An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

St. Mary’s NS,
Bagenalstown, County Carlow
Uimhir rolla: 11135K

Date of inspection: 07 June 2011
1. Introduction

St. Mary’s NS, Bagenalstown, Co. Carlow is a four teacher co-educational primary school under Church of Ireland patronage. Eighty six pupils are enrolled and attendance is good. The board of management was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the evaluation, and the response of the board will be found in the appendix to 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 and staff work consistently to ensure an inclusive, holistic learning environment for all pupils.
- The school’s dedicated principal competently manages the school. She is capably supported by a committed teaching team.
- The board has developed a commendable action plan which ensures the cyclical progression of the whole-school plan.
- There is a high standard of planning relating to key organisational and curriculum areas and the quality of classroom planning is good.
- The quality of overall teaching, learning and pupil achievement is very good.
- Pupil management is of a high standard.

The following **main recommendations** are made:

- More formal engagement with parents in the planning process should be considered.
- Differentiation strategies should be extended to all short-term plans in order to provide for the needs of all pupils, including the more able.
- The assessment policy should be implemented on a systematic whole-school basis.
- Consideration should be given to the development of the planning process in the special education setting.
- Parental involvement in the IEP review process should be prioritised. Parents should be provided with a copy of their child’s IEP.

3. Quality of School Management

- The properly constituted board of management meets regularly and maintains suitable minutes. The board is aware of its statutory obligations with regard to legislation, including the organisation of appropriate accounting procedures. The board liaises fully with teachers, and with parents to a lesser degree, in the formulation of the school plan, and all policies are ratified. More formal engagement with parents in the planning process is recommended. The board has developed a commendable action plan which ensures
the cyclical progression of the school plan in both organisational and curriculum areas. Board members avail of training provided by the Church of Ireland Diocesan Board of Education.

- The school principal displays the capacity to manage all aspects of school life. She demonstrates excellent organisational skills. She leads the whole-school planning process. She manages and supports staff effectively and is highly committed to pupils’ pastoral and educational welfare. The deputy principal competently supports the principal in the effective implementation of her duties. This contributes effectively to sustaining a positive school climate.

- The parents’ association supports the work of the school. Parents are involved in fundraising and in all school events and are a valuable support to the school. Communication between home and school is very effective. Parent questionnaires indicate that the majority of parents feel the school has a good reputation in the community.

- Pupil management is of a high standard. An ethos of respect permeates all interactions. Pupils co-operate willingly with their teachers and they participate fully in guided and discovery-based learning situations. Teachers consistently affirm pupils’ efforts.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- A high standard of planning in relation to key organisational and curriculum areas is evident. The whole-school plan is mindful of the school context and the individual needs of pupils. Organisational policies are clearly structured and noticeably influence the daily life of the school. Very good work is undertaken in the development of curriculum plans which consistently reflect the principles of the primary school curriculum.

- The quality of classroom planning is good. Teachers’ long-term and short-term plans are comprehensive, are clearly outlined in terms of content, approaches and methodologies and are in line with the whole-school plan. Monthly progress records are consistently maintained. Some short-term plans indicate an understanding of the importance of differentiation for pupils with special educational needs. It is recommended that this good practice be extended to every classroom in order to provide for the needs of all pupils, including the more able. It is also recommended that a formal, systematic approach to assessment on a whole-school basis be employed and that the school's whole-school assessment policy be implemented in all classrooms.

- 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

- The overall quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement is very good. Effective classroom management skills are evident at all class levels. Pupils experience a range of learning opportunities and are consistently focussed on challenging learning opportunities. There is an atmosphere of purposeful learning throughout. Teachers
engage in whole-class teaching and provide pertinent opportunities for pair work and group tasks. Well-structured lessons are appropriately paced. Themes and topics are linked effectively and integration is a feature of many lessons. Written work is of a high standard and is vigilantly monitored and positively affirmed.


A high standard of teaching and learning in Irish is evident. Oral language skills development is appropriately addressed in all classes. Pupils generally exhibit self-confidence and good understanding in their learning. A positive attitude towards the Irish language is developed. Satisfactory attention is given to the development of reading and writing. Functional and creative writing opportunities are provided and pupils’ independent writing is encouraged and promoted. Print-rich environments for the Irish language are created in classrooms to support learning.

- There is a very good standard of teaching and learning in English. A print-rich environment complements lesson presentation in all classrooms. Pupils’ oral language competence is extended through discrete oral language lessons. Story and poetry are used thoughtfully to consolidate learning. Appropriate emphasis is placed on the development of pupils’ writing skills. Pupils at all levels write in a variety of genres. Samples of this work are displayed attractively and celebrated throughout the school. Suitable attention is paid to the extension of reading strategies. The majority of pupils read competently and are developing appropriate comprehension skills. In their questionnaire responses, most pupils believed that they are doing well at reading. Well-stocked libraries are used optimally across the school.

- The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in Mathematics is very good. A broad range of teaching methodologies is successfully implemented. Emphasis is placed on practical experiences using hands-on discovery methods, co-operative learning and the development of mathematical language. Pupils experience a broad variety of work across the strands. Suitable emphasis is placed on oral work to extend pupils’ mathematical thinking. The integration of mathematical concepts with other curriculum areas is appropriately addressed. Concepts taught are regularly revised and consolidated. Due attention is paid to developing problem-solving skills across the strands.

- The quality of provision in Science is very high. Lesson objectives are shared with pupils, many learning activities are challenging, and the methodologies of the science curriculum are successfully used. An atmosphere that is conducive to effective work in Science is evident throughout. Classroom displays celebrate pupils’ learning in several strands, and resources are readily available. Pupils’ active involvement in scientific tasks is one of the hallmarks of lessons. Pupils discuss scientific concepts with confidence. They demonstrate an ability to evaluate evidence and to draw conclusions from their experiments. Scientific terminology is used appropriately.
6. Quality of Support for Pupils

- Good practice is evident in some special education settings. This includes the organisation of supplementary teaching both on an in-class and on a withdrawal basis to meet pupils’ varying needs, along with the use of creditable teaching and learning approaches.

- Further development of the planning process in these special education settings is recommended. This should include the creation of specific targets for each pupil’s individual education plan (IEP). Long-term and short-term objectives should be based on these targets so that the identified needs of particular pupils are addressed consistently in all instances. While parents are involved in the development of their child’s IEP, it is recommended that they be actively involved in the IEP review process and that they be provided with a copy of their child’s IEP. The special education team and class teachers liaise officially at staff meetings and informally as required. Additional focus on the identified needs of individual pupils is advised at these meetings to ensure a cohesive link between classroom and special education planning for these pupils. A number of newcomer pupils are integrated successfully into the school.

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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 Board of Management of St. Mary's N.S. would like to thank the inspector for making the inspection an affirming, positive experience. We are pleased that the main strengths of the work of the school were identified and that the commitment and dedication of all members of the school community was affirmed.

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 acknowledges the recommendations made in the report. The Board, in consultation with the Principal and staff, has prioritised implementation of the recommendations as part of our action plan. The work is in progress.