An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

St Michael’s National School
Ballina, Co. Mayo
Uimhir rolla: 12792F

Date of inspection: 10 November 2011
1. Introduction

St Michael’s National School is situated in the town of Ballina. It has two mainstream class teachers and an enrolment of twenty-six boys and girls from infants to fourth class. Enrolment has grown consistently in recent years and the school now has a significant percentage of newcomer pupils from the international community. It is under the patronage of the Church of Ireland Bishop of Tuam, Killala and Achonry.

This whole-school evaluation focused on the quality of teaching and learning in Irish, English, Mathematics and Science. 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:

- Pupils’ literacy skills are consistently developed across the curriculum. As a result, pupil attainment in literacy is very good. The introduction of peer tutoring is commended.
- The quality of teaching, learning and pupil attainment in Mathematics is very good.
- A very effective emphasis is placed on language development in Science. The quality of learning and pupil attainment in Science is very good.
- The quality of planning and preparation by class teachers and support teachers is very good.
- Pupils are managed very effectively. They present as confident, happy learners.
- The quality of teaching approaches and interventions for pupils with special educational needs is very good. Teaching is focused, structured and promotes skill development.

The following main recommendations are made:

- To meet the school’s needs for stronger in-school leadership, the professional development opportunities available should be explored.
- The school needs to further develop its skills and practices in both school self-evaluation and school development planning.
- Teachers should develop a whole-school approach to developing pupils’ writing in both Irish and English.
- The staff should develop its assessment practices with a view to graphing the results of standardised tests, presenting pupil attainment in a user-friendly manner and tracking individual pupils’ progress.
3. Quality of School Management

- The quality of the work of the board of management is good. The board has overseen consistent development of the school building and grounds in recent years. Specific roles and responsibilities have been assigned to different members of the board. It is recommended that the board meet on a more regular basis and that it engage more actively in the school development planning process.

- The quality of the work of the in-school management team is fair. The principal is hard-working and prioritises teaching duties at all times. She has established positive working relationships with school staff. The deputy principal supports her by undertaking a wide range of curricular, organisational and pastoral duties. While the emphasis on high quality teaching and learning is commendable and should not shift, there is significant scope for the exercise of stronger in-school leadership. It is recommended that opportunities for professional development in the areas of school leadership and management be explored and availed of.

- The quality of the management of resources is fair. While a number of resources are available to support teaching and learning in different curricular areas there is scope for more appropriate resourcing of class libraries and support settings. It is recommended that more use be made of information and communication technology (ICT).

- The quality of the management of home-school communication is good. Annual parent-teacher meetings and end-of-year written reports inform parents of the progress of their children. In a questionnaire issued to the parent body as part of the evaluation, all parents agree that the school is well run. The school should consider involving parents in curricular initiatives and in the planning process.

- The quality of the management of pupils is very good. The pupils present as confident, happy learners who interact willingly with their teachers and peers. The school’s code of behaviour is very positive and stated in child-friendly terms.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- The quality of the school’s planning and of its self-evaluation processes is fair. While a large number of organisational plans have been devised by the staff there is a need to ensure they adhere to current legislation and department circulars. Curricular plans are generic in nature and do not reflect the school’s context or the high quality practices evident in individual classrooms. It is recommended that the school further develop its skills and its practices in the areas of school planning and self-evaluation.

- The quality of teacher planning is very good. Teachers prepare effective long-term and short-term schemes of work based on curricular objectives. Monthly progress reports show breadth and balance in the programmes of work presented to pupils.

- Confirmation was provided that the board of management has formally adopted the Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-primary Schools (September 2011) without modification. The school is compliant with the requirements of Primary Circular 0061/2006. School authorities provided evidence that arrangements are being put in place to ensure compliance with the requirements of the recently published Circular 0065/2011 and Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools as a matter of priority.

5. Quality of Teaching, Learning and Pupil Achievement

- The quality of overall teaching, learning and pupil achievement is very good. A significant majority of pupils display improvements in literacy and numeracy
attainments from year to year. Lessons are structured and paced effectively. Language is emphasised across the curriculum although additional use should be made of pair work to ensure pupils have adequate opportunity to use target vocabulary.

- Sa Ghaeilge, tá cáilíocht an teagaisc, na foghlama agus ghnóthachtáil na ndaltaí go maith. Leagtar béim éifeachtach ar chaint na maidne ar bhonn scoile-ule a chuidionn go mór le cumas labhartha na ndaltaí. Cuirtear an chuige cumarsáideach chun cinn go toirthe trí obair bheire a úsáid go rialt a. Baintear feidhm chuí as ábhair leiríthe agus cuíocht teanga chun na daltaí a spreagadh. Moltar réimse níos leithne de thascanna scríbhneoireachta a ullmhú chun go mbeidh na daltaí in ann iad féin a chur in iúl go cumasach tri Ghaeilge. Moltar chomh maith an Ghaeilge a úsáid go neamhfhoirmiúil i rith an lae.

The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in Gaeilge is good. An effective emphasis is placed on ‘morning talk’ at whole-school level which greatly helps pupils’ oral ability. The communicative approach is promoted fruitfully through the regular use of pair work. Appropriate use is made of visual aids and language games to motivate the pupils. It is recommended that a wider range of writing tasks be prepared for pupils so they can express themselves proficiently in Irish. It is further recommended that Irish be used informally throughout the day.

- The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in English is very good. Pupils' literacy skills are consistently developed across the curriculum. Oral language is taught best where topics and genres are identified and developed. It is essential that specific pupils follow a structured oral language programme to support their language needs. Classrooms are rich in print and pupils' written work is attractively displayed. Pupils write in a variety of genres but would benefit from a more structured, whole-school approach to writing. It is recommended that pupils’ handwriting be developed to ensure a legible cursive script is established by all pupils. Pupils’ standards in reading are very high. The recent introduction of peer tutoring is commendable as it is yielding very encouraging results.

- The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in Mathematics is very good. Concrete materials and visual aids are used very effectively. New concepts are related to pupils’ lives and to the environment. Lessons are carefully structured and presented in a logical, sequential manner. There is very appropriate consolidation of concepts. It is recommended that a whole-school approach to problem-solving be agreed.

- The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in Science is very good. A very effective emphasis is placed on language development although there is a need for more pupil-pupil interactions. Teachers take pupils’ ideas as the starting point for lessons. There is evidence of pupils engaging in discovery learning. It is recommended that the school consider using information and communication technology (ICT) more consistently in the teaching of Science.

- The quality of assessment is good. Pupil profiles are maintained by class teachers. Pupil progress is assessed through the correction and monitoring of work, through class tests and tasks, and through standardised tests in literacy and numeracy. It is recommended that the staff graph the results of the standardised tests and that the results be presented in a reader-friendly manner. It is further recommended that individual pupils’ progress be tracked on an annual basis.

6. Quality of Support for Pupils

- The school has access to a shared learning-support/resource teacher (LS/RT) and a shared resource teacher, neither of whom is based in the school. The school policy governing supports for pupils requires review. As the LS/RT has a very clear
understanding of the staged approach, it is recommended that this teacher be involved in the review.

- The quality of teaching approaches and interventions for pupils with special educational needs (SEN) is very good. Teaching is focused, structured and promotes skill development. It is recommended that the learning environment be developed adequately to support pupils’ learning and to celebrate pupils’ attainments. The quality of resources shows scope for development. It is recommended that the school consider investing in information and communication technology for the support settings. There is also a need for consistent use of such resources as the Primary School Assessment Kit for pupils for whom English is not their first language.

- The quality of planning and preparation by the support teachers is very good. Individual education plans (IEPs) contain specific, measurable targets devised through a consultative process with parents and class teachers.
Appendix

School Response to the Report

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

Area 2  Follow-up actions planned or undertaken since the completion of the inspection activity to implement the findings and recommendations of the inspection

A whole-school approach to developing pupils’ writing in English and Irish has been developed by the teachers and is currently being implemented.

Professional development opportunities (Forbairt) have been explored and booked so as to meet the school’s needs for stronger in-school leadership.