St. Attracta’s Community School,
Tubbercurry,
Co. Sligo.

School Self Evaluation Report

Report Issue Date: January 2014.
1. **Introduction**

In September 2012, a whole staff evening in-service took place on school self-evaluation. To follow, a literacy and numeracy core team was assembled consisting of school management, resource/learning support teacher and a number of staff representing the following subject areas: (a) English, (b) Gaeilge, (c) Project Maths, (d) History, (e) Geography, (f) French, (g) Junior Cert Science, (h) Leaving Cert Sciences, (i) Applied Sciences, (j) LCVP.

1.1 **The focus of the evaluation**

A school self-evaluation of teaching and learning was undertaken in St. Attracta’s Community School between January and October 2013. Under the umbrella of literacy we decided to concentrate on the area of spelling within a cohort of our first year students in classes 1A and 1B.

1.2 **School Context**

St. Attracta’s Community School came into being in 2002 through the successful amalgamation of Banada Abbey Secondary School and the Marist Convent. We are a co-educational school in a rural setting under the Trusteeship of the Bishop of Achonry and the Marist sisters. Numbers have increased from 527 in 2002 to 600 currently with a staff, teaching and ancillary of 60. We have 12 feeder schools in our catchment area. 22 students avail of learning support in English and 11 are in receipt of resource hours. As well as the traditional Junior and Leaving Certificate, we also have a well established Transition Year and Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme. There is a strong culture of CPD in our school. St. Attracta’s strives to create a Christian Community where the academic, cultural, sporting and spiritual aspects of each student is developed within an atmosphere of mutual respect, integrity, sincerity, honesty and tolerance.

Our school has successfully undergone a Whole School Evaluation, numerous subject inspections and incidental inspection since its opening. We appreciate the input and support of the Inspectorate at all times.
2. The Findings

First year students in classes 1A and 1B were set the Hodder Graded Word spelling test. This is a standardised spelling test which provides standardised scores, percentiles and spelling ages. The test was marked and each student’s score recorded in accordance with their chronological age. We then set about introducing a series of interventions with a view to improving their spelling competence. These interventions were:

- Regular spelling tests.
- Directed reading time in the form of “Drop Everything and Read” (DEAR).
- The teaching of spelling strategies and word attack skills.
- Recording of spellings in copies.
- A more focussed approach to the encouragement of accurate spelling in written work.

The students were retested after six months. On average the reading age of the students tested increased by 1.5 years over a six month period.

We plan to extend the spelling programme across all the class groups in first and second years. In addition to the interventions implemented by the English teachers we are also looking at ways that we can address spelling across the curriculum.

In order to help us plan for the development of literacy across the curriculum we conducted a number of surveys with students, parents and teachers.

We surveyed the teachers to establish existing practice with regard to promotion of literacy in the school. Teachers were invited to complete a brief online survey (Appendix 1) related to literacy in the classroom. From the summary of findings we were able to ascertain what good practice was already in place, which of these literacy related activities could be extended across the curriculum and also where there might be scope for the introduction of new practice. The findings of this survey indicated that teachers were using key word lists to reinforce subject specific vocabulary and many were encouraging accuracy in spelling punctuation and grammar. It was, however, evident that we needed a more coordinated approach to the reinforcement of technical accuracy in written work.

One area which has been identified as having a significant impact on standards of literacy is that of independent reading. It has been shown that students who
read for pleasure on a regular basis present with higher levels of literacy. With this in mind we decided to see what we could do to increase our students’ opportunities to read independently. The first stage was to establish how often the students read and also to gain an understanding of the factors that impact on this. We surveyed the students on their reading habits (Appendix 2) addressing both frequency and the nature of the preferred reading material. We plan to use the findings of this survey to help us identify ways in which we can promote reading both at school and at home.

Research has shown that children who come from homes that are literacy rich environments tend to have much higher levels of literacy. With this in mind we conducted a survey with parents (Appendix 3) to gain some understanding of how the home life of our students might be impacting on reading habits and literacy as a whole. We asked parents about their own reading habits, the presence of books at home and to what extent good ‘reading habits’ were being modelled. We are now looking at ways in which we can promote reading in school and at home.

**Use of Data**

We now use the CAT 3 assessment for all our students just prior to entry. This is a series of cognitive ability tests including a Verbal battery, a Quantative battery and a Non-Verbal battery of tests. The students also take the age appropriate level of the CAT 3 in Transition/5th year. These tests provide us with stanines for all students at entry. The stanines for verbal attainment for our current 1st years are shown in the table below:

No. of students scoring at each Stanine (Test May 2013)
It is possible to use the CAT 3 to gain some indication of performance at Junior Cert and Leaving Cert. Ideally we will be able to identify and introduce a series of programmes and interventions that will improve standards in literacy and numeracy. We hope to be able to measure the impact of these interventions by analysing the CAT 3 and JC/LC results.

In accordance with recommendations of the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy Guidelines we have established a Literacy and Numeracy Steering Committee. This committee is made up of teachers from a range of subject areas. The core team is using data gathered from the self evaluation process to inform the development of our own Whole School Literacy and Numeracy Plan.

3. **Progress made on previously-identified improvement targets.**

Not applicable as no previously-identified targets exist.

4. **Summary of School Self-Evaluation Findings**

4.1 **Our School has Strengths in the following areas:**

- Staff are now using the aforementioned interventions to aid the improvement of literacy in their classrooms.

- There is willingness among staff to share good practice (resources, methodologies etc).
● STen scores of first year students for reading are above the national norms.

● Classrooms are print-rich environments.

● DEAR (Drop Everything and Read) is currently being used with 1st and Second year classes and is specifically included on the TY timetable. We plan to extend this next year.

● 87% of teachers mark students written work for accuracy in spelling and grammar.

● 56% of students report their being lots of books at home.

● Almost half of the student cohort used for this report read for pleasure at least once a week and 34% read novels for enjoyment.

● 76% of parents surveyed read regularly.

4.2 **The Following areas are prioritised for improvement:**

● Expand the DEAR programme to all Junior Certificate Classes.

● Develop and implement a more focussed approach to improving literacy across the curriculum.

● Continue to develop the school as a print rich and literacy rich environment.

● Promote independent reading in school and in the wider school community.

● Use data from CAT 3 assessments to inform practice with regard to literacy.