Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Scoil Náisiúnta Dromaili
Drumelis, Cavan, Co. Cavan
Uimhir rolla: 11541V

Date of inspection: 20 October 2011
1. Introduction

Scoil Náisiúnta Dromaili is a mainstream, co-educational primary school under the patronage of the Catholic Bishop of Kilmore. The 242 pupils are distributed across nine classrooms. School attendance is good overall. During this whole-school evaluation, provision for Irish, English, Mathematics and Visual Arts 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 board of management works effectively and has made praiseworthy progress in managing structural improvements.
- The principal works in a dedicated and earnest manner and is assisted ably and positively by the deputy principal and post-holders.
- Teachers manifest considerable skill, enthusiasm for teaching and a very caring approach towards their pupils.
- The quality of teaching and learning is good overall.
- Throughout the school, the quality of display is praiseworthy.
- Parents have a very positive opinion of the school and the parents’ association provides purposeful, effective support.
- Pupils are enabled to partake very successfully in a wide range of activities including sporting, traditional music, environmental and charitable activities.

The following main recommendations are made:

- It is recommended that a discrete oral language programme be delineated in Irish and in English.
- The progression of learning from class to class should be planned, recorded and monitored more closely.
- Classroom routines and protocols should be reinforced more consistently in a small number of classrooms.
- Financial contributions from parents towards tuition for co-curricular activities should be discontinued.
3. Quality of School Management

- The board of management works effectively and has made praiseworthy progress in managing structural improvements. The school building and grounds present extremely well and facilities are excellent. Going forward, the board should strengthen its involvement in the school development planning process. It should also consider providing an annual report on the operation of the school.

- The administrative principal works in a dedicated and earnest manner and leads the planning process to good effect. He is assisted ably and positively by the deputy principal and two special duties post-holders.

- There are nine mainstream teachers and three support teachers. One of the support teachers is employed part time. All manifest considerable skill, enthusiasm for teaching and a very caring approach towards their pupils. The ancillary staff—including two special needs assistants, a secretary and a cleaner/caretaker—work very effectively.

- The quality of display is praiseworthy throughout the school. Resources for teaching and learning are satisfactory overall. However, there is need to augment library stocks in both Irish and English, classroom supplies of mathematics equipment and resources for Irish reading. There is good availability of information and communications technologies (ICT).

- Effective home-school links are maintained in a variety of ways. For example, informative newsletters are issued to parents and teacher-parent meetings are conducted regularly. In their questionnaire responses, parents express a very positive attitude towards the school indicating that it provides a well-run, safe, happy learning environment. The parents’ association works earnestly and purposefully and expresses strong support for the school. Going forward, it would welcome more systematic links with school management and further parental involvement in policy development and curriculum support.

- Currently, parents contribute financially for specialised tuition in ICT, drama and gymnastics. Financial contributions from parents towards tuition for co-curricular activities should be discontinued.

- During the evaluation, the management of pupils was generally good. However, classroom routines and protocols should be reinforced more consistently in a small number of classrooms. Opportunities for pupils to engage in co-curricular and extracurricular activities are very good. Pupils partake very successfully in concerts and in traditional music, sporting, environmental and charitable activities. In their questionnaire responses, pupils indicated high levels of satisfaction with the school. However, they should be provided with more opportunities to engage in decision-making through an appropriate forum.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- The school planning process is satisfactory overall. Administrative plans are reviewed regularly; however, a number of documents should be extended or amended. For example, policies in respect of home-work and home-school links and arrangements around extra personal vacation days should be revisited. A policy in respect of critical incidents should be developed. Further use of the school web site to share policy documents might also be considered.
Whole-school curriculum planning documents are useful. From now on, however, the progression of learning from class to class should be planned, recorded and monitored more closely. An e-learning plan should be developed.

Teachers’ individual classroom planning is good overall. Further emphasis should be placed on objective-based planning, however.

Teachers have begun to engage successfully in aspects of school self-evaluation. As teachers are open to new ideas, systematic self-evaluation is an area that should yield good results into the future.

