

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Robertson National School
Stranorlar, County Donegal
Uimhir rolla: 18731P

Date of inspection: 30 September 2011



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

1. Introduction

Robertson National School is a two-teacher, co-educational school under the patronage of the Church of Ireland Bishop of Derry and Raphoe. The school caters for forty-four pupils and enrolment figures look set to remain steady for the next number of years. The pupils are taught in two multi-grade classrooms. Attendance levels are very good overall. Provision for English, Irish, Mathematics and Science was inspected. The board of management 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 management and staff effectively nurture and value the all-round education of the pupils.
- The board of management functions very effectively and it supports the work of the school to a very high level.
- The principal provides very good leadership to the school community.
- The teachers are very committed to the pupils and there is evidence of very good teaching, learning and pupil achievement.
- Parental support for the work of the school is highly commendable.

The following **main recommendations** are made:

- It is recommended that the board reviews the duties assigned to the special duties post on a regular basis in accordance with Circular 07/03.
- It is recommended that the school continues to develop assessment strategies to inform planning and provision for exceptionally able pupils.

3. Quality of School Management

- The work of the board of management is very effective. The chairperson visits classrooms regularly and is centrally involved in assemblies. He shows particular commitment towards the characteristic spirit of the school. Members of the board are proactive in helping to create a stimulating learning environment. Very worthwhile resources for teaching and learning, including information and communications technologies (ICT), have been acquired. The board is commended on the extensive improvements to the building and grounds in recent years and for its interest in supporting curricular development in particular.
- The work of the in-school management team is of a very high quality. The principal facilitates school-review and self-evaluation processes and he is very effective in his role as instructional leader. The special duties post-holder supports school improvement

measures very diligently. It is recommended that the board reviews the duties assigned to the special duties post, in accordance with Primary Circular 07/03, to ensure that the duties align more closely with the curricular priorities that the school has outlined in its own planning documents.

- School resources are managed very effectively. There are two mainstream teachers and two shared support teachers. All work very well together and show considerable dedication to their work and to their pupils. The special needs assistant (SNA) is employed on a part-time basis and she works diligently in her role. She is also employed as a part-time secretary. She supports the teaching principal and staff capably.
- The school building and its environs present extremely well. The school has engaged in a successful two-year environmental awareness programme and was awarded a green flag.
- The management of relationships with the school community is very effective. Parents are supportive of school activities. They are active in celebrating special events in the life of the school including the annual grandparents' day and the sixth-class graduation ceremony. Parents assist with fund-raising, educational trips and sporting and social events. Formal parent-teacher meetings are held annually and end-of-year reports are issued to parents about their children's progress. Responses to questionnaires, administered as part of the evaluation, indicate that parents are happy with the school and that their children like going there.
- The overall management of pupils is very effective. Pupils show courtesy and respect in their interactions with teachers and with each other. Pupils' responses to questionnaires administered during the evaluation indicate that they feel safe, valued and happy at school. School assemblies are organised effectively and, during assembly, pupils are given opportunities to present their work in written and visual forms.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- The school planning and self-evaluation process is highly commendable. A comprehensive array of administrative policies has been developed collaboratively by the board and staff and these impact positively on how the school operates.
- Curricular planning is of a very high quality. Teachers engage successfully in school self-review processes using the framework document *Looking at our School* (DES, 2003). The curricular plan is broad and balanced and it promotes continuity and progression in pupils' learning. The teachers, as part of their self-evaluation work, have identified a need to enhance provision for exceptionally able pupils. In the future, planning for such pupils will need to be more fully informed by relevant assessment strategies.
- 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

- Sa Ghaeilge, tá caighdeán an teagaisc, foghlaim agus gnóthachtáil daltaí ar an iomlán go maith. Cothaítear dearcadh dearfa i leith na teanga sa scoil agus baintear úsáid éifeachtach as acmhainní teicneolaíochta agus cluichí teanga. Baintear úsáid inniúil as modhanna cruthaitheacha teagaisc sa dá roinn ach tá gá le fócas níos treise ar scileanna cumarsáide. Tá scileanna léitheoireachta agus tuisceana na ndaltaí go han-mhaith. Tugtar faoi thascanna scríbhneoireachta struchtúrtha go rialta agus tá úsáid na foclóra sna tascanna scríbhneoireachta ar chaighdeán maith.
- *The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement overall in Irish is good. A positive attitude is cultivated towards the language and effective use is made of technological resources and language games. Competent use is made of creative teaching approaches in both sections; however, a stronger focus is needed on the development of communication skills. Pupils' reading and comprehension skills are very good. Structured writing activities are undertaken regularly and pupils' vocabulary in written tasks are of a good standard.*
- The quality of teaching and learning in English is very good. Reading is developed very well from the pre-reading to independent reading stages. Effective use is made of large-format books and authentic reading materials such as novels. Comprehension is taught competently and pupils' learning in this area is progressing very well. In both classrooms, highly commendable practices are in place to develop pupils' writing skills. Pupils are given opportunities to write in different genres and writing across the curriculum is promoted effectively. Pupil achievement in English is very good overall.
- Provision for Mathematics is very good. Lessons taught during the evaluation included very effective approaches incorporating the use of the environment, ICT and collaborative approaches. Teachers have introduced effective strategies in problem solving and pupils are making very good progress in this area. Assessment data indicate that pupils' achievement in Mathematics is very good overall.
- Work undertaken in Science is very good. There is very careful coverage of all strands of the subject. The school grounds are used extensively for science trails and habitat investigations. The school received a Science and Mathematics award recently for its work as part of the *Discover Primary Science* programme. It participates in the *Incredible Edibles* programme and the school has its own vegetable and plant garden which is used as a resource for teaching scientific concepts. The pupils are confident in discussing the scientific experiments undertaken.
- Overall teaching, learning and pupil achievement are very good. Displays of pupils' work provide evidence of high-quality learning outcomes in many curricular areas. A highly commendable range of methodologies, including team-teaching approaches, is used in both sections of the school. Very effective learning experiences and creative use of ICT were observed during the evaluation.
- The overall quality of assessment is very good. Teachers keep detailed records of pupils' progress and they plan to develop pupil self-assessment checklists. Standardised tests are administered in English reading and mathematics and pupil attainments are very good overall.

6. Quality of Support for Pupils

- There is high-quality provision for pupils with special educational needs. A comprehensive whole-school policy guides practice in this area. Pupils' learning needs are identified using a wide range of diagnostic tests. Appropriate planning is in place which is formulated in consultation with parents and other relevant professionals. The pupils' progress is monitored and recorded diligently.
- Considerable emphasis is placed on the transition of pupils into primary school and close links are established with post-primary schools in preparation for the transfer of senior pupils.
- Teachers are sensitive to any instances of disadvantage which manifest and they endeavour to be as supportive as possible to parents and pupils. There is a book rental scheme in place.

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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 Board of Management felt that the Whole School Evaluation was affirming of the hard work and dedication of the Board of Management, Staff, Parents and Pupils.
- The Inspector was very professional in her work, and was warm and courteous throughout the evaluation.
- The report accurately reflects the on-going and future work of the school.

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

The Board of Management looks forward to discussing and implementing the recommendations made by the inspector.