Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Saint Clare’s Primary School
Cavan, County Cavan
Uimhir rolla:08490N

Date of inspection: 12 February 2010
WHOLE-SCHOOL EVALUATION

A whole-school evaluation of St Clare’s Primary School was undertaken in February, 2010. The evaluation focused on the quality of teaching and learning in English, Irish, Mathematics and Visual Arts. This report presents the findings of the evaluation and makes recommendations for improvement. 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.

INTRODUCTION – SCHOOL CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

St Clare’s Primary School is a large urban primary school serving Cavan town and its environs. The school has experienced rapid development in recent years and enrolment trends are continuing upwards. It caters for a diverse pupil population from a wide range of national backgrounds and is included in Band 1 of Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS), the action plan of the Department of Education and Skills for educational inclusion. Attendance levels among some pupils give cause for concern, and the school has formulated a strategy to promote better attendance by these pupils.

The following table provides an overview of the enrolment and staffing in the school at the time of the evaluation:

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<th>Number</th>
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<tr>
<td>Pupils enrolled in the school</td>
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<td>Mainstream classes in the school</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teachers on the school staff (includes job sharing position)</td>
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<td>Mainstream class teachers</td>
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<td>Special class teachers</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teachers working in support roles</td>
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<td>Special needs assistants</td>
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1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT

1.1 Characteristic spirit, mission or vision
St Clare’s Primary School strives to provide a well ordered, happy and secure atmosphere where the self-esteem of each child is enhanced and his or her educational, spiritual, moral and cultural needs are identified and developed with compassion, enthusiasm and due regard for the child’s individuality. The school operates under the patronage of the Catholic Bishop of Kilmore.

1.2 Board of management
The board of management is constituted in accordance with Department of Education and Skills requirements. It meets regularly and minutes are kept of all meetings. Members of the board have been assigned a range of duties, which they perform in a dedicated manner. Details of the board’s finances are maintained systematically and accounts are audited annually. Financial reports are presented at each meeting. Members of the board have availed of training provided by the Catholic Primary School Managers’ Association (CPSMA). Among areas identified by the board for development are the strategic management of the future development of the school, the revision of some organisational policies and planning for the greater integration of the use of
information and communication technology (ICT) into teaching and learning. The chairperson visits the school on a very regular basis and is keenly interested in the work of the school. The board is actively involved in the formulation and review of school policies. It is recommended that the board should devise a timescale to facilitate the regular review of policies.

1.3 In-school management
The principal, who was appointed to her position in 2007, provides strong leadership for the school. In particular, she plays a strong and effective role in curriculum leadership. She actively encourages staff to engage in continuing professional development and she facilitates the sharing of expertise among colleagues. She has established positive working relationships with colleagues and with pupils, parents and the wider school community.

The principal is supported by a dedicated and industrious in-school management team which meets on a monthly basis. Duties of the postholders have been clearly delineated in accordance with Primary Circular 07/03 and are reviewed regularly to ensure that they continue to meet the evolving needs of the school. Members of the in-school management team share responsibility for a range of curricular, organisational and pastoral areas.

1.4 Management of relationships and communication with the school community
Communication with the school community is very good. The parents’ association works closely with the board of management and with staff. Parents’ representatives attest to the quality and frequency of contact with the school in relation to their children’s progress. The teachers are approachable and are willing to meet with parents. Channels of communication are well established and there are clear procedures for addressing parents’ concerns. Formal parent teacher meetings and detailed school reports keep parents apprised of pupils’ progress. Regular newsletters are issued to parents. The school website is kept up to date and provides a valuable resource for parents. It includes details of upcoming events, current activities and samples of pupils’ work. The school secretary provides valuable assistance to the principal and staff and the caretaker maintains the school buildings and grounds to a high standard.

1.5 Management of pupils
Pupils’ behaviour was observed to be of a high standard. They show respect for one another, members of the staff, and the school environment. One senses a secure, warm and caring environment on entering the school. Teachers’ interactions with pupils are positive and encouraging, both in the classroom and around the school. Through the use of morning assemblies and a variety of positive behavioural strategies children are inspired and motivated to give of their best.