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 and school staff; 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

- In general satisfactory standards are achieved in teaching and learning in Irish. Various teaching approaches and communicative strategies are employed to teach the language. However, regular use should be made of incidental Irish. Many pupils can construct simple sentences but there is scope to improve the pupils’ capacity in the language overall. It is recommended that a whole-school plan for oral Irish be devised and progressively implemented in every class. The majority of pupils read with a certain accuracy and understanding. It is advised that a plan for early literacy be devised and reading skills be systematically developed. Writing skills are diligently taught and pupils write texts with some accuracy. Further opportunities should be afforded pupils to practice free writing.

- Work in English is of a high quality. Pupils are enabled to express themselves confidently and articulately. The instruction of pupils in public speaking and debating in the senior classes is noteworthy. It is recommended that a structured, discrete oral language plan be delineated to build upon this good practice. Pupils explore poetry with a commendable understanding of its language, nuances and rhythm. Pupils’ reading skills are very good and the majority achieve very high standards in reading. Some very good examples of personal writing are in evidence. This good work would be further enhanced through a whole-school approach to process writing in a specified range of agreed genres.
• Provision for Mathematics is commendable. The lessons observed during the evaluation were active and well-structured. In some cases, the differentiation of work for both the less and more able pupil needs further attention. Pupils show enthusiasm for the subject and most have memorised tables and number facts appropriately. As part of their own self-evaluation, teachers have identified problem solving and mathematical language as areas they intend to develop. Pupils’ attainment in standardised tests is very good overall.

• Overall provision for the Visual Arts is good. In particular, the quality of direct teaching in the senior classes is praiseworthy. Throughout the school, pupils have regular opportunity to complete work in each of the curriculum strands and their work is displayed prolifically. Going forward, assessment in the subject needs to improve including, perhaps, the use of portfolios. Additionally, more specific attention should be paid to the drawing strand in the junior and middle classes and a wider range of media should be explored in some classrooms.

• There is scope for development in whole-school assessment practice. While there is good work underway in many classrooms, there is need to enhance formative assessment practice on a whole-school basis. Further promotion of pupils’ self and peer-evaluation strategies would also be beneficial. Standardised tests are administered in English reading and Mathematics. Ideally, the standardised test in Mathematics should be administered annually rather than bi-annually. The introduction of a non-reading intelligence test and the newly available standardised test for Irish should be considered.

• Overall, the quality of teaching and learning is good. Whole-class instruction is clear and purposeful and pupils have opportunities to engage in many active and creative learning activities. The use of differentiated approaches should be improved in a number of classrooms and there should be further emphasis on the development of listening skills.

6. Quality of Support for Pupils

• Provision for pupils with additional and special educational needs is good. In general, written preparation and recording are effective. However, in some instances short-term planning should be linked more closely to pupils’ learning needs. Lessons observed during the evaluation were well structured and effectively implemented. Pupil-teacher interactions were very affirming of pupils. Currently, support is provided primarily on a withdrawal basis. While some team teaching has been explored, further in-class support, incorporating co-operative team teaching, should be introduced on a systematic basis.

• Parents are kept informed of their children’s progress. However, it is necessary to inform parents of pupils’ attainment in standardised tests.

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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 BOM of Dromaile N.S. welcomes the recent WSE report and its acknowledgement of the high standards and quality of teaching and learning in our school. The Board is pleased that the expertise, dedication and commitment of all staff members was acknowledged and that the report also highlights the many strengths of our school in extra curricular areas and recognises the very positive perception that parents have of the school. We would like to thank the inspectors for the courtesy and professionalism shown by them during the course of their visit. Overall the whole experience proved to be very positive and beneficial for all involved.

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 welcomes the various recommendations and will give due consideration to these in our ongoing planning for the future. Teachers are continuing their work in the development of existing structures for recording and monitoring of pupils’ progress. A more structured objective based oral Irish Language programme is also being redrafted. The Board has already commenced developing more effective communication links with parents and is committed to further enhancing education opportunities for all pupils. It will also give consideration to the publication of an Annual Report on the operation of the school.