Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Kilbrittain NS,
Kilbrittain, Co. Cork
Uimhir rolla: 14116V

Date of inspection: 7 Nov. 2011
1. Introduction

Kilbrittain NS is a rural, co-educational school under the patronage of the catholic Bishop of Cork and Ross. Currently, there are 152 pupils enrolled in the school. Enrolment peaked in the 2008/09 school year and, though a reduction has occurred since then, it is now relatively stable. Attendance levels are high and school practices with regard to pupil attendance are effective and in line with National Education Welfare Board (NEWB) and Departmental guidelines. 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 school is an important focal point in the local area and is well supported by the parents of the pupils currently attending the school.
- The board of management maintains suitable and well resourced premises for teaching and learning.
- A broad and balanced curriculum is provided and suitable teaching methods are used.
- The teachers are conscientious and professional in their work.
- Pupils in the school display positive attitudes towards learning and are co-operative.
- The school has a positive and inclusive approach to pupils with special educational needs and its overall provision in that area is very good.

The following main recommendations are made:

- Within the terms of circulars 008/2011 and 0025/2011, the principal and staff should devise a separate school monthly progress template which would identify pupils’ learning in each curricular area more clearly and allow for progression and continuity to be more easily evaluated across the school in specific curricular areas.
- The board should look at devising a school self-evaluation framework which would review learning outcomes for pupils in selected curricular areas.
- School clustering arrangements for special education provision should be reviewed with a view to achieving greater efficiencies in terms of teaching time and costs.

3. Quality of School Management

- The board of management is properly constituted and oversees the work of the school in an effective manner. The school site has been developed, incrementally, over the years to provide a suitable learning environment. The main school building, though limited in
terms of circulation areas and ancillary spaces, is in excellent condition. An additional adjacent space has been developed, with community support, for use as a general purposes room and has been invaluable in the development of school assembly practices and for co-curricular community events. The old listed school building which is located on site remains in use as an additional classroom area and has been maintained to a satisfactory level.

- A suitable range of teaching and learning resources has been provided in all classroom settings. The provision of information and communication technology (ICT) hardware and software is at an advanced stage in the school and its effective use as a teaching tool was a feature of many lessons observed during the evaluation. The incoming board of management should examine the possibility of incorporating all areas of the school into one and provide greater circulation space and more suitable administrative accommodation, if possible.

- The board oversees the financial affairs of the school responsibly and accounts are certified in line with Departmental guidelines and best practice.

- The formal in-school management team is comprised of the principal, the deputy principal and one special duties teacher. Individual roles are reviewed annually in line with agreed school priorities and provision for formal in-school management meetings has been arranged within the context of the additional hours as set out in Circulars 008/2011 and 0025/2011. Additional responsibilities have been accepted, on a voluntary basis, by other staff members in line with their identified strengths and interests. This is very good practice and a distributed leadership model is evolving in the school which facilitates professional growth and staff empowerment. It is recommended that this model of leadership development is supported, where possible, by the board and that the future up-skilling of staff is linked to identified school needs and current areas of priority development.

- Parental responses to questionnaires indicated the school has a very good reputation in the community and all parents surveyed consider that the school is well run. In addition, parental responses showed that almost all were happy with the school facilities, considered the school to be a safe environment and believed that their child(ren) were doing well in school. Almost all were of the opinion that their children liked school.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- A comprehensive range of school administrative and curricular plans were made available during the course of the evaluation. These are, generally, well informed with regard to the legal framework in which schools operate and underpinned by the principles of the curriculum for primary schools. The principal and staff have played leadership roles in ensuring that school planning is significantly linked to practice and there is an on-going process of review in place. The board and parents have played supportive, consultative roles in the whole-school planning process. Questionnaire responses indicated that parents would welcome further opportunities to contribute their views about school policies. The board is encouraged to strengthen parental participation in policy development and review.

- In order to further improve and complete the school planning cycle, it is recommended that further emphasis should be placed on the development of an accessible and easily interpreted monthly progress record template. This would facilitate school self-evaluation and allow the principal and the board to identify more readily school improvement targets in teaching and learning. Necessary follow-up actions should then be implemented.
Reference to NCCA guidelines on assessment for and of learning and the national strategy to improve literacy and numeracy should assist in this process.

- All teaching staff members complete long-term and short-term plans in respect of all curricular areas. Long-term plans provided a useful menu of relevant content and short-term templates provided clear objectives based on selected themes. Progress in delivering the prescribed curriculum at individual class level was recorded by ticking the relevant area in the forward planner. This practice would be improved by the completion of a separate monthly progress record of pupils’ learning in each curricular area. In tandem with the recommendation made above, advice was given on the advantages of developing summary monthly report templates which would facilitate the periodic evaluation of learning across the school by the board, the principal or by the curriculum leader in a specific area.

- Confirmation was provided that the board of management has formally adopted the Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools without modification and that the school is compliant with the requirements of the Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools.