2. QUALITY OF SCHOOL PLANNING

2.1 Whole-school and classroom planning
The quality of whole-school planning is very good. The planning process involves the board of management, teachers, and parents and high levels of collaboration are evident. All policies and plans required by legislation and by the Department are in place. Policies are ratified by the board following a consultative process and are reviewed periodically. The organisational policies in place are useful and relevant to the unique context of the school. Curriculum policies reflect the principles, structure and teaching approaches of the Primary School Curriculum (1999). They are constructed in a comprehensive and detailed manner and guide the implementation of a broad and balanced curriculum. All policies are easily accessed by teachers in electronic format.
The quality of classroom planning is very good. All teachers provide detailed and comprehensive long-term and short-term plans for each curriculum area. Plans include details of proposed lesson content, learning objectives, teaching methodologies and resources. Plans also outline how learning programmes can be differentiated to meet the needs of pupils of different ability levels. The manner in which differentiation practices and associated activities are planned for curricular areas of English and Mathematics is noteworthy. There is some scope for the extension of such practices and activities to the planning for Irish.

Very detailed monthly progress records are compiled by all teachers and are maintained centrally by the principal. The staff is urged to review the format of these progress records to ensure that they provide a succinct summary of teaching and learning.

2.2 Child protection policy and procedures

Confirmation was provided that, in compliance with Department of Education and Science Primary Circular 0061/2006, the board of management has formally adopted the Child Protection Guidelines for Primary Schools (Department of Education and Science, September 2001). Confirmation was also provided 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) has been appointed in line with the requirements of the guidelines. While the policy states that the deputy principal should act as deputy DLP, it needs to be revised to include the name, rather than the position, of the person appointed as deputy DLP.

3. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

3.1 Language

Gaeilge
Meastar go bhfuil cáiliocht na foghlama agus an teagaisc sa Ghaeilge sásúil le scóip le haghaidh forbartha. Deineadh athbhreithniú ar an bplean scoile don Ghaeilge sa scoilbhliain 2008/2009 le tacaíocht ón Seirbhís Tacaíochta Réigiúnach don Churaclam. Tá pleán straitéiseach fadtréimhseach breá don Ghaeilge rianaithe ag an bhfoireann anois. Sa phlean áirithear aidhmeanna agus cusóirí teagaisc mar aon le cur síos ar scileanna, ar mhodhanna muinte agus ar úsáid áiseanna. Tá an pleán bunaite ar bhuhrphrionsabail an churaclaim agus tugtar aird ann do gach gné de théagaisc agus d’fhoghlaim na teanga. Leagtar béim inmholta sa phlean ar shuim agus ar mheas na ndaltaí a chothú sa Ghaeilge agus sonraítear dearadh dearfach i leith na teanga sa scoil seo. Sna ceachtanna Gaeilge, úsáideann na hoidí an Ghaeilge mar theanga chumarsáide agus tá láithreacha suime agus timpeallachtáit príontála don Ghaeilge le feiceáil sna seomraí ranga. Tá raon leathan áiseanna curtha ar fáil chun an Ghaeilge a mhúineadh agus chonachthas leas cruthaitheach á bhaint as an gcéad bún idirnghniomhach d’fhonn ceachtanna a léiriú agus suim a mhúscailt.

San obair ó bhéal, cuirtear béim inmholta ar leathnú foclóra agus bunaítear na ceachtanna ar théamaí a hfeileann d’aois agus suim na ndaltaí. Ai thoradh na ndaltaí cruasach rann, amhrán agus filíochtachtaí go muiníníeach agus tá an chuid is mó de na daltaí in ann ceisteanna simplí a chur agus a fhreagairt. Déantar an léiththeoireacht agus an scríbhneoireacht a nascadh go tuisciceann leis an obair ó bhéal ó rang a dó ar aghaidh agus tá caighdeán creidiúnach leis an sonrú sa ghné seo den obair.
The quality of teaching and learning in Irish is satisfactory with scope for development. The school plan for Irish was revised in the school year 2008/2009 with support from the Regional Curriculum Support Service. The staff has now devised a fine long-term strategic plan for Irish. This plan includes aims and teaching objectives along with reference to skills, teaching methods and the use of resources. The plan is based on the principles of the curriculum and refers to each aspect of the teaching and learning of the language. In the plan, commendable emphasis is placed on developing pupils’ interest in and respect for the language and a positive regard for the language is noted in this school. In Irish lessons teachers use Irish communicatively and interest areas and print-rich environments for Irish are evident in the classrooms. A wide range of resources is provided for the teaching of Irish and constructive use is made of the interactive whiteboard to present lessons and to elicit pupils’ interest.

In oral work, commendable emphasis is placed on the extension of vocabulary and lessons are based on topics relevant to the pupils’ age and interest levels. Pupils recite a range of rhymes and poems and songs and most pupils are able to ask and answer simple questions. Reading and writing are linked perceptively with oral work from second class onwards and a creditable standard is evident in this aspect of the work.

