Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

St. Mary’s Senior School,
Dunmanway,
County Cork
Uimhir rolla: 13661S

Date of inspection: 29 November 2010
1. Introduction

Located in the rural town of Dunmanway, St. Mary’s Senior School provides single-sex education for girls from second to sixth class. The school is under the patronage of the Catholic Bishop of Cork and Ross. The school campus also includes St Mary’s Infant school and some facilities, such as the hall and staff room, are shared. 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.

Currently, there are 93 pupils enrolled and levels of attendance at the school are very good. The school adopts effective approaches with regard to pupil attendance which conform to National Education Welfare Board (NEWB) and Departmental guidelines.

2. Summary of Findings and Recommendations for Further Development

<table>
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<th>The following are the main strengths of the work of the school:</th>
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<td>• The board of management provides effective leadership and management to the school community. Decision-making in the areas of policy, planning, resource and staffing are characterised by openness, accountability and clarity.</td>
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<td>• The quality of accommodation, the provision of resources in support of teaching and learning and maintenance standards in the school are very good.</td>
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<td>• Effective channels of communication foster good relationships between the school, pupils, parents and the wider community.</td>
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<td>• A broad and balanced curriculum is provided for, suitable teaching methodologies are employed and there is an appropriate emphasis on the achievement of high standards in teaching and in learning.</td>
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<td>• The standard of pupil behaviour is very good. Pupils are suitably challenged and motivated by good teaching and a range of co-curricular and extra-curricular activities.</td>
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<td>• The principal provides effective instructional leadership and fosters a mutually supportive working environment.</td>
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The following main recommendations are made:

| • It is recommended that board of management should formulate a long-term strategy statement which sets out the school’s priorities in relation to accommodation. The rationalisation of existing facilities should contribute to the improvement of educational provision in the community. |
| • The school should establish development priorities, in collaboration with other relevant service providers, and undertake specific action planning activities to ensure that |
continued high-quality use is made of the excellent educational facility for pupils with special educational needs into the future.

- It is recommended that a timetable for whole-school planning be devised so that individual policies can be reviewed on a cyclical basis.
- It is recommended that common templates be devised for both long-term and short-term planning.

3. Quality of School Management

- The board of management functions in accordance with the wishes of the Patron, the requirements of the Education Act and Departmental guidelines. The board is committed to the effective provision of education and strives to incorporate, where possible, the views and concerns of all groups within the school community.

- The board manages the financial resources of the school efficiently and effectively and maintains school accounts in line with statutory requirements and Departmental guidelines. School accommodation is very good and the resource needs of teaching staff and pupils are effectively provided for. All classrooms are well-equipped to support the delivery of a broad and balanced curriculum. Resource provision in support of pupils with special educational needs is very good. The effective use of interactive white boards was a feature of teaching and learning in most lessons observed.

- At the time of the whole-school evaluation, the in-school management team was reduced to two members as a result of permanent staff members being on secondment, career-break and personal leave. The principal and the teaching staff are to be commended for the manner in which they have co-operated to carry out duties assigned to post-holders in their absence. These duties are relevant to school needs, reflect the strengths and abilities of the in-school management team and are in line with Departmental guidelines. In the delegation of responsibility within the school, duties assigned pertain to key areas of school administration, curriculum and pastoral care. The performance of the in-school management team is reviewed regularly and duties may be adapted in line with changing school circumstances. The manner in which the teaching staff co-operates to ensure that the responsibilities delegated to post-holders are carried out effectively is a testament to their professionalism.

As a means of further improving existing good practice, the submission of a brief annual report on their activities by all post-holders to the board was recommended. At the time of the evaluation, school management was advised on the need to constantly review assigned duties in line with changing school needs.

- Ancillary staff includes nine special needs assistants (SNAs), a secretary and a cleaner. All perform their duties to a high standard and contribute significantly to the efficient running of the school.
• The daily practices and routines of the school indicate satisfactory compliance with current legislation and with departmental regulations regarding the length of the school year, the length of the school day, enrolment and retention of pupils, health and safety and the provision of a broad and balanced curriculum.

• Parents are recognised as key partners in education and contact between the board, the community, parents and teachers is facilitated in a number of ways. The board has facilitated the development of a formal, affiliated parents association and effectively promotes contact with the general body of parents and with the wider school community.

• Parent-teacher meetings are held in line with Departmental guidelines and pupil progress data are shared. Formal written reports are given at the end of the school year.

• Parental responses are sought in relation to aspects of whole-school planning. Community events are celebrated and parents are invited to be involved in concerts, games and school tours.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

• The whole school planning process is in line with Departmental guidelines and reflects the characteristic spirit of the school. School management, teachers and parents, where appropriate, are involved in the development of school administrative and curricular plans. A process of continual review takes place and the content of all official school documentation is regularly re-evaluated by the board. This work is co-ordinated by the principal with the assistance of her colleagues. At the time of the evaluation, a number of policies, including the curriculum plans for Mathematics and SPHE and the Code of Behaviour were under review. Advice was given to the school with regard to the benefit of incorporating targets for development in the form of action plans in whole school planning documents, where appropriate.

• The Plean Scoile is a useful guide to the work of the school community and provides a solid basis for decision making, strategic planning and individual teacher planning. All individual teachers prepare long-term and short-term plans. Progress and continuity in teaching and learning across the curriculum is monitored by monthly progress reports which record learning outcomes at all class levels.

• 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**

- Lessons are, generally, well planned and effectively delivered throughout the school. A wide variety of teaching strategies and methodologies are employed and suitable resources are at hand to facilitate discovery learning. There is a positive working environment in the school and teachers communicate high expectations to pupils with regard to effort and achievement. Almost all pupils are positively involved in their work, happy in school and learning productively.

