An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Kilmagner NS
Kilmagner, Fermoy, Co. Cork
Uimhir rolla: 11337W

Date of inspection: 19 January 2012
1. Introduction

Kilmagner NS is a rural three mainstream teacher school, east of Fermoy, Co. Cork. The school was established in 1878 and is under the patronage of the Apostolic Administrator, the Archbishop of Cashel and Emly. The strong commitment in the school to catering for pupils of different abilities and backgrounds was reflected in parent interviews and in questionnaire replies. The average daily attendance of 95% is commendably high. The board of management of the school was given an opportunity to comment on the findings and recommendations of the report; the board chose to accept the report without response.

2. Summary of Findings and Recommendations for Further Development

The following are the main strengths of the work of the school:

- The strengths of the school reside in the dedicated staff, well mannered pupils, special needs provision and a completed building programme facilitated by grant-aid from the Department of Education and Skills (DES) and strong community support.
- Both new board of management (BOM) and new in-school management (ISM) team are keen to achieve new goals for the school.
- There are very good communication processes within the school community.
- Standardised test results in English and Mathematics demonstrate solid achievement.
- There is an emphasis in Mathematics on practical approaches.
- Noteworthy use is made of special programmes in the support context to develop pupils’ coping skills.
- Pupils in the gifted category are given challenging tasks to stretch their ability.

The following main recommendations are made:

- It is recommended that individual ISM members present an annual report to the board on the fulfilment of their duties.
- The staff should now devise a more helpful system for recording the monthly report.
- There is now a need to introduce special programmes such as First Steps, Literacy Lift-off, Building Bridges of Understanding or other station teaching approaches in English.
- Further training for teachers is needed in the use of interactive technology.
- Analysis of standardised test results should be shared with the board of management.
3. Quality of School Management

- A new board was appointed prior to the commencement of the WSE and already has been involved in the appointment of a new deputy principal for the school. The previous dedicated board worked over the past two years to ensure the renovation programme was completed. The chairperson and the new board now aim to extend playground space and to initiate new forward budgeting plans for the school. There is a financial report presented by the treasurer at each meeting and external certification of the accounts is undertaken annually. A safety audit has been undertaken led by a board member, liaising with the staff representative.

- The principal has been on the staff since 2002 and took over her present role two months before the WSE, the previous principal having retired in November 2011 after 34 years of dedicated service. The new principal’s goals in the coming years are to cultivate and capitalise on the talents of staff and continue to foster good relationships within the school community. In order to achieve these goals curriculum development and the development of organisational policies will be the main issues for discussion at in-school management meetings and at staff meetings in the years ahead.

- The deputy principal was appointed one month before the WSE. Also a panel appointment was made earlier in the year and the teacher involved carried with her an inherited post. Therefore, both the BOM and the ISM team experienced considerable change prior to the evaluation. All involved are to be commended for the remarkably smooth transition that has taken place. Duties for posts of responsibility have been decided and it is planned to instigate regular meetings of the ISM team. It is recommended that ISM members present an annual report to the board on the fulfilment of duties.

- The main resources of the school reside in the dedicated staff, the well mannered pupils, the provision for pupils with special ability and special needs and the current standards of accommodation. Interactive technology has been provided in all classrooms and it is now recommended that staff undergo training in its use.

- Over the last two years, the parents’ association has been involved in aiding the board’s work in relation to the extension and renovation. The association supplemented DES grants to aid completion of the work, thereby displaying very strong local commitment to the future of the school. The association now hopes to help the new board in its quest to increase playground space.

- There are very good communication processes within the school community. The chairperson of the parents’ association meets with the principal every month after the monthly association meeting. Use is made of parent-texting, notes and a newly started newsletter and, in addition, an email is sent to all parents after the monthly meeting with the minutes of that meeting attached. Parents are involved in major school events and helping with the creation of a school garden is under discussion. Parents have an input into policies and, in line with good practice, these policies are submitted by the board to the association for discussion and feedback.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- The organisational policies are presented clearly and are very useful documents for guiding the work of the school. Policies are communicated well to parents using the school newsletter. Parents receive some policies and are advised that others are available if required. As regards the curriculum, the usefulness of the Mathematics plan
should be replicated in the plans for Irish and English and it is advised to list poems, rhymes, songs, stories and novels as well as other practical content for each class. In the History plan it would be worthwhile specifying local trails and items of historical interest and deciding when certain topics will be undertaken. The teachers prepare very detailed short-term plans and very useful long-term plans. The staff should now examine ways to connect long-term and short-term plans with the school plan and devise a more helpful system for recording the monthly report.

