**School Self-Evaluation Report 2015/’16**

1. **Introduction**

School self-evaluation is seen as an important area to inform school development planning in our school. To this end The Board of Management, staff, parents and pupils work together on an on-going basis to improve the school infrastructure, resources, level of care and teaching and learning in our school. The school community has prioritised areas for improvement every year well in advance of the current Department of Education and Skills initiative in this area. This school self-evaluation report is in compliance with the Department’s initiative.

This school self-evaluation report for 2015/’16 explores our school community’s view of Gaeilge and also evaluates the school’s legislative and regulatory compliance as per the School Self-Evaluation Guidelines checklist.

1. **The focus of the evaluation**

A school self-evaluation of teaching and learning in Gaeilge was undertaken in the school during the 2015/’16 school year. During the evaluation teaching and learning, in particular in oral Irish, across the whole school was evaluated.

1. **School Context**

* This is a mixed, vertical primary school located on the edge of Portlaoise with a rural/urban intake.
* At the time of the report there are 228 pupils.
* The school is single stream junior infants to sixth – eight classes, eight class teachers, 4 SET, an administrative principal, four SNAs and part-time ancillary staff.
* The school has an assessment policy.

1. **Findings**

* No standardised testing is undertaken in Gaeilge in the school. Standardised testing takes place annually in Maths and English. This testing is useful in providing an indicator of pupil achievement in comparison to national norms and thereby guide development work in these areas. The absence of such a test in Gaeilge means the school is unable to compare pupils’ standards in Gaeilge against national norms. The ability to compare would provide the school with a baseline from which to plan development.
* A pupil survey was completed by all pupils from 1st to 6th class. A simpler survey was

used in 1st and 2nd class with pupils from 3rd to 6th being given the additional opportunity to provide feedback on areas of Gaeilge they enjoy and how the school might help pupils improve their Gaeilge.

* The survey indicated that the majority of pupils view Gaeilge as an important subject 77% however only 51% agreed that they liked Gaeilge. There was a distinct difference between boys and girls with only 38% of boys indicating they liked Gaeilge as against 63% of girls. It was also notable pupils liking for Gaeilge declined with age from 69% in 1st class to 30% in 5th.
* A possible explanation for this decline is that despite 84% acknowledging doing Gaeilge every day in class only 46% indicated that they speak Gaeilge every day in school with only 25% of pupils feeling confident enough to speak the language. Added to these findings are those from outside school in which pupils indicated that only 45% would ever speak any Gaeilge outside school with less than half indicating any parental ability to assist with the language. These figures indicate low levels of engagement which are undoubtedly inhibiting language development and confidence with subsequent limited language progression for many pupils.
* On a more positive note 90% of pupils, with no significant difference across age bands or between boys/girls, indicated that they would like to improve their Gaeilge although only 40% would like to increase the amount of time they spend on Gaeilge in school.
* Pupils also provided information on areas of Gaeilge they enjoy in school. Areas of active learning/engagement such as songs, poems, games, IWB and dramas were mentioned by all age groups.
* Pupils were also asked for their views on how the school could help them to improve their Gaeilge. Suggestions made included: a Gaeilge corner in every class, more Irish books in class libraries, providing vocabulary sheets, more spoken Irish around the school, grouping of class for Gaeilge as per maths/English reading, prizes/rewards to encourage spoken Gaeilge, half day/day a week where Gaeilge is spoken, all instructions by teachers through Gaeilge, lunchtime Gaeilge club, Gaeilge only at little break, more exposure to spoken Gaeilge from teachers/guests.
* In a parental survey on Gaeilge 91 questionnaires were returned representing a 65% return.
* 78% of parents believe Gaeilge is an important subject.
* 63% of parents believe they have a reasonable understanding of Gaeilge with 43% being reasonably confident in speaking the language.
* With regard to assisting their children with Gaeilge 74% feel able to do so with 54% attempting to converse occasionally in Gaeilge at home. Of this number only 6% do so on a regular basis. 55% of parents would like to improve their level of spoken Gaeilge and the following are a sample of the suggestions made by parents as to how the school might assist in this regard: run a series of Irish classes, Maidin caife, parental booklet, notes/vocab home, homework for parents!
* 61% of parents believe their children enjoy Gaeilge which is 10% ahead of the figure reported by the children themselves.
* 55% of parents were happy with their child’s level of spoken Gaeilge with the following suggestions made as to how the school could improve the level of spoken Gaeilge: Gaelgeoir na seachtaine, games as Gaeilge, learn popular songs as Gaeilge, phrase of the week, invite in native speakers, Irish day each week, Irish at break-times, use during other subjects, have Gaeltacht pen pals, quizzes as Gaeilge, exchange day/event with Gaelscoil, reward pupils for spoken Irish, have a lead Irish teacher in the school.
* A staff survey on Gaeilge indicated that all the staff believes that Gaeilge is an important subject although 60% did not view it as being as important as maths and English. When the results were discussed at a staff meeting, this was attributed to the DES literacy and numeracy initiative, which increased the emphasis on English and maths.
* Overall the staff indicated dissatisfaction with the standard of Gaeilge in their classes with only 40% of pupils in their opinion at a satisfactory level despite the majority receiving daily opportunities to speak Irish. Staff acknowledged that language learning is improved through providing opportunities for oral language throughout the school day. This is an area they felt the school can develop and which will help improve standards of spoken Gaeilge. Staff also felt that pupils’ willingness to engage with Gaeilge declined with age as borne out in the pupil surveys. It was felt that for pupils to feel confident in communicating they need to have mastered basic language functions, ie. greetings, questioning, asking, expressing and be given opportunities to practice their language outside of discrete Gaeilge lessons. To make real progress staff felt Gaeilge needs to be integrated across the curriculum and school day.
* 80% of staff felt that their Gaeilge was satisfactory overall but 50% did express a lack of confidence in engaging in oral conversations with the class mainly due to lack of personal day to day usage of the language. 90% of staff indicated a desire to improve their own spoken Irish, which they felt would improve their own teaching of the language.
* Staff suggested the following ideas to improve spoken Gaeilge in the school:
  + Change staff attitude regarding importance of Gaeilge to equal Maths/English and allocate time/energy/resources accordingly.
  + change the current Gaeilge scheme in use to a more active/language based program
  + place the emphasis onto spoken Irish, have spoken Irish day/half day/break each week for the whole school, lunch-time Gaeilge club
  + provide more opportunities to pupils to hear spoken Gaeilge through listening to TG4/Nuacht/RNG
  + use more active/enjoyable teaching methodologies such as drama and games in the teaching of Irish
  + a greater use of Gaeilge throughout the school through Gaeilgeoir na seachtaine, frásaí na seachtaine, gaeilge on the intercom at announcements
  + explore opportunities to integrate Gaeilge throughout the class/school day for example, all instructions/responses as Gaeilge or teaching a second subject through Gaeilge across the school
  + provide greater support to parents seeking to improve their Gaeilge by providing classes, vocabulary/work sheets.