To build on this good work, there is a need for greater focus in short-term planning in the implementation of learning objectives to further develop pupils’ language skills. It is recommended that the staff concentrate on the pre-communicative phase in lessons, especially, to extend pupils’ vocabulary and to teach language structures. Pupils should be given further opportunities to work together in pairs or in small groups to use the language that has been taught for communicative purposes. The approach used in English and Mathematics, where support teachers come into classrooms to provide interesting learning activities for each pupil, is commended. It would be worthwhile to use this approach for Irish so that teaching would be differentiated and so that each pupil would be actively involved in learning. It would also be worthwhile, in the senior classes especially, that pupils be afforded opportunities to compose pieces based on their own experience and to promote greater linkage between the written work and the school environment. The use of the digital camera to take photographs of various elements in the environment, so that these could be used for discussion in Irish lessons, should be considered.

The teaching of English is very good throughout the school. Teachers collaborate very effectively on the development of suitable programmes and resources to aid the development of pupils’ oral
language, reading and writing skills. The generous sharing of expertise among teachers ensures that a broad range of effective teaching strategies is disseminated to all mainstream and support classes. It is clear that the programmes in use are chosen to meet pupils’ learning needs and to challenge all pupils to achieve their potential. A variety of differentiation strategies is used to ensure that pupils are set realistic learning targets and are given sufficient support to enable them to achieve the learning goals set for them.

A structured oral language programme is used in each class. Lessons include well-organised oral language activities and guided reading activities which are thoughtfully prepared. A suitably varied range of texts is available and used very well. Class discussion and perceptive teacher questioning are among the strategies used to develop comprehension. Class libraries are well stocked and contain a broad selection of fiction and non-fiction books. These books are used well to provide pupils with a broad selection of reading material. In senior classes, excellent use is made of class novels. Mainstream and support teachers collaborate very effectively to prepare stimulating activities and to provide appropriate supports to enable all pupils to engage with the text.

Teachers use a variety of effective strategies to model reading for pupils. Parents are also involved in the development of reading through the shared reading of poetry and stories. Peer tutoring strategies are used very successfully in middle classes in the development of reading. They are also used effectively to provide an audience for pupils’ writing. Pupils are encouraged to write for a variety of purposes. From infant classes pupils are taught to write creatively. The range of writing includes daily news, recounts, letters, procedures and poetry. The use made of free writing copybooks is highly commendable. Teachers give encouraging regular oral and written feedback to pupils to stimulate further writing. Prudent attention is given to the development of the writing process; pupils draft, edit and re-write their work. In some classes commendable use is made of ICT to publish samples of pupils’ personal writing, including stories and poetry. The importance of language as a central element across the curriculum is honoured, and language lessons are integrated very effectively with other subjects.

3.2 Mathematics
Teaching and learning in Mathematics is guided by a very well-formulated, comprehensive and detailed school plan. Teachers adopt a variety of teaching methods to deliver the mathematics curriculum. They make very good use of whole-class teaching, pair work and group methods. In particular, the use of collaborative learning approaches, which are grounded in hands-on activities, is specifically commendable. It is notable that teachers make very good use of concrete resources in their lessons, the vast majority of which are designed and produced by individual class teachers. The use of these resources is also favourably augmented through the use of ICT.

At the junior end of the school, pupils are highly engaged in mathematical activities, with teachers employing a number of mathematical programmes designed to foster collaborative learning which also provide a range of opportunities for pupils to develop and distil their mathematical understanding. Similarly, through the middle and senior sections of the school, classes are characterised by high pupil involvement and focused mathematical activities. In the provision of such an approach, the school has been effective in providing a programme of work which spans all strands of the mathematics curriculum while also catering for the varying needs of individual pupils. In this regard, the collaborative work of class teachers and support teachers within specific teaching contexts is praiseworthy. Such approaches, which emphasise high pupil involvement and are carefully cognisant of the need for differentiation, serve to empower pupils in their learning. It was notable during the evaluation that pupils are enthusiastic about
Mathematics and clearly enjoy the subject. The school is specifically commended for cultivating this attitude to and this enthusiasm for Mathematics.

Lessons make very good provision for the development of mathematical knowledge and mental mathematics. To this end, games and specific activities are used effectively. In delivering the curriculum, teachers make good provision for linkage and integration, with some creative exemplars of such practice being noted during the evaluation. Suitable provision is also in place for revision.