5. Quality of Teaching, Learning and Pupil Achievement

- The learning environment is well developed in the school and, though internal circulation areas in the main building are limited, good use is made of all available internal and external spaces. All classrooms are visually attractive and well maintained. Each has an interactive whiteboard and ICT is used effectively as a teaching resource. Pupils are well managed and their motivation levels are generally high. They are confident and articulate and display a positive image of their school and their community. Questionnaire responses indicated that almost all parents believe that teaching is good in the school. The board and the representatives of the parents’ association also expressed their satisfaction with the general educational attainment of pupils. Pupil responses to questionnaires indicate a need for teachers to engage their pupils in more structured group work in class.

- Tá réimse leathan d’áiseanna le h-aghadh múineadh na Gaeilge ar fáil sa scoil agus bhí caighdeán na foghlama sásúil trasna na scoile. Cuítear béis ar fhobarth thoilóra, ar bhunsceilanna na léitheoireachta agus na scribhneoireachta agus ar úsáid na Gaeilge mar theanga chumarsáideach i ranganna áirithe. Úsáidtear modhanna múinte oiriúnacha agus cuítear na ceachtanna i láthair go briomhar, éifeactach. Chun a thullleadh feabhais a chur i bhfeidhm, moltar don bhofoireann ath-bhréithníu a dhéanamh ar na téacsleabhair a úsáidtear agus triail a bhaint as clár fhoghlama comhtháite ar nós ‘Seideán Sí’. Moltar, chomh maith, ball féinse a athint agus a chumasú chun an obair seo a threorú agus chun spríocanna fhothlaimh nóis soiléire a athint do gach rang léibhéail.

A wide variety of resources are available for the teaching of Irish and satisfactory standards are achieved. Emphasis is placed on vocabulary development, on reading and writing skills and, in specific classes, on the use of Irish as a communicative language. Suitable teaching methods are used and classes are presented in a lively and effective manner. To further improve the quality of the work, it is recommended that the staff review their use of textbooks and consider the suitability of an integrated language programme such as ‘Seideán Sí’. It is also recommended that a staff member be identified and supported in directing this work and also in developing more specific learning targets for each class level.
• English is taught effectively and results of standardised tests in reading are generally in line with expectations. Pupils listen attentively and communicate clearly, in the majority of instances. Reading skills are developed incrementally, although it is important to reinforce these, at all class levels, as pupils progress through the school. Interest in reading is also generated through the provision of print-rich environments and the promotion of reading as a leisure activity. In that respect, advice was given on the need to constantly invest in books as a key resource and to provide pupils with choice and time to read for pleasure as a part of new school literacy targets. Writing skills are reinforced across a wide variety of genres and the cumulative work of the staff can be seen in the samples of written work on display in the senior classes.

• In Mathematics, pupils are carefully supported in acquiring a good understanding of skills and concepts. Their mathematical vocabulary is developed systematically as pupils move from class to class. A wide range of mathematical equipment is available in the school and is used to good effect in many classes. Advice was given on the auditing of this equipment to indicate deficits and future needs. It would also be useful to develop a strategic plan on the dissemination of information on the effective use of specific items of equipment to all staff members. Almost all of the parents surveyed believe that their child(ren) are doing well in Mathematics and the majority of pupils also believe this to be true. Standardised test results (Sigma-T) in Mathematics indicate satisfactory results in line with expectations.

• SPHE is taught effectively in the school and a positive atmosphere exists. Good relationships underpin all school related activities. A positive code of behaviour, including an anti-bullying policy, is consistently implemented in a fair manner. Teacher-pupil and pupil-pupil interactions are respectful. Pupil behaviour during the course of the evaluation was very good and a calm and well ordered atmosphere was apparent. The principles of the SPHE curriculum, good self-esteem, respect for oneself and others, pride in ones community, the values of relationships and citizenship are firmly embedded in the policies, routines and practices of the school.

6. Quality of Support for Pupils

• Pupils with special educational needs are supported by a team of six which includes three teachers and three special needs assistants (SNAs). Under the general allocation model, the school has been assigned 1.2 posts based on enrolment. An additional 36.5 hours support for low incidence pupils is also provided by a full-time resource teacher (RT) and by the services of an additional part-time RT based in another school. At the time of the evaluation, indications from the school authorities suggested that this allocation may increase as eight additional pupils who have been identified as having possible specific learning needs await assessment.

• The school has been active with regard to identifying pupils with special educational needs and clear relationships have been established with both public and private professionals. Currently, the school has a number of pupils who have been assessed as functioning on the autistic spectrum. Within the constraints of existing resources programmes have been put in place to support these pupils. Senior management should review annually the extent to which the provision made for these pupils is adequately meeting their needs.

• School practices with regard to the maintenance of information on pupils’ learning are effective. Results are communicated to parents in a suitable manner in line with departmental guidelines and most parents believe that school reports give a good picture of how their child(ren) are doing.