1. **Progress made on previously identified targets.**

School Improvement Plan for Maths:

* Year 1 target to identify areas of difficulty for pupils/classes through analysis of Standardised Test Results achieved. This full breakdown of the tests now continues annually.
* Year 2 target to incorporate the teaching of mathematical language into maths teaching achieved. Reminders provided annually.
* Year 3 target to improve pupils’ problem solving abilities commenced and standardised testing for the year 2015/16 indicates an improvement of 4% in this area in comparison with 2014/15.

School Improvement Plan for English:

* Year 1 (14/15)target to improve reading fluency through work with PDST, visits to other local schools, identification of improved reading program, financing and resourcing of program and communication to parents, staff and pupils achieved.
* Year 2 (15/16)target to improve reading fluency through raising staff awareness, implementation of new levelled reading program at junior end of school and assessment at the end of each term achieved. Target to implement new, levelled program at senior end to improve reading fluency not achieved due to budgetary difficulties. This target will have to wait until financing and resourcing of the reading materials is possible.
* Standardised test results for 2015/16 in literacy averaged 68% in comparison with 63% in 2013/14 and 2014/15. This represents a 5% improvement.

1. **Summary of school self-evaluation findings**

* Gaeilge is an area requiring development and improvement in the school.
* No standardised assessment in Gaeilge is undertaken in the school. A nationally standardised test (TGD-R) for English medium schools is available from the Educational Research Centre in Drumcondra, Dublin. The use of this test should be considered to establish the standard of Gaeilge in the school.
* Staff, pupils and parents feedback has identified spoken Irish as an area in which there is a lack of confidence and which is in need of development and improvement.
* There is a decline in pupil confidence/progression as pupils become older.
* Active pupil learning/engagement is preferred by pupils with increased opportunities/requirements for oral language in the class/school environment required for improvements to occur in oral capabilities.
* The majority of staff, pupils and parents have indicated an interest in improving their own spoken Irish and have made valuable practical suggestions to assist such improvement.
* Improvements in literacy and numeracy are continuing in the school which are further enhancing pupil performance above the national norms in standardised testing which indicates good pupil learning, motivation and engagement in these areas.
* The following areas are prioritised for improvement:
  + Assessment in Irish
  + Development of oral Irishin line with the implementation of the Primary Language Curriculum.

1. **The following legislative and regulatory requirements need to be addressed.**

* No areas were identified at present.