The board and the parents’ association expressed high levels of satisfaction with the work of the principal and staff and with the overall standard of pupil achievement. Questionnaires, issued to parents, indicated very good levels of satisfaction with the work of the school. Pupil questionnaires also indicated very good levels of satisfaction. The willingness of almost all pupils to engage and to co-operate with their teachers and peers was evident during the course of the evaluation.


Chun an dea chleachtas a fhógraí a thuilleadh, moltar bheim bhreise a chur ar úsáid na Gaeilge mar mheán cumarsáide nádúrtha. Moltar, chomh maith, dírítear a thuilleadh ar an dtumhadh le linn na gceachtanna agus modh an aistriúcháin a sheachaint nuair nach gá sin.

Irish classes are capably managed and have good structure and pace. The learning material is relevant to pupil age and interests, and appropriate teaching methods are used. Good use is made of games and drama to positively develop pupil listening and speaking skills. Effective use is also made of the interactive whiteboard so that suitable language input is ensured during the lesson. The pupils enjoy the lessons and the majority read fluently. The standard of written work throughout the school is commended.

To further develop good practice it is recommended that more use is made of Irish as a real means of communication. It is also recommended that pupils be further immersed in Irish during the lessons and that unnecessary translation be avoided.

- English is taught systematically and effectively. Pupils, in the main, are articulate and confident. Reading skills are well developed and the results of standardised tests (Micra-T) indicate above average achievement in all of the curricular bands. Standardised test results and other relevant data are carefully monitored and appropriate action follows, when required. Reading for pleasure is facilitated and encouraged and suitable reading material is available to all classes. Good collaboration occurs between class teachers and the learning support teacher to assist pupils with additional learning needs and effective interventions occur. Writing skills and the writing process are developed. Almost all pupils complete their written assignments to a good standard. Examples of pupils’ written work in a wide variety of genres are celebrated in classrooms and in school circulation areas.
• Mathematics lessons are presented creatively and are, generally, well-structured. Standardised tests (Sigma-T) indicate very good levels of mathematical achievement. Concrete materials are appropriately used to facilitate hands-on learning. The centrality of talk and discussion, investigation and prediction are key features in the teaching of mathematics. Meaningful integration with other curricular areas and with the environment was noted during most of the lessons observed during the evaluation.

In the context of further improving the teaching of Mathematics in the school, advice was given with regard to the benefit of setting additional outcome focused targets for all classes. In addition, the development of a whole-school approach to the promotion of higher-order thinking skills through a more structured programme for problem solving was also recommended.

• In Social, Environmental and Scientific Education (SESE) a wide range of integrated themes are explored. This work is linked to the local environment, where possible, and is also relevant to the experience of the pupils. Thematic approaches are a feature of the work of many classes and topics are often linked to other curricular areas. The quality of teaching and learning in Geography is good and emphasis is placed on the development of skills, as well as understanding concepts and acquiring facts. Maps and globes are on display in most classes. Pupils have a keen sense of place and display a good knowledge of human and natural environments at home and world-wide. The good work of the school might be further improved by more regular field trips or visits to local areas of particular interest.

6. Quality of Supports for Pupils

• A co-ordinated and very effective programme of supports for pupils with special educational needs is provided in the school. Central to this support structure are two classes for pupils with Moderate General Learning Disability which cater for boys and girls. A dedicated team of two special needs' teachers, together with special needs' assistants (SNAs) provide, under the direction of teaching staff, a range of structured interventions which meet the needs of individual pupils. Interventions are based on assessments and in line with the Primary School Curriculum for pupils with Mild, Moderate or Severe Learning Difficulty. The work of the team is characterised by openness and transparency and the extent to which they liaise with and avail of the services of other professionals and service providers is an excellent example of good practice.

• Clear, outcomes focused planning occurs and targets are reviewed regularly in the best interest of the pupils. Excellent facilities are provided for the pupils in these classes and significant support is provided by Co-action and the HSE. A wide range of strategies is adapted for internal use within the classes and teaching staff are well informed through regular engagement with professional development opportunities. In addition to the formal curriculum, the pupils are taught life, social and community skills and regular opportunities are provided for meaningful integration with mainstream pupils through the Physical Education (PE) curriculum and extra-curricular activities such as cookery, gardening, school concerts and various other internal school activities.
• In addition to the special classes, the school has the services of a shared learning support (LS) teacher and a shared resource teacher (RT). The LS/RT team adopts a flexible approach to their activities and make good use of a range of strategies, which include individual and group withdrawal and some in-class support. Individual learning plans are developed for each pupil and progress records are carefully maintained. The principal assumes responsibility for the development, implementation and review of the school policy with regard to pupils experiencing learning difficulty. Class teachers adopt effective strategies which include group work, differentiated learning, individual support programmes and liaison with parents. Additional supports in literacy and numeracy are enhanced by good prevention strategies such as paired reading, time-bound intervention strategies such as co-operative teaching or team-teaching and supplementary teaching in the classrooms.

• There is a coherent and systematic approach to assessment in the school. Early diagnosis is emphasised and suitable screening tests are used in support of good early intervention practices. Priority is given to pupils at or below the 12th percentile in standardised tests, and pupils with low incidence disability are given the recommended time allocation for resource hours depending on their relevant reports. Parents are kept informed of all aspects of the work and their input is sought in the development of individual educational programmes for pupils in receipt of supplementary teaching. Pupil progress is carefully monitored and an in-depth review of each pupil’s progress is conducted by the LS teacher at the end of each instructional term.

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