An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Abbeyleix South NS, Abbeyleix
Co. Laois
Uimhir rolla: 14260F

Date of inspection: 14 October 2010
1. Introduction

Abbeyleix South NS is a co-educational school under the patronage of the Church of Ireland Bishop of Cashel and Ossory. The school caters for the educational needs of eighty pupils from a wide catchment area in Abbeyleix, County Laois. The school has four mainstream class teachers, a learning support teacher who is shared with a neighbouring school and a shared resource teacher based in an adjacent school. The school espouses a Christian ethos and its stated child-centred vision is evident in the daily life of the school. The school was built in 1893 to cater for the Church of Ireland population of the area and it retains many of its original features which has an impact on the work of the school. At the time of the evaluation, the school was looking forward to the construction of a new school building. Pupils’ attendance rates are high.

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 principal and teachers work diligently and collaboratively to enhance the educational experiences of pupils both on a curricular, co-curricular and extracurricular basis.

- The quality of relationships within the school and between the school, the parents and the wider community is commendable. A welcome and supportive atmosphere is evident and interactions among pupils are characterised by respect, consideration and politeness.

- The board of management and staff are commended for the maintenance and upkeep of the school and its teaching resources in order to provide a safe and well-organised educational environment for pupils.

The following main recommendations are made:

- The approach to individual teachers’ planning should be reviewed so that a common format is agreed which places a greater focus on learning outcomes and on the provision of differentiated learning activities to ensure challenge and support for learners.

- The range of teaching methodologies should be extended to include more active learning, guided discovery and collaborative learning.

3. Quality of School Management

- The board of management is properly constituted and is clearly committed to the development of the school. It is to be commended for the upkeep of the very old school building to a high standard. School finances are carefully managed. Minutes are maintained and in order to enhance the good communications that already exist, it is
recommended that an agreed report of each board meeting, setting out the information to be conveyed to members of the school community becomes a standard item at all board meetings and is recorded in the minutes.

- The school is led by a highly diligent principal who capably combines both teaching and administrative duties. She exhibits strong leadership skills and has fostered positive relationships with members of the school community. She prioritises her role as instructional leader. She is ably assisted by a deputy principal and a special duties teacher who undertake a number of assigned duties which are reviewed annually. In line with best practice, consideration should be given to the presentation of an action plan outlining how these duties are to be fulfilled.

- The school is well resourced and the management of resources is good. Cordial working relationships are evident and all members of staff work collaboratively in the best interests of pupils. It is recommended that the board satisfies itself that the best possible secretarial support is provided for the school in line with available resources.

- There is effective communication between the various partners in the school community. Parents’ representatives expressed their satisfaction with the range of information about their children’s progress and with the quality of education provided by the school. Parents’ questionnaires indicated that parents would like to be better informed about the work of the board and the parents’ association, and they would like to be more involved in the formulation of school policies.

- The management of pupils is of a high quality and a very positive learning environment prevails throughout the school. This is reflected in both the pupils’ and parents’ questionnaires. Almost all pupils reported in pupils’ questionnaires that they felt safe at school and enjoyed positive relationships with their teachers and peers. The educational experiences of pupils are enhanced by their involvement in a range of co-curricular and extracurricular activities.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- The overall quality of whole-school organisational and curriculum planning is very good. Organisational policies meet legislative requirements and support the smooth operation of the school. Clear curriculum plans and resources are in place for all subjects and these provide good support to inform individual teachers’ planning. The school has a positive attitude towards school self-evaluation and the development of this process is encouraged into the future.

- Individual teachers’ planning and progress records are of a high quality. The approach to long-term and short-term planning in the school is based on the principles and structure of the curriculum. Consideration should be given to the use of an agreed format in order to support continuity and development throughout the school. It is recommended that planning documents should have a greater focus on learning objectives and more specific differentiated lesson content. Monthly progress records are maintained using short-term planning documents.

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 overall quality of teaching and learning in this school is of a high standard. Classrooms are print-rich and displays of teaching resources are effectively used to enhance classrooms. Lessons have a good structure and pace. Paired and group work are used productively during lessons but there is scope for this provision to be developed to include more active and collaborative learning. Some differentiation of teaching and learning activities was observed during the course of the evaluation. Written work is well monitored and corrected by all teachers. It is recommended that information and communications technology (ICT) be further integrated as a pedagogical tool across the curriculum.

- Cothaítear dearcadh dearfach i leith na Gaeilge i measc daltaí na scoile agus tá caighdeán inmholtá bhaint amach i múineadh agus i bhfoghlalmá na Gaeilge. Moltar an iarracht a dhéantar an Gaeilge a úsáid le linn an lae agus moltar an nós seo a leathnú a thuilleadh. Is léir go bhfuil tuiscint mhaith ag na daltaí ar an teaglaith. Úsáideann na hoidí modhanna múinte éagsúla éagsúla le linn na gceachtanna, ar a n-áirítear druíleanna, cluichí, rólghlacadh, amhráin agus rannta. Baintear úsáid as an téacsleabhair chun na scileanna léitheoireachta a mhúineadh agus déanann na daltaí cleachtaí scribhneoireachta ar bhonn rialta.

- A positive attitude towards Irish is promoted among the pupils of the school and a commendable standard is being achieved in the teaching and learning of Irish. Praiseworthy efforts are made to use Irish throughout the day and it is recommended that this practice be further extended. It is evident that the pupils have a good understanding of the spoken language. Teachers