Classrooms and the general school environment are very well presented as mathematics rich environments. Teachers make very good use of mathematics trails. In the main, content is linked effectively to the pupils’ experience and environment, but there is some potential for the wider use of such practice. Teachers adopt a wide range of assessment approaches. It is notable that in some classes, teachers encourage parents and pupils to explore mathematics in the home environment. This type of initiative is highly beneficial to pupils’ learning and it is recommended that the school investigates approaches to further develop and disseminate such practice at a whole-school level.

3.3 Visual Arts
The quality of teaching and learning in Visual Arts is very good. Very good provision for all strands of the curriculum is in place. Classrooms and the general school environment display samples of the pupils’ work across a wide range of strands. There is also very suitable provision for both the making of art and for looking and responding to various artistic pieces. In encouraging pupils to look and respond to art, teachers make very good provision for the study of artists’ lives and for the examination of differing artistic styles. In looking and responding, pupils are also encouraged to examine their own and each others’ work.

Teachers make very effective use of a variety of teaching methods to stimulate the pupils’ imaginations and to engage them in various artistic activities. A wide range of resources is used to explore art activities. Lesson content is creatively and effectively integrated with other aspects of the curriculum. Pupils clearly enjoy art activities and participate enthusiastically in lessons. In so doing, they reveal a sense of achievement, being very active in exploring, experimenting, expressing and enjoying art. Teachers employ a variety of assessment techniques, with teacher-devised tasks and pupil portfolios being the more prevalent of such techniques.

3.4 Assessment
Teachers monitor pupils’ progress carefully and continually. They use a variety of formative and summative assessment techniques to track pupils’ progress across a range of curricular areas. Very good systems are in place to record individual progress and to track pupils as they progress through the school. Pupils’ written work is corrected in a systematic and affirming manner, and helpful feedback encourages them to greater effort.

In accordance with Departmental requirements, standardised tests in English and Mathematics are administered annually. The results are analysed perceptively and enable teachers to identify those pupils who require additional support. Assessment results are stored securely and information on pupils’ achievement is communicated to parents at annual parent-teacher meetings. An annual written report is also issued to parents. The keeping of portfolios of samples of pupils’ work, the administration of regular teacher-designed and commercially-produced tests and the regular correction of written work, including homework, enable teachers to check whether learning objectives are being achieved. This regular monitoring allows teachers to adapt or revise learning programmes to meet the evolving needs of pupils.
4. QUALITY OF SUPPORT FOR PUPILS

4.1 Pupils with special educational needs
The special education team (SET) comprises one special class teacher, six learning-support teachers, one resource teacher for pupils with disability and two resource teachers for pupils of the Traveller community. High quality provision is made for pupils with mild and moderate general learning difficulties in the special class setting. The learning support and resource teachers operate as a very effective and cohesive unit and collaborate very well with mainstream class teachers to ensure all pupils’ learning needs are addressed in a well-coordinated manner.

Planning for pupils with additional learning needs is very well structured. A good and balanced range of interventions, including Reading Recovery, Maths Recovery, Literacy Liftoff and peer tutoring, is used to respond to identified learning needs. Support is provided in a variety of contexts. Sometimes pupils are withdrawn from mainstream class for intensive individual and small group tuition. In addition, teachers working in teams provide very well coordinated in-class support in English and Mathematics. On other occasions, teachers support pupils in other curriculum areas where literacy is a requirement.

Targeted early intervention helps to minimise the impact of learning difficulties on pupils. Short-term, focused support, tailored to meet the needs of individual pupils, ensures that identified learning difficulties are addressed promptly. Detailed records are maintained and are used to inform both class teachers and parents of pupils’ progress. Class teachers and support teachers also use this information to tailor programmes to meet the evolving needs of the pupils. Detailed minutes are kept of all meetings of the special education team and of meetings with class teachers. The school has fostered strong links with outside agencies, including the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS), the National Council for Special Education (NCSE), the Health Service Executive (HSE) and local agencies such as Breifne Integrated Community Development. The staff is devising plans at present for the further use of ICT in support settings and organising the provision of computer facilities for each support room.

4.2 Other supports for pupils: disadvantaged, minority and other groups
A range of strategies, including those provided under special initiatives, has been developed to facilitate the full inclusion of the diversity of pupils in the school. A School Completion Project (SCP) worker is employed on three days per week. Funding provided through the programme is used to promote school attendance and to support pupils in their purposeful engagement in all aspects of life in the school.

