

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

SN Fionntain Naofa
Shanahoe, Abbeyleix,
Co Phortlaoise
Uimhir rolla: 17489G

Date of inspection: 24 November 2010



AN ROINN | DEPARTMENT OF
OIDEACHAIS | EDUCATION
AGUS SCILEANNA | AND SKILLS

1. Introduction

This three teacher school with 74 pupils enrolled was built in 1948 of a Boyd Barrett school design template. It is situated some six kilometres north-east of Abbeyleix. Typically of this school design, the three classrooms are small in size and restrict the level of movement and pedagogical approaches that the pupils and teachers engage in. There is one additional classroom built in 2004 as well as additional contact rooms used for learning support/ resource services and an administration office to the rear of the main school structure. There are lined play areas to the front and rear of the school and a well-drained games field to the rear of the school. The school building and grounds have been well maintained over the years and they are in good condition. 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.

2. Summary of Findings and Recommendations for Further Development

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

- The quality of communication and interaction between the different parties is very good.
- The pupils indicate that this is a good school and the good behaviour and cooperation of the pupils is commendable.
- The school has targeted improvements in literacy and numeracy as a priority.
- There is a positive learning environment the school.
- Good provision is made for pupils with learning difficulties.

The following **main recommendations** are made:

- A plan for the refurbishment of the school building should be prepared to manage the school refurbishment process locally.
- The school plan should be developed in the areas listed in the body of this report.
- The teaching and learning methodologies being practised should be varied to include more group work and paired work in pupils' activities.
- The level and use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT), library and educational resources in the school needs to be raised.
- The high achievers in the school should be included in the general allocation for learning support timetable in order to enhance curriculum mediation strategies more appropriate to their abilities.

3. Quality of School Management

- The quality of work engaged in by the board of management is good. The board is duly constituted under the rules of the Department, officers are allocated with responsibilities, good budgetary controls are in place and accounts are regularly certified. The board and parents' association are in regular contact and both committees indicated during pre-evaluation meetings their satisfaction with the quality of education available in the school.
- The school building, although well maintained, requires upgrading and refurbishment and a planned approach to achieving this identified priority is recommended.
- The board has discussed and ratified the school plan currently in use. Elements of the plan however require updating to reflect legislative changes and best practice, particularly in the areas of school enrolment policy, investment and use of ICT, provision of adequate library resources and the implementation of differentiated learning strategies.
- The quality of the work of the in-school management team as reflected in the day-to-day running of the school is very good. Pupils are ensured access to a broad curriculum and are prepared for post-primary education. The principal and post holder are both diligent and concerned to ensure that the pupils attain high standards.
- The role ascribed to the post holder in the school plan needs to include curriculum implementation strategies to reflect the evolving needs of the school.
- The quality of the management of resources is good. A structured developmental plan is required to ensure that the recently installed interactive whiteboards are used at the optimal level in enhancing curricular research and presentation. Further investment in Information and Communication (ICT) is required as well as an implementation plan for ICT use.
- The quality of communications between the different parties in this school is good. Parents' questionnaire responses indicate that the parent body is very satisfied with the school, both in regard to the management of pupils and curriculum delivery. The parents' association has also circulated its first newsletter outlining events in the school.
- The quality of rapport between the pupils and teachers is very good. They discuss school issues openly and cognisance is taken of pupils' opinions in making school decisions. Pupils are well supported in their social and skills development and the staff is to be congratulated on the open and welcoming ambience in the school.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- The quality of school planning and school self-evaluation shows scope for development. A large number of organisational and curricular plans have been generated in the school plan and they are presented in two volumes of work. The teaching staff drafts the policies and submits them to the board of management for discussion, amendment and ratification.
- The plans are currently being contextualised in this school. A specific implementation strategy with dates and designated responsibilities need to be included in the plan. Dates

for review and evaluation of the strategies should also be included as well as planned supports from the professional supports services.

- The placing of the school plan on a school website would ensure better access to the school plan by all the partners and would also enable wider consultation in the planning process. The parents association are yet to be included formally in this process.
- Individual classroom planning is regularly practiced and is influenced largely by the respective text-books in use and other commercially produced programmes. The implementation and impact of individual classroom planning should now become part of the school improvement agenda currently being promoted by the staff. The planning practices engaged in should be included in the overarching methodologies section of the school plan. It is recommended that the school adopts the DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools) initiative templates for school improvement in this process.
- School authorities provided evidence that, in compliance with Primary Circular 0061/2006, the board of management has formally adopted the Department's *Child Protection Guidelines for Primary Schools*. Evidence was provided to show 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.

