

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

**Whole School Evaluation
REPORT**

**St Mary's National School,
Croom, Co Limerick
Uimhir rolla: 09306W**

Date of inspection: 16 September 2013



1. Introduction

St Mary's National School is a co-educational primary school in the parish of Croom, which is located twenty-two kilometres south west of Limerick City. The school is under the patronage of the Catholic Bishop of Limerick. There are 147 pupils enrolled at present and levels of pupil attendance are, in general, very good. The board of management of the school 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 is properly constituted and performs its duties with diligence.
- The newly-formed parents' association is very supportive of the work of the school.
- The principal and her staff are hard-working, conscientious and committed.
- Pupils are well-behaved, courteous and polite.
- The overall quality of teaching observed in classrooms ranged from good to very good.
- High quality targeted support for pupils with special educational needs was observed.

The following **main recommendations** are made:

- It is recommended that the board of management drafts a strategic plan for the future development of the school.
- A greater emphasis on collaborative planning is advised in order to ensure that the curriculum is implemented in a progressive and incremental manner throughout the school.
- Moltar béim sa bhreis a chur ar mheasúnú sa Ghaeilge. *It is advised that an additional emphasis be placed on assessment in Irish.*
- It is recommended that assessment approaches be extended to a greater number of curricular areas.
- It is recommended that assessment data in English be systematically analysed with a view to further informing differentiated teaching.

3. Quality of School Management

- The board of management is properly constituted and is very supportive of the work of the school. Meetings are convened on a regular basis and detailed minutes are maintained. Board members regularly engage in ratification and review of administrative policies and curricular plans. The board is advised to prepare a strategic plan for the future of the school, taking due cognisance of projected enrolment figures, school finances and the requirements and restrictions of the school complex. The board ensures that school accounts are certified annually in accordance with section 18(1) of the Education Act (1998). However, it is now recommended that the board reviews its day-to-day financial operating procedures.
- The in-school management team consists of the principal, the deputy principal and a special duties post holder. The principal is a key figure in the management of the school and is strongly committed to sustaining and developing a positive school climate and standards of teaching and learning. The deputy principal and special duties teacher provide ongoing support to the principal in a range of areas. In addition, other staff members have also assumed roles and responsibilities which are supportive to the school as a whole. It is recommended that posts of responsibility be reviewed to ensure a balance between curricular, organisational and pastoral duties in accordance with the provisions of Circular 17/00 *Appointments to Posts of Responsibility*.
- The school buildings and grounds are well-maintained and provide a comfortable learning environment for pupils. It is recommended that the board reviews current accommodation provision with a view to planning strategically for future needs. The school is well resourced with educational equipment to enhance teaching and learning. Interactive whiteboards are available in each classroom. The school secretary and caretaker contribute effectively to the day-to-day operation of the school. Special needs assistants (SNAs) support the inclusion of pupils with special educational needs (SEN) in mainstream classroom settings.
- The school enjoys a very positive relationship with parents. The newly-formed parents' association is very supportive of the school. Parents engage in a range of fundraising initiatives and activities which contribute effectively to enhancing the educational experience of the pupils. Responses to questionnaires issued to parents reflect high levels of satisfaction with the school. Notwithstanding this, a policy detailing procedures relating to parental complaints should be formulated and circulated to all parents.
- Pupils are well-behaved, courteous and polite. A positive and respectful atmosphere prevails in all classrooms and a high level of pupil engagement was observed in all activities. They are facilitated to engage in a range of extra-curricular and cocurricular activities. Responses to pupil questionnaires issued during the evaluation were very positive.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- A comprehensive range of administrative and curricular plans were available for review during the evaluation. Curricular plans provide general guidance to teachers on whole-school approaches to curriculum implementation. To further enhance provision on a school-wide basis, greater emphasis on collaborative planning is advised in order to ensure that the curriculum is implemented in a progressive and incremental manner throughout the school.

- The school has engaged positively in the self-evaluation process. A significant level of work has been undertaken and a draft report has been prepared. To enhance this process, it is recommended that there is further refinement of the school improvement plan to include specific learning targets for each of the selected curricular areas over a three year cycle.
- All teachers prepare appropriate long-term and short-term planning documents to support their teaching. Planning should be streamlined to ensure a greater link between teachers' planning and curricular objectives. Monthly progress reports are completed by all teachers and are stored centrally in the school. Effective planning for differentiated teaching was noted in some learning contexts and this good practice should be extended on a school-wide basis.
- Confirmation was provided that the board of management has formally adopted the *Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools* without modification and that the school is compliant with the requirements of the *Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools*.