A full-time home school community liaison (HSCL) co-ordinator works to promote children’s educational interests through the fostering of closer ties between the school and the wider community. The HSCL programme successfully maintains channels of communication with the wider parent body, through activities such as home visits and providing courses for parents, either in the well-appointed parents’ room or in the community. All initiatives are organised in response to formal and informal needs identification processes. Available funding is used very prudently to provide a rich variety of programmes to facilitate parents’ involvement in the life of the school. The HSCL co-ordinator maintains close contact with school management and with mainstream and support teachers in order to provide supports for pupils. A parent-child reading programme has been running successfully in the school for a number of years, and the Maths for Fun Programme is operating successfully with the support of class teachers, support teachers and parents.
The school has compiled a wide-ranging policy on intercultural education which it plans to review in the near future. The school actively endeavours to celebrate the various cultures of its pupils through an annual ‘multi-cultural week’. Activities during this week include an examination and celebration of costumes, songs, musical traditions, flags and food of the various cultures. Such activities serve to welcome and recognise the various traditions and identities of the school’s pupil population.

 Provision for pupils with English as an additional language (EAL) is guided by comprehensive school plans which are clear and specific in detailing a range of suitable approaches and methodologies. In particular, these plans provide a comprehensive and structured outline of content relevant to communicative and linguistic competences. The school has three teachers of EAL. They prepare suitable short and long-term plans. In developing these plans, the teachers of EAL regularly liaise with class teachers in order to support the work of the class teacher and in order to develop cognitive applied language proficiency (CALP). It is recommended that the planning documentation of both class teachers and teachers of EAL makes more specific reference to the content of such language.

 Support for pupils with EAL is provided in a variety of settings which include in-class support, withdrawal, group work and one-to-one tuition. These classes are delivered in a stimulating manner. Pupils enjoy them and partake enthusiastically in the various language activities planned therein. Lessons make very good provision for the active involvement of pupils and for the provision of varied opportunities for pupils to use and develop their language skills. To this end, teachers make very good use of resources, games and various stimuli.

 Through a range of assessment techniques, which include consultation with the class teacher, consultation with the principal, interviews with the pupils, the use of the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) assessment guidelines and Integrate Ireland Language and Training (IILT) assessment guidelines, pupils in need of learning support are identified. Following such identification, an Individual Profile and Learning Programme (IPLP) is constructed for each pupil which sets out clear and specific language proficiency targets. Pupil progress in attaining these targets is continuously monitored in an informal manner with more formal assessments being undertaken twice per academic year. Parents are consulted where necessary on pupils’ progress in attaining these targets with formal provision for such meetings being scheduled in conjunction with the annual parent-teacher meetings. The school also organises an induction evening for parents of junior pupils who are commencing support in EAL classes.

 5. CONCLUSION

 The school has strengths in the following areas:

- The school is managed very well by a committed, active and highly effective board of management.
- The principal provides excellent organisational and curricular leadership to the school.
- The support provided by the in-school management team is of a very high quality.
- The quality of teaching and learning in mainstream and support settings is high and there is well-coordinated collaboration among all teachers.
• The supports for pupils and parents provided through special initiatives are focused, well managed and effective.
• Communication among staff and between the school and home is open and regular, and it facilitates a collaborative approach to decision making.
• Pupils’ behaviour is very good, and interactions among all members of the school community, including management, teachers and ancillary staff, were observed to be respectful and courteous.

The following key recommendations are made in order to further improve the quality of education provided by the school:

• The inventive and focused approaches to the teaching of language which the school has developed so successfully for the teaching of English should now be applied to the teaching of Irish.
• The format of the monthly progress records used in mainstream setting should be modified to provide a more succinct summary of teaching and learning.

Post-evaluation meetings were held with the staff and the board of management where the draft findings and recommendations of the evaluation were presented and discussed.
Appendix

SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

Submitted by the Board of Management
Area 1: Observations on the content of the inspection report

The Board of Management of St. Clares Primary School would like to thank the Department of Education & Skills team of inspectors for the professional manner in which they carried out the Whole School Evaluation and for the very positive report on the school. It portrays an accurate picture of St. Clares and reflects the high standard of education provided for the children and the positive contribution of teachers, parents, BOM and the wider community.

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 recommendation regarding the development of teaching of Gaeilge and strategies will be implemented to deal with this recommendation.

Amendments have been made to the format of monthly progress records in our mainstream setting to ensure a more succinct summary of teaching and learning. The child protection policy has been revised to include name of Deputy Principal as Deputy DLP and a timescale for regular review of all policies has been devised in consultation with staff.