targets its special education programme at pupils who are underachieving in the area of literacy. To this end, early intervention is a strong feature of its action plan. Support for pupils is delivered in a highly engaging manner. They are provided with a broad range of activities and challenges which are focused on the targets unique to each child, while also being delivered in a fun and affirming manner. Lessons focus on phonological awareness, word-attack skills, comprehension activities, oral language development and reading exercises. Fruitful partnerships with parents are established through the use of well-structured and intensive homework activities. Resources, which include the use of information and communication technology (ICT) are very well deployed, with teacher-designed resources being used in a notably creative and effective manner.

An examination of the school's standardised test scores and pupil attainment across all class levels indicates that the focus on literacy is paying strong dividends. It is recommended that the school investigate the extension of the principles of this intervention to numeracy.

5. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- The school is managed effectively by a focused and committed board of management.
- The school benefits from the committed and conscientious leadership of the principal and deputy principal.
- The whole-school plan is user friendly and focused in style.
- A warm and nurturing school environment exists.
- Lessons have very good pace and structure.
- Teachers make every effort to recognise the uniqueness of each child while also nurturing them to reach their fullest potential academically.
- A strong sense of order and efficiency prevails in the school.
- Pupils are content in this industrious learning environment, applying themselves to their work with enthusiasm and pride.
- Special education is delivered in a focused, warm and affirming manner.

As a means of building on these strengths and to address areas for development, the following key recommendations are made:

- It is recommended that the school review its approaches to classroom planning and monthly reports to ensure consistency in practice and an appropriate amount of relevant detail.
- It is recommended that the school investigate wider opportunities for the support of numeracy and for the use of in-class support.

- It is recommended that duties pertaining to the post of deputy principal be more clearly delineated in the school plan.

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.

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