

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

St Michael's N.S.,
Castlepollard, Co. Westmeath
Uimhir rolla: 05513H

Date of inspection: 23 September 2010



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

1. Introduction

St Michael's National School is a five-teacher co-educational primary school under the patronage of the Catholic bishop of Meath. The school provides a programme for boys and girls from junior infants to sixth class. Its traditional geographical catchment area is Castlepollard town and the surrounding rural hinterland. There are 133 pupils enrolled in the school and attendance levels are high. The board of management was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the report; a response was not received from the board.

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 is very committed to the school.
- The principal and in-school management team provide valuable leadership for the school community.
- The teaching staff and ancillary staff discharge their duties conscientiously and effectively.
- The school enjoys a high level of support from parents and the local community.
- The atmosphere in the classrooms is co-operative and conducive to teaching and learning.
- The quality of teaching and learning is good in the subjects evaluated.
- Supports for pupils with special educational needs are very effective.

The following **main recommendations** are made:

- It is recommended that a strategic plan be devised to prioritise policy review, specific target setting and thorough school self-evaluation.
- It is recommended that results of standardised assessments be analysed to establish specific benchmarks for further improvement.
- It is recommended that greater emphasis is placed upon the composing and literacy aspects of the Music curriculum at all levels.

3. Quality of School Management

- The board of management is correctly constituted and it follows correct procedures in the conduct of its meetings and the certification of its financial accounts. It oversees the provision of school resources and discusses and ratifies school policies. The board communicates effectively with the school staff and the local community.
- The principal provides good leadership for the school community. He is very visible in school activities and cultivates the support of the staff and the local community. Suitable duties are delegated to the deputy principal and the special-duties teacher and the

effective discharge of these duties is very valuable in the curricular, administrative and pastoral realms. In response to an Inspectorate questionnaire, almost all parents commented positively on the smooth running of the school.

- Resources are managed very effectively in the school. The Department's summer-works scheme has been utilised to improve the accommodation and the school grounds. The part-time secretary, caretaker and cleaner carry out their duties conscientiously and contribute to the smooth running of the school. A good stock of educational resources has been acquired.
- The school has strong links with parents, the parish, sporting organisations and the local library. The school's parents' association is active in fundraising and supporting school events. It is recommended that there be further involvement of parents in support of classroom and curriculum initiatives.
- Parent responses to the Inspectorate questionnaire show that most parents feel welcomed by the school and that they are satisfied with the arrangements for parent teacher meetings. It is recommended that the results of standardised tests be communicated and explained to parents at the appropriate class levels.
- The management of pupils is very good and responses to the Inspectorate survey show that most pupils like coming to school and feel safe at school. Classroom dynamics and relationships are very positive and affirming. Pupils' behaviour was very good during the evaluation.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- The school's policy documents are of a high quality and reflective of the school context. Most of the policies have been reviewed, discussed and ratified by the board of management at a recent meeting. To promote a more feasible and inclusive school development planning process it is recommended that the next review of school policies be phased over a number of years.
- The school is at an early stage in its self-evaluation process. As part of this process, the school should make use of data on pupil achievement, the results of the questionnaires used during this evaluation and the Department publication *Looking at Our School*. It is recommended that a strategic plan be devised to prioritise policy review, specific target setting and thorough school self-evaluation.
- Teachers' classroom planning is of a good quality and reflective of whole-school curriculum plans. Monthly reports are filed centrally.

Child protection policy and procedures

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

- Tá cáilíocht an teagaisc agus na foghlama go maith sa Ghaeilge. Tugtar deiseanna do na daltaí a scileanna éisteachta a fhorbairt agus labhraíonn na hoidí le cruinneas. Ó thaobh na teanga labhartha de, múintear ionchur teanga nua go hoiriúnach agus i ranganna áirithe úsáidtear an cur chuige cumarsáideach chun na daltaí a mhealladh chun cainte. D'fhéadfaí an dea-chleachtas seo a scaipeadh ar fud na scoile chun líofacht na ndaltaí a fhorbairt.
- Léann tromlach na ndaltaí le tuiscint agus fuaimniú cuí. Tugtar faoin scríbhneoireacht go coinsiasach ach d'fhéadfaí tabhairt faoi raon níos leithne de sheanraí scríbhneoireachta. Múintear amhráin agus dánta le sult.
- *The quality of teaching and learning in Irish is good. Pupils are afforded opportunities to practise their listening skills and teachers speak with accuracy. With regard to the spoken language, suitable new language inputs are taught appropriately and in certain classes teachers use the communicative approach to stimulate pupils to speak. This approach could be replicated throughout the school to develop pupils' fluency.*
- *Most of the pupils read with appropriate comprehension and pronunciation. Writing is approached conscientiously but the range of writing genres could be extended. Songs and poems are taught enjoyably.*
- The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in English is very good. There is a strong emphasis on oral-language development throughout the school and most pupils converse articulately. Reading and comprehension standards are commendable and the school encourages reading through peer tutoring, book fairs and close links with the local library. Pupils write in a variety of genres and their writing is celebrated in classroom displays. Poetry is explored and recited meaningfully and pupils write their own poetry in a range of styles.
- The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in Mathematics is good. Appropriate resources and teaching methodologies are regularly employed to involve pupils in discovery learning. Early mathematical activities are undertaken effectively and all curriculum strands are addressed systematically. Most pupils display good knowledge of number facts and ability to plan problem-solving strategies. Difficulties were noted among a small number of pupils in relation to computation. It is recommended that the results of standardised attainment tests and other relevant data be analysed further to identify pupils in need of extra support in Mathematics.
- The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in Music is good. All strands of the curriculum are addressed and there is particular emphasis on performing, song singing and listening and responding to Music. It is recommended that greater emphasis be placed upon the composing and literacy aspects of the Music curriculum at all levels. Percussion instruments are used very effectively and pupils' rhythm is well developed. Each class can sing a good repertoire of suitable songs in English and in Irish.
- Outcomes for pupils are generally good in the subjects evaluated. Lessons are presented through a variety of suitable methodologies and a majority of pupils indicated in questionnaires that they work in groups regularly. Most pupils reported that they find their lessons interesting and understand their teachers' explanations.

- While information and communication technology (ICT) is frequently utilised in lesson presentation, the majority of pupils report in questionnaires that they do not often use computers themselves in class.

6. Quality of Supports for Pupils

- Support teaching for pupils with special educational needs is very good. Valuable initiatives are employed through the withdrawal and in-class-support models to improve standards in literacy. Realistic and sustainable progress was noted in relation to the targets set for these pupils.
- Targets in individual profile and learning programmes (IPLPs) are devised and reviewed collaboratively. It is recommended that parents of pupils with low-incidence special educational needs be more involved in the planning process and that each of these parents receives and signs a copy of the individual education plan prepared for their child.
- An array of standardised, diagnostic and screening test data is filed and used for decision making in relation to resource allocation. Further analysis of these data would be useful for tracking individual pupils' progress in literacy and numeracy and for establishing specific, measureable targets for the whole school. Such targets would enhance the school's self-evaluation process.

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