An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

St. Senan’s Boys’ National School,
Kilmacow, County Kilkenny
Uimhir rolla: 14187V

Date of inspection: 10 February 2011
1. Introduction

St. Senan’s Boys’ NS is a rural, vertical, primary school with an enrolment of 110 pupils. It is under the patronage of the Catholic Bishop of Ossory. The attendance of the pupils is very good. The board of management was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the evaluation, and the response of the board will be found in the appendix to this report.

2. Summary of Findings and Recommendations for Further Development

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

- Productive working relationships exist between the board of management and the school staff.
- The principal and staff are dedicated to providing the pupils with a caring school environment.
- The pupils are well behaved and work conscientiously and co-operatively with their teachers and with one another.
- Overall, the standard of teaching and learning in the school is of a good quality.

The following main recommendations are made:

- Reading material in English and Irish should be differentiated to match the class and ability levels of the pupils.
- Curriculum plans in English and Irish should be reviewed to ensure their purposefulness in reflecting the school’s own context and the particular needs of the pupils.

3. Quality of School Management

- The board of management operates effectively and is committed to supporting the work of the school. Clearly defined responsibilities are allocated to individual board members and are undertaken diligently. The maintenance and improvement of school facilities are ongoing priorities of the board.

- The principal is thoroughly familiar with the community of the school. He leads the whole-school planning process and promotes a culture of teamwork and collaborative decision-making. He also supports positive pupil participation and behaviour. He is capably supported by the deputy principal and the special duties teacher. Assigned duties are reviewed regularly and are designed to meet the priority needs of the school. As a means of building on the existing capacity of the in-school management team, it is recommended that their curriculum leadership roles be strengthened. The responses to the parent questionnaires indicate that most parents are of the view that the school is well run.

- A good variety of resources to support teaching and learning is available in the school and these are utilised effectively. The school building and grounds are maintained appropriately.
Although there is no parents' association in place, parents are kept appraised of school activities in an effective manner. They are supportive of school events and assist with extra-curricular activities. Most parents confirm that the school welcomes them. To further promote parental involvement, it is recommended that the school actively promotes the establishment of a parents' association.

The management of pupils throughout the school is commended. The pupils are very well behaved and they work conscientiously and co-operatively with their teachers and with one another. Analysis of the pupil questionnaires indicates that they feel secure and confident in their learning environment.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

Overall, the quality of school planning and school self-evaluation is good. Plans for all areas of the curriculum and a range of organisational policies have been devised collaboratively by the principal and the teaching staff, in consultation with the board of management. Current curriculum plans for English and Irish are broad and general in nature. It is advised that they are contextualised to the needs of the school, to ensure that they provide greater guidance for individual teacher planning and clearly outline the spiral approach to the pupils' learning.

The teachers prepare suitable long-term and short-term plans and record progress in each of the curriculum areas.

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

Overall, the standard of teaching and learning in the school is of a good quality. Classroom atmospheres are positive and interactions between teachers and pupils are affirmative. Lessons are well-structured, paced and presented. Parental questionnaire responses indicate that most parents consider that teaching is good in the school and that their children are doing well. The majority of pupil questionnaires indicate that the pupils enjoy their lessons and learning.

Tá obair shásúil ar siúil i soláthar don Ghaeilge trí an scoil. Baintear úsáid éifeachtach as raon straitéisí mar obair bheirte, cluichí agus drámaíochta chun scileanna éiseachta, labhartha agus tuiscíonna na ndaltaí a chothú. Úsáidtear acmhainní go torthúil chun an t-ábhar a mhuineadh go héifeachtach. Tá cnuasach leathan rann, filíochta agus amhrán ar eolas ag na daltaí. Ar an iomlán, léann an cuil is mó de na daltaí sna meán- agus sna hardranganna le lifocht tioriúnach, ach is gá aird níos forleithne a dhihrú ar dheachadh. Moltar leabhair léithéideachta grádaithe a roghnú chun an caighdeán tuiscíonna agus lìofachta a ardú de réir leibheal na ndaltaí. Fáigh feidhmiúcháin de na daltaí cleachtadh ar an scribhneoireacht, cleachtadh ar an scile, lìofachta agus cuirtear gníomhaíochtaí ar fáil dòibh ar nós cleachtadh tuiscíonna, cleachtadh gramadaí agus scriobh scéalta.
There is satisfactory provision for Irish throughout the school. Effective use is made of a range of strategies such as pair-work, games and drama in cultivating the pupils’ listening, speaking and comprehension skills. Resources are used purposefully to aid teaching. The pupils know a wide variety of rhymes, poems and songs. Overall, most pupils in middle and senior classes read with appropriate fluency. However, it is advised to focus more closely on the promotion of accurate pronunciation. It is also recommended that the reading material be differentiated to match the ability levels of the pupils. The pupils practise functional writing and engage in comprehension and grammar exercises and story writing.

- Overall, the quality of teaching and learning in English is good. Purposeful, discrete oral-language activities and skilful teacher questioning serve to promote the pupils’ expressive language competence. In the junior classes, the pupils’ phonological and phonemic awareness is fostered purposefully and good use is made of a broad variety of reading material. It is recommended that the reading material in the middle and senior classes be differentiated to match the class and ability levels of the pupils. In general, the pupils read fluently and with understanding, in accordance with their ability. The pupils are provided with opportunities to write in a variety of genres and this work is displayed attractively in the classrooms.

- The quality of teaching and learning in Mathematics is good. Dedicated mathematics areas in all classrooms serve to support the pupils’ learning in this area of the curriculum. The teachers provide clear explanations of concepts and implement purposeful and structured learning activities. In all lessons, there is a suitable emphasis on the teaching and use of appropriate mathematical language. A range of manipulatives is used effectively to support teaching and learning. In the main, the pupils display suitable understanding of the content previously addressed across the strands.

- The quality of teaching and learning in Physical Education is very good. Lessons are structured and paced appropriately and due attention is placed on the development of specific skills. The school has a supply of appropriate resources and equipment to support the implementation of this area of the curriculum. Additional support is provided by external coaches in hurling, rugby, gymnastics and swimming.

- A variety of assessment modes is used to evaluate the progress of individual pupils. These approaches include teacher observation, teacher-designed tasks and tests, checklists, the monitoring of pupils’ written work, standardised tests and diagnostic tests. Evidence from the pupil questionnaires demonstrates that homework is corrected regularly and guidance is given to pupils on how to improve their work.

6. Quality of Support for Pupils

- Competent practice is evident in the provision for pupils with additional learning needs. Lessons are well structured and teacher-pupil interactions are affirmative and encouraging. Positive pupil progress is in evidence, including the development of their self-confidence. Effective and positive communication structures exist between school staff and parents. Individual education plans are prepared appropriately and parents are involved in this process. Lessons are provided on a withdrawal and an in-class basis. A range of commercial and teacher-designed resources is employed effectively to support learning.

Published November 2011
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 and staff of St. Senan’s B.N.S. thank the inspector for the professional, courteous and helpful manner in which the Whole School Evaluation was carried out.

The members of the Board are encouraged and gratified that the report recognises the welcoming atmosphere in the school, the exemplary behaviour and conscientious work of the pupils, the dedication and professionalism of the staff, the effective and committed support of the Board of Management, the fruitful contributions and co-operation of the parents and the enthusiastic and excellent work of the ancillary staff.

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 report will provide a focus to further enhance the work of the school through the ongoing implementation of its recommendations.