Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Seir Kieran’s NS
Clareen, Birr, County Offaly
Uimhir rolla: 11203B

Date of inspection: 9 December 2010
1. Introduction

Seir Kieran’s NS is a mainstream, co-educational primary school under the patronage of the Catholic Bishop of Ossory. It is situated in Clareen, which is a rural community outside of Birr, Co. Offaly. The school is a focal point for the local community, which serves as its primary catchment area. Currently the school has three mainstream class teachers, one shared learning-support teacher and a part-time resource teacher. The school also employs a part-time secretary. There are sixty-eight pupils on roll. 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:

- A strong sense of community prevails within the school and impacts very positively on relationships between pupils, parents, teachers and the wider community.
- The in-school management team affords proficient leadership to the school.
- A well-developed system of whole-school planning is established within the school.
- Pupils engage in very good quality learning activities in English reading and writing.
- The quality of teaching and learning in special educational needs settings is very good.

The following main recommendations are made:

- The school’s assessment policy should be updated and implemented in order to assess pupils’ mastery of key objectives across all curricular areas and to inform teaching and learning at mainstream class level.
- Ba chóir an cur chuige cumarsáideach a chur i bhfeidhm sa Ghaeilge ionas go mbeadh sé ar chumas na ndaltaí páirt a ghlacadh i gcomhráíte nádúrtha. The communicative approach should be implemented in Irish in order to enable pupils to engage in meaningful conversations.
- A plan for the systematic treatment of the strands and strand units of the History curriculum should be implemented and pupils’ learning in this area should be regularly consolidated.

3. Quality of School Management

- The board of management is commended for providing and maintaining the school’s physical environment in optimum condition. There is scope to enhance the structure of board meetings and to broaden the range of issues discussed. Each meeting should contain a treasurer’s report and should conclude with an agreed report which should be recorded in the minutes. The board should familiarise itself with the appointment
procedures for teachers and ensure that personnel assigned to learning support are fully probated.

- The in-school management structures are very effective. The principal displays well-developed management and organisational skills. Members of the in-school management team have clearly defined responsibilities across the administrative, curricular and pastoral domains. They meet frequently and afford very good leadership to the school. Praiseworthy attention is afforded to teaching and learning at in-school management meetings. Developing this and extending it to whole-staff meetings is recommended.

- Overall, good quality information is provided to parents both on general school matters and on their children’s education. The school should, however, provide parents with a report of their children’s standardised test results as required by circular 138/2006. The school is commended for its recently developed web site and is encouraged to continue to exploit its potential to disseminate information to the school community.

- Parent-teacher relationships are open and welcoming. While the school does not have a formal parents’ association, parents provide much valuable support and assistance to the school. In their response to questionnaires administered during the evaluation, the vast majority of parents expressed their satisfaction with a range of issues associated with the school including school administration, facilities, discipline and overall levels of teaching.

- A strong sense of community prevails within the school. Mutual co-operation and support characterise the work of the teachers. Pupil-pupil and pupil-teacher relationships are warm and affirming. Pupils themselves report that they feel safe and secure within the school environment; that they can approach a teacher with ease and that important issues, such as bullying, are discussed with them regularly.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- Administrative policies are of a very good quality. They reflect legislative requirements, departmental guidance and existing school practice. The school is commended for engaging with strategic planning for policy development and for formulating specific action plans to inform this process. In the review of administrative policies, the school should update its assessment policy to include assessment strategies pertinent to mainstream classes and review its enrolment policy.

- The quality of curriculum planning is very good. Plans reflect the format and structure of the curriculum and provide clear guidance on appropriate methodologies. The English and mathematics plans are of a particularly good quality. In English, content to be covered by each of the class levels for some areas of the curriculum is clearly defined. This is very good practice and should be extended to all areas of the English curriculum and to other plans. The school’s approach to the teaching of Irish is very clearly outlined in the Irish plan. In developing this plan, consideration should be afforded to outlining content objectives for each class level under the four strands. A commendable emphasis is placed on local history in the history plan. More specific guidance on the selection of topics from the menu curriculum for middle and senior classes and the introduction of a cyclical programme for the treatment of strand units for all classes is advised.

- Individual teacher planning is generally good in mainstream classes. It is recommended that curriculum objectives inform long-term and short-term plans and monthly progress records. More careful planning for the teaching of vocabulary and language structure in Irish would have a greater impact on teaching and learning in this area.
• Clearly defined targets are established for pupils in special educational needs settings and both long-term and short-term plans are of a very good quality.

• Parents were recently surveyed as part of the revision of the homework policy. This is good practice and the school is encouraged to investigate similar avenues of affording parents a role in policy formation and review.

**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**

• Overall the quality of teaching and learning in the school is good. Teachers display competence in their teaching and management skills. Pupils, in their responses to questionnaires administered as part of this evaluation, report that their lessons are interesting, that concepts are clearly explained to them and that they receive constructive feedback on their work.

• Currently the school administers a non-reading intelligence test to pupils once during their school life. Pupils complete standardised tests in Mathematics, English and spelling annually and a screening test in senior infants. A means of recording standardised test results that enables a year-on-year comparison of individual pupils’ results, relative to their non-reading intelligence score, should be devised. The school is encouraged to devise a system of assessing pupils’ mastery of key objectives across curricular areas and utilising this data to inform teaching and learning at mainstream class level.

• In Irish pupils demonstrate an understanding of basic questions. However, the majority of them experience difficulty in engaging in conversations on curriculum themes. It is recommended therefore, that an emphasis be placed on fostering natural conversations and that the communicative approach be implemented throughout the school. It would also be beneficial to use informal Irish regularly in the school environment. It is further advised that greater benefit be derived from stories and poems, covered in all classes, to increase pupils’ conversational abilities.

• In English, pupils’ writing skills are very well developed throughout the school. A commendable emphasis is placed on the writing process and pupils at all levels write in a broad range of genres. Pre-reading skills are systematically taught and, as pupils progress through the school, opportunities to develop reading strategies, to read for
pleasure, to respond to text and to develop interest through reading are all incorporated in the programme. Oral language is covered in all classes. More beneficial learning outcomes would be attained if oral lessons involved an element of explicit teaching.

- A commendable emphasis is placed on the subject-specific language of Mathematics and lessons observed involved good links with pupils’ everyday experiences, productive use of concrete resources and practical activities. In some cases, learning tasks are differentiated. This good practice should be extended and developed throughout the school. Overall pupils demonstrate a good understanding of mathematical concepts. However there is a need for further reinforcement of learning in strands such as Data, Shape and space and Measures.

- Some very beneficial learning activities were observed in History during the evaluation. These included the examination of artefacts, local history trails and project work complemented by effective use of information and communication technology. There is a need however to consolidate pupils’ learning in History, to ensure that all strands are systematically treated and to engage in more frequent recording of learning.

6. Quality of Supports for Pupils

- The quality of teaching and learning in special educational needs settings is very good. Lessons are clear and focused, resources are effectively used and pupils are making good progress in both literacy and numeracy.

- In some cases, pupils who are registering far in excess of the thirteenth percentile in standardised tests receive support through withdrawal from mainstream classes. This provision would be more effective if it were mediated through in-class support in the context of differentiated group teaching.

Published, June 2011
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 and the staff of Seir Kiernans National School wish to acknowledge the courteous and professional manner in which our Whole School Evaluation was conducted. We welcome the recognition and the affirmation of the good practices of 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 acknowledge the recommendations outlined in the report. The Board will endeavour to address all recommendations. This process has already commenced.