

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Newtownwhite National School
Ballysakeery, Ballina, Co. Mayo
Uimhir rolla: 09040K

Date of inspection: 24 January 2012



A N R O I N N | D E P A R T M E N T O F
O I D E A C H A I S | E D U C A T I O N
A G U S S C I L E A N N A | A N D S K I L L S

1. Introduction

Newtownwhite National School is a co-educational, rural school dating from 1906, situated between Ballina and Killala. It is under the patronage of the Church of Ireland Bishop of Tuam, Killala and Achonry.

The school's ethos values diversity. Its enrolment of seventeen pupils represents a number of religious denominations who are welcomed in a very inclusive environment. Enrolment is increasing and the levels of attendance are very good. Pupils avail of the *School Meals Programme* funded by the Department of Social Protection.

This whole-school evaluation focused on the quality of teaching and learning in English, Irish, Mathematics and Visual Arts. 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 support of the board of management for the work of the school is highly commended.
- The diligence and professionalism of the staff is praiseworthy. They are very committed to the welfare of the pupils in their care.
- The overall standards of teaching and learning in the subjects evaluated are very good.
- Available resources are effectively managed. The school is also involved with a number of environmental and other programmes.
- Very good relationships exist within the school community and the parents' association is very supportive of and involved in the work of the school.
- An action-planning approach, implemented to address the school's agreed priorities, self-evaluation and review, works very effectively.

The following **main recommendations** are made:

- Moltar a thuilleadh béime a chur ar fhorbairt scileanna teanga neamhfhoirmiúil na Gaeilge tríd an scoil. *It is recommended that further attention be given to the development of informal communication skills in Irish throughout the school.*
- It is suggested that greater emphasis be placed on the promotion of mathematical language and mental mathematics. Differentiated collaborative problem-solving activities would further benefit pupils' progress.

3. Quality of School Management

- The committed board of management is properly constituted and functions very effectively in its support of the school. Meetings are held regularly, board members have

allocated roles and responsibilities and school accounts are audited annually. Board members expressed concern regarding the school's future, having lost financial support for school transport recently.

- The diligent, hardworking principal is ably supported by the second post holder. Both teachers carry out their assigned duties very conscientiously. They facilitate school self-evaluation processes and school improvement measures very competently. They have worked very successfully together and promote and accommodate a diversity of learners and the full inclusion of pupils with special educational needs. The teachers are commended for availing of many educational courses in pursuance of their ongoing professional development.
- The quality of the management of resources is very good. The school building and grounds are attractively and very well maintained. The school has been highly commended in Mayo County Council's *Best Kept School* programme. The pupils are encouraged to develop a sense of responsibility for the upkeep of the school and respect for their environment through this and the *Green Schools* programme. The school has received four flags under the *Green Schools* programme. It is also involved with *Active School* and *Discover Primary Science* awards.
- The board of management is commended for the provision of a very broad range of curricular resources that are used very effectively in teaching and learning. Information and communication technology (ICT) is used successfully and the school website is updated periodically. The staff is commended for the efficient organisation of a book rental scheme in conjunction with grants from the Department of Education and Skills.
- A very resourceful and hard working part-time secretary/caretaker contributes to the upkeep and smooth running of the school.
- The parents' association is very supportive of and involved in the life of the school. The members organise fundraising events and assist with educational trips, sporting and social events and contribute to school policies. Formal parent-teacher meetings are held annually and written reports are issued. Communication is effective and is maintained through newsletters, informal meetings and text-a-parent. All parents indicated in their questionnaire responses that the school is well run and that they are very happy overall.
- The management of pupils is very good. Pupils are courteous and respectful in their interactions with teachers and with each other. Regular school assemblies are effectively organised and provide valuable opportunities for all pupils to socialise, share and participate together. Pupils acknowledged in questionnaires administered during the evaluation that they feel happy and safe in school.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- The quality and relevance of organisational policies and curricular plans is very good. A sub-group, comprising parents and board of management members, proof reads policies which are reviewed on a cyclical basis as part of the school's action planning process. This process of consultation and involvement is very laudable. The process of school self-evaluation and development planning is well advanced.
- The quality of teachers' planning is excellent. A diverse range of learning experiences is provided for pupils. Individual planning is linked to the school plan, has regard for differentiated outcomes for pupils with varying needs and is firmly based on curricular

objectives. It is suggested that shorter planning documents and monthly progress reports be compiled by teachers.

- Confirmation was provided that the board of management has formally adopted the *Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools* without modification and that the school is compliant with the requirements of the *Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools* (Circular 0065/2011).