- 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

- In infants and junior classes, clear objectives are laid out for teaching the language. Rhymes, dialogues and songs are taught directly and systematically. Beneficial use is made of listening, repetition and pair work strategies. In the junior and middle classes profitable use is made of props to enhance understanding of vocabulary. Conversational Irish is practised by means of pair work and topics are linked to reading and writing lessons. This is good practice. Lessons in reading and writing are differentiated wisely for the multi-class context. In senior classes, pupils write short essays regularly and the majority of pupils write neatly. It would be worthwhile placing greater emphasis on vocabulary practice before pupils undertake writing activities. No use was made of the interactive whiteboard for Irish lessons throughout the school.

- The pupil response to English story is scaffolded skilfully in a positive and encouraging manner in infant and junior classes. In the middle classes, pupil participation in poetry recitation is positively encouraged. Good work on the class novel is undertaken in senior classes with interesting and engaging visualisation activities for setting, location, characters and action. The school is highly commended for its support of gifted pupils in English as well as its support of pupils with both learning and special needs. Standardised test results demonstrate solid achievement overall in the school. In order to develop English teaching further, there is a need to include in the school plan decisions around the coverage of different writing genres. Policy around free writing also needs to be examined in order to make more use of this approach. Most pupils write neatly, but regular practice of handwriting is advised. There is now a need to introduce special programmes such as First Steps, Literacy Lift-off, Building Bridges of Understanding or other station teaching approaches in English. Use should be made of the general
purpose room for these activities. The potential of the interactive whiteboard needs to be developed.

- Good practice in the teaching of Mathematics was observed with a variety of teaching approaches used: practical work with equipment, working in groups and pairs and whole class discussion. Good differentiated work was observed in the multi-class context. Throughout the school there is an emphasis on practical approaches, using equipment. Results from standardised tests demonstrate that these approaches are paying dividends. Mental arithmetic practice is part of lessons and many pupils lay out their work in their copies in a neat fashion. In order to encourage higher levels of attainment, a school policy for layout of work in copies is advised. Very little use was made of the interactive whiteboard during lessons in Mathematics.

- Lessons in History aim to heighten awareness of the past by local comparison activities of life today and in the past. Whole class teaching for these lessons was good and incorporated story, photographs on the interactive whiteboard and discussion. The teaching of History in the school could be developed further by specifying local trails and items of local historical interest in the school plan. Use could also be made of class or school historical investigation tables. Teachers should also consider making use of the old roll books in the context of local history.

6. Quality of Support for Pupils

- The support section of the school consists of the principal, one other full-time teacher, one teacher based elsewhere and four special needs assistants. The IEP's are well presented and with appropriate learning targets. A schedule is drawn up for the year as to when testing, reviews and the introduction of shared reading are to commence. This is a good approach. Discussion of standardised testing results is undertaken and it is now recommended that the outcomes of both the results and the discussion should be shared with the board of management. It is also advised that the date targets are achieved should be filled in.

- Noteworthy use is made of poetry in the support context and of special programmes to develop pupils’ coping skills. One programme, Friends for Life, is aimed at developing emotional well being as recommended for some pupils with special needs. This is helpful for pupils with autism and asperger's syndrome as well as pupils with ADHD. The methodologies include whole class discussion and pair work. Support is also given to pupils who come into the gifted category. Pupils in this category are given challenging tasks to stretch their ability. In the instances observed, pupils were writing books based on their interests and reading preferences. The pupils are taught speed typing and support teachers and a special needs assistant (SNA) guide this work. This is a very beneficial development. All SNA’s provide important support to pupils with serious conditions.

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