5. Quality of Teaching, Learning and Pupil Achievement

- The overall quality of teaching in lessons observed ranged from good to very good. A range of educational resources, including concrete manipulatives, were used to good effect. Pupils participated well in lessons and effective collaborative learning was observed in many settings. In general, high levels of pupil attainment were noted in the subjects evaluated.
- Tá caighdeán maith bainte amach ag na daltaí sa Ghaeilge. Úsáidtear an Ghaeilge mar theanga teagaisc i gcuid is mó den na ranganna. Cuirtear béim ar fhorbairt foclóra sna ranganna uile. Tá stór leathan rannta, dánta agus amhráin ag an-chuid de na daltaí agus aithrisíonn siad go bríomhar iad. Tá béim inmholta ar an ngramadach sna ranganna uile. I gcuid de na ranganna ba chóir deiseanna sa bhreis a sholáthar do na daltaí labhairt go leanúnach. Léann formhór na ndaltaí le brí agus le tuiscint. Bhí samplaí maithe de scríbhneoireacht fheidhmiúil le feiceáil sna ranganna. Moltar anois aird a dhíriú ar shaor-scríbhneoireacht agus ar scríbhneoireacht phearsanta i gcuid de na ranganna. Chun tabhairt faoi na dea-chleachtais a fhorbairt, moltar béim sa bhreis a chur ar mheasúnú sa Ghaeilge.
- *Pupils generally have a good standard of Irish. Irish is used as the language of instruction in most classes. A commendable emphasis is placed on vocabulary development in all classes. The majority of pupils recite a wide range of rhymes, poems and songs enthusiastically. Commendable emphasis on grammar was observed throughout the school. In some classes, greater opportunities should be provided for pupils to converse in Irish more freely. Good samples of functional writing were observed in classrooms. It is recommended that an increased emphasis be placed on the development of creative and personal writing in some classes. The majority of pupils read with fluency and understanding. To further enhance current practice, it is advised that an additional emphasis be placed on the assessment of Irish.*
- The overall quality of teaching and pupil attainment in English is high. All teachers target the development of oral language skills and some very effective practice was observed. There is now an opportunity to extend pupils' oral language experiences in the context of their environment and previous learning. Pupils' reading skills are developed

incrementally through the use of graded texts, parallel readers and age-appropriate novels and in general, good reading standards are noted throughout the school. Initiatives such as station teaching and paired reading with parents, have been established to enhance provision in literacy. High quality samples of written work in a variety of genres were observed in classrooms and provision for poetry was good throughout the school. To further enhance current provision in English, it is now recommended that assessment data be systematically analysed with a view to further informing differentiated teaching.

- High quality teaching and pupil attainment were noted in Mathematics. All activities observed were underpinned by purposeful use of concrete manipulatives. Good emphasis is placed on fostering mathematical language, promoting number competence and mental mathematics. A whole-school problem-solving strategy has recently been introduced. It is recommended that school planning for Mathematics be reviewed to ensure a broad and balanced coverage of all strand units in each class.
- The school's provision for Physical Education is very good and includes a broad range of activities encompassing all of the curricular strands. The school is well resourced in terms of equipment and has access to very good community facilities. All lessons observed were well structured. Good levels of productive pupil participation with a strong emphasis on skills development were evident in all activities. It is recommended that the board considers approaches to ensuring the full implementation of the aquatics strand of the curriculum.
- A variety of assessment approaches are used to good effect in the school. The school administers screening and standardised tests annually and the results are collated at a whole-school level. Teacher-designed tasks and tests and a number of checklists are used to monitor pupil progress in some subject areas. Pupils' written work is regularly monitored and positive evaluative comments are provided by the teachers. It is suggested that assessment approaches be extended to a greater number of curricular areas to enhance monitoring of pupil progress and assist in curricular planning.

6. Quality of Support for Pupils

- The school has a comprehensive SEN policy and examples of high quality support for pupils were observed during the evaluation. There is a balance between in-class support and withdrawal of pupils for tuition both individually and in small groups. While team-teaching is a feature of provision in some classes, an increased emphasis on collaborative planning in this context is advised. All teachers plan systematically for their work and there is a collaborative approach to the formulation of individual education plans and individual pupil learning profiles. It is recommended that some targets in these plans be reviewed to make them more specific and measurable. The school should formulate a policy for the long-term storage of SEN records.

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 Croom National School wishes to acknowledge the thorough, professional and courteous manner in which the inspectors carried out our Whole School Evaluation. We are delighted that the report affirms the high quality of teaching and learning in our school.

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 and Staff welcome the advice and recommendations contained in the W.S.E. report. Some recommendations have already been implemented and we are committed to working together to implement the remainder before the end of June 2014.