5. Quality of Teaching, Learning and Pupil Achievement

- The overall quality of teaching and learning is good in this school. The pupils' questionnaire reveals a student body that indicate that they are receiving a developmental education programme and that they are enjoying school.
- Múintear an Ghaeilge go díograsach sa scoil agus tá spiorad rannpháirtíochta agus sástantacht na ndaltaí follasach sa chur chuige. Cothaítear tuiscint agus feasacht teanga na ndaltaí tríd an obair. Éiríonn leis na daltaí caighdeán áirithe a bhaint amach freisin i léamh agus scríobh na Gaeilge, Is gá afach ath-bhreithniú a dhéanamh ar an gcur chuige agus béim a chur ar Ghaeilge fheidhmiúil, ar ghnásanna cainte agus ar na scileanna cumarsaide teanga. B'fhiú infheistíocht suntasach a dhéanamh i leabhair Ghaeilge don leabharlann scoile.
- *Irish is taught diligently in this school and the pupils' spirit of participation is evident in the way the language is taught. The pupils' understanding and linguistic skills are developed through the process. Pupils also achieve a certain standard in reading and writing in Irish. A review of methodologies is now required so that there is an emphasis on functional language, language routines and on enacting communication skills. It would be worthwhile to invest significantly in library books in Irish.*
- Overall the quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in English is good. However further emphasis needs to be placed on developing oral language skills, phonological awareness and differentiated reading and writing programmes of work. Pupils' work is regularly monitored and learning support services further enhance identified skills and classroom practice.

- A whole-school approach to handwriting and presentation also needs to be implemented as part of the school's improving standards initiative. Development of comprehension and higher order thinking skills should also be emphasised to achieve creditable standards relative to pupils' abilities. Further investment in library facilities and home school supportive programmes could further enhance the work practices.
- Overall the quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in Mathematics is good. A specific programme of work is outlined in the school plan and school text-books guide its sequencing and problem solving activities. Mental work, differentiated learning strategies, use of equipment and practical problem solving are targeted in the improving standards strategy being implemented in the school and their inclusion in a revised programme is praiseworthy. Prediction and estimation skills should also be included.
- It is recommended that teachers target specific mathematical language in each lesson and that use would be made of group work, pair work, mathematical trails games, puzzles and quizzes to stimulate pupils' interests and competences.
- The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in Drama is good. The school plan outlines the curricular framework and good use is made of Christmas concerts and local festivities to showcase classroom practice. Past performances have been recorded and are used as learning resources by the pupils. There is good use of structured pupil-pupil interaction, props and other resources and performances are integrated with Gaelge and local history to explore language and sentiment.
- All the teachers implement a variety of teacher-designed tasks and tests and pupils' written work is monitored. Standardised tests in literacy and numeracy are administered annually. Further diagnostic tests are administered by the learning support and resource teachers. The results of all class assessments need to be collated sequentially and analysed rigorously to help identify the essential pedagogic and curricular responses that need to be put in place on a class by class basis to support the improving standards strategy being pursued.

6. Quality of Supports for Pupils

- This school has access to 12.5 hours of general allocation from two learning support teachers per week covering literacy and numeracy. A part-time resource teacher also provides 7 hours of support for two pupils in the school.
- The support team provide an effective school-based response to the needs of resource and learning support pupils. Resource pupils receive strategic and focussed support in a withdrawn setting and pupils attending learning support receive supplemental supports in phonics and in developing comprehension skills. Equitable inclusion for high achievers in the learning support services must be ensured in view of the availability of discretionary time in the general allocation learning support time being given to the school.

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Appendix

SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

Submitted by the Board of Management

Area 1 Observations on the content of the inspection report

The responses the questionnaires given by the inspector to both parents and children registered an overall satisfaction rate of 97-100% with the school. This is a reflection on the dedication of the whole staff.

The children look forward to participating in local studies and field trips, art projects and Christmas dramatic productions; all pupils in the school from junior infants up line out in the school band and march in the Portlaoise St. Patrick's Day parade (having the honour of leading the parade in 2011). The involvement of the children in these activities and also sport, particularly football, hurling and swimming, has become part of the tradition of the school and results in a happy environment filled with enthusiasm.

There are nine computers in the computer room. Each child in the school from junior infants up has a lesson on the computers every week. This has been the practice for many years in the school and the children have become very adept at using computers.

A smart interactive whiteboard with visualiser has been installed in each classroom and every teacher was given a laptop for school use. Prior to installation all the teachers attended a summer course on the whiteboard. Following the installation they attended in-service on the smart board. This was done in their own time and at their own expense as they wished to be equipped to fully utilise the new technology for the benefit of the children in their care.

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 Methodology policy in Literacy and Numeracy has been drawn up by the teaching staff and ratified by the Board of Management. This is now being implemented in the classrooms.

The DEIS Three Year Plan for Literacy and Numeracy has been laid out with the assistance of a cuiditheoir from the Professional Development Service for Teachers with targets and review dates.