Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

St Columba’s Mixed NS
Cloonagh, Dring, Co. Longford
Uimhir rolla: 12813K

Date of inspection: 23 March 2011
1. Introduction

St Columba’s NS is a co-educational primary school located near the village of Mullinalaghta in County Longford. The school operates under the patronage of the Catholic Bishop of Ardagh and Clonmacnois. There are 42 pupils enrolled in the school and attendance levels are very good. The views of all parents and the opinions of pupils in middle and senior classes were collected, analysed and provide part of the evidence for this report. 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 demonstrates strong commitment to the school and its efforts have contributed significantly to the high quality of accommodation and resources in the school.

- The principal’s leadership style is very effective and she and the special-duties teacher articulate a shared vision with a strong focus on educational standards, community links and pupil welfare.

- All staff members discharge their duties conscientiously and competently.

- Relationships between pupils and staff are very respectful and a very co-operative atmosphere was noted in each classroom.

- The quality of overall teaching, learning and pupil achievement is good in the subjects evaluated.

- The quality of supports for pupils with special educational needs is very good.

The following **main recommendations** are made:

- The board of management should encourage the establishment of a parents’ association to formalise the existing good relationships with parents.

- The school should devise a long-term planning calendar, with a view to having a more phased, collaborative and sustainable policy review process.

- The school should revise its enrolment policy to reflect the school’s compliance with relevant equality legislation.

3. Quality of School Management

- The board of management demonstrates strong commitment to the school and its efforts have contributed significantly to the high quality of accommodation and resources in the school. The board is correctly constituted and its members have undertaken specific
tasks in relation to the needs of the school. Board members have undertaken training for their roles.

- Meetings are convened very frequently and conducted according to correct procedures. The financial accounts have been audited by an independent professional. The board discusses and ratifies school policy.

- There are two mainstream teachers in the school and both undertake in-school management roles very effectively. The principal was appointed from within the existing staff three months ago. She articulates a vision for the school with a strong focus on educational standards, community links and pupil welfare. Her leadership style is very effective and she delegates a range of curricular, pastoral and administrative responsibilities to the special-duties teacher.

- Resources are managed very effectively in the school. The special-needs assistant, secretary and caretaker contribute well to the smooth running of the school.

- Strong relationships are fostered between the school, local organisations and parents. While there is no formal parents' association, there is evidence that some parents assist the work of the school in areas such as gardening, the school play, aquatics, local history and sport. It is recommended that the board of management encourage the establishment of a parents’ association to formalise this good relationship and to simplify consultation on policy formation.

- Relationships between pupils and staff are very respectful and a very co-operative atmosphere was noted in each classroom. Most pupils report that they like coming to school and that they enjoy their lessons. All pupils state that this is a good school. Discipline is very positive and affirming.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- The quality of the school planning and school self-evaluation process is good. All required policies are in place and many have been reviewed recently. Administrative and curricular policies provide valuable guidance for the smooth running of the school.

- While the planning process has included consultation with the staff and the board, there should be wider consultation with parents. Parental responses to the Inspectorate survey would support this approach. It is recommended that a long-term planning calendar be devised with a view to having a more phased, collaborative and sustainable policy review process.

- The implementation of school self-evaluation is at an early stage. The school is commended on its action-planning approach and on its tracking of standardised assessment data in numeracy and literacy. It is recommended that specific, measurable targets be set and reviewed annually. The Inspectorate publication *Looking at Our School* would be useful in enhancing the school self-evaluation process.

- The quality of classroom planning is very good. All teachers specify their intended learning outcomes with clarity. Planning documents and monthly reports attest to the delivery of a broad, progressive and balanced programme for each subject area.

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

- The quality of overall teaching, learning and pupil achievement is good. Classroom interactions are very productive and all pupils report that lessons are explained clearly for them. While whole-class teaching and discussion are positive features of many lessons, there is scope for greater use of group and collaborative learning methodologies in some cases. Commendable differentiation of lesson content was noted for pupils with special educational needs.