5. Quality of Teaching, Learning and Pupil Achievement

- Overall, the quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement is very good. Well structured lessons, a variety of teaching approaches and active-learning opportunities ensure high levels of pupil engagement and participation. The classroom environments support the pupils' learning and fine examples of their work are displayed in the corridor. All pupils confirmed in their questionnaire responses that teacher explanations are clear and that they are supported in their learning.
- Déantar an-iarracht suim na ndaltaí sa Ghaeilge a mhúscailt. Tá cáilíocht an teagaisc agus na foghlama go maith. Baintear dea-úsáid as cluichí teanga, puipéid, rannta, amhráin agus as ábhair choincréiteacha chun na daltaí a spreagadh. Usáidtear sraitheanna ó *Séidéal Sí*. Cé go gcuireann na múinteoirí an cur chuige cumarsáideach chun cinn agus go léiríonn formhór na daltaí tuiscint chuí ar an dteanga, tá gnéithe éagsúla le forbairt fós. Moltar an Ghaeilge neamhfhoirmiúil a chothú a thuilleadh agus aird a dhíriú ar ábhar agus céimeanna cinnte idir fhoclóir, fhrásaí, amhráin, drámaíocht agus scéalta. B'fhiú deiseanna rialta a thabhairt do na daltaí páirt a ghlacadh i bhfíorchumarsáid. Baineann caighdeán maith leis na scileanna léitheoireachta tríd an scoil. D'fhéadfaí cur leis na scileanna seo trí fíorleabhair a úsáid ar bhonn níos leithne. Forbraítear saothar scríbhneoireachta na ndaltaí i seánraí éagsúla go sásúil.

Great effort is made to promote positive attitudes to Irish among the pupils. The quality of teaching and learning is good. Very good use is made of language games, puppetry, rhymes, songs and concrete materials to motivate the pupils. Strands from Séidéal Sí are used. While the communicative approach is promoted by teachers and a majority of pupils display appropriate understanding, aspects remain that can be further developed. It is recommended that the informal use of Irish be further promoted and that attention be given to definite topics and stages including vocabulary, phrases, songs, drama and story telling. Regular opportunities for the pupils' engagement with real-life communication should be provided. The quality of reading is good throughout. These skills could be further augmented through engagement with real books. Pupils' written work in a variety of genres is being developed satisfactorily.

- The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in English is very good. Lessons are presented in a lively and engaging manner. Structured oral language and discrete language themes are implemented to good effect. Pupils are competent and confident speakers. A multi-strategy approach to the promotion of their reading competence and the encouragement of reluctant readers is adopted through peer reading, paired and shared reading, novels, stories, newspapers and other texts. Pupils are introduced to a broad and challenging poetry repertoire. The writing process is well developed in the school. Some good examples of the pupils' writing in a range of genres were evident including class diaries, independent composition and a range of projects.
- The high quality overall of teaching and learning in Mathematics is evident through class discussion in preparation for lessons, clear explanation of concepts, collaborative learning opportunities, use of concrete materials and well structured, activity-based and problem-solving approaches. Greater emphasis on the promotion of mathematical

language and mental mathematics and differentiated, collaborative, problem-solving activities would further benefit pupil progress.

- Provision for teaching and learning in Visual Arts is very good. Comprehensive programmes of work are implemented at all class levels and pupils have opportunities to develop their skills in all curriculum strands. Interactive whiteboard work is incorporated very successfully to ensure integrated and thematic approaches. The lessons observed included effective starting points that were linked to the pupils' imagination and experiences. Portfolios are maintained and attractive displays of pupils' work evidence the emphasis on the elements of making and looking and responding to art.
- The quality of assessment is very good. A variety of approaches includes checklists, individual profiles, individual records and passports, recorded teacher observations, teacher tasks and tests, diagnostic and standardised tests. Particularly effective is the use of pupil self and peer appraisal. The school participated in a recent assessment for learning (AfL) pilot audit from which it derived considerable knowledge and benefit. Assessment strategies inform teacher planning. Standardised attainment tests are collated electronically and facilitate recording and analysis of whole-school achievement. Assessment outcomes are used to guide the school's consistent approach to address the differentiated needs of individual pupils, including exceptionally able pupils. The trends identified in assessment data and test analyses could be further used to support school self-evaluation.

6. Quality of Support for Pupils

- The quality of support provided for pupils with special educational needs is excellent. Extensive individual profile and learning programmes (IPLPs) and individual education plans (IEPs) are prepared by two shared support teachers. Timed, measurable and realistic targets are devised for pupils through a consultative process with parents and mainstream class teachers. Early intervention and the staged approach are provided for. In-class support and withdrawal in small groups or individually, depending on needs, is undertaken. Documentation relevant to planning and record-keeping is exemplary and all work is tailored to the pupils' individual needs.
- A caring and mutually-respectful atmosphere is cultivated throughout the school. All teachers have established very good relationships with their pupils and they are clearly committed to the pastoral care, holistic development and academic learning of all pupils.

Appendix

SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

Submitted by the Board of Management

Area 1 Observations on the content of the inspection report

The whole school community of Newtownwhite N.S. would like to thank the inspector for the courteous and sensitive manner in which the WSE was carried out. We are happy that the report acknowledges the caring and mutually respectful atmosphere cultivated throughout the school. It affirms the commitment given to the holistic development and academic learning of all the pupils.

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

We continue to expand the development of informal communication skills in Irish throughout the whole school community.

As part of our three year development plan we have targeted the areas of problem solving and oral maths.