- Tá cáilíocht an teagaisc agus na foghlama agus gnóthachtáil na ndaltáí go maith sa Ghaeilge. Cothaítear dearcadh dearfach i leith na Gaeilge i measc na ndaltaí agus is saibhir an stór focal a mhúinteá dóbh. Úsáidtear an cur chuige cumarsáideach go minic sna ceachtanna agus, sa chleachtas is fearr, spéasghar na daltaí chun cainte trí Ohomhá beirte. Tá cumas labhartha agus tuiscint imholtá ag formhór na ndaltaí. Léann na daltaí áithne an t-imeachtaí a ghlacann do na daltaí seánráis agus éagsúla agus léiríonn a gcuid oibre forbairt chuí. Baintear tairbhe agus sult as atá in oiriúint dá gcumas féin le cruinneas. Tugtar deiseanna scríbhneoireachta do na daltaí éagsúla agus léiríonn a gcuid oibre forbairt chuí.

- The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in Irish is good. A positive attitude is cultivated towards Irish and pupils are given rich vocabulary input. The communicative approach is often used during lessons and in the best practice pupils are encouraged to speak through pair work. Pupils’ speaking ability is praiseworthy and most pupils demonstrate good understanding. Pupils read material matched to their own ability levels with accuracy. Pupils receive opportunities to write in the various genres and their work demonstrates appropriate development. Pupils derive benefit and fun from activities in poetry and music.

- The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in English is very good. Oral language is developed purposefully at all levels and most pupils express themselves confidently. Pre-reading preparation is undertaken very conscientiously and most pupils display good phonological awareness and knowledge of sight vocabulary. Reading standards and comprehension levels are very good in relation to ability levels. Pupils write well in a wide variety of genres and they are taught to plan, draft and edit their ideas very coherently. Pupils’ handwriting is presented to a very high standard. Poetry is explored very beneficially.

- The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in Mathematics is good. Classroom planning identifies objectives with clarity and work is differentiated for pupils with special educational needs. Commendable emphasis is placed upon the consistent use of agreed mathematical language and frequent recall of mathematical facts. Concepts are introduced and explored through discussion, skilful questioning and allocation of purposeful tasks. Further use of collaborative group methodologies would enhance pupils’ opportunities to engage with each other and with mathematical resources. Most pupils complete computational exercises accurately and many pupils demonstrate commendable problem-solving skills.

- The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in Physical Education is good. The school’s hall and astro-turf pitch are among the facilities used to provide a wide
variety of activities. Lessons are well structured to ensure participation and enjoyment. In order to ensure continuity and progression, it is recommended that skills targets be identified and assessed in each curriculum strand at each class level. The school participates successfully in a range of inter-school sports competitions.

6. Quality of Support for Pupils

- While school practices enable full access to pupils with special educational needs, it is recommended that the enrolment policy be reviewed to reflect the school’s compliance with relevant equality legislation.

- The quality of supports for pupils with special educational needs is very good. Diagnostic, screening and observational assessments are used very effectively to identify and support additional learning needs. Early intervention initiatives and a range of withdrawal and in-class supports are deployed prudently.

- Specific targets are identified in individual profile and learning programmes (IPLPs) and individual education plans (IEPs) and these are reviewed in consultation with class teachers and parents.

- Both of the support teachers plan and deliver their support programmes very effectively through use of suitable methodologies and learning resources. Pupils with special educational needs are making creditable progress in relation to their targets and ability levels.

- Almost all parents commented favourably on the arrangements for parent/teacher meetings and the accuracy of information provided in the annual school reports.

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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 would like to begin by acknowledging the inspector’s courteous and highly professional manner displayed to the staff and pupils during the inspection process. The Board accepts the findings of the report as a fair and positive account of the achievements, quality of teaching and management at St. Columba’s N.S. The Board and staff will continue their strong commitment to the management and teaching at St. Columba’s N.S.

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 enrolment policy has been reviewed and relevant changes have been made to comply with current legislation.
In reference to the recommendation setting smaller more achievable targets, the action plan has been reviewed by the staff and revised to fit to a wider time frame.
The Board welcomes the recommendation to set up a Parent’s Association. Actions have been taken at board level with a view to continuing this process in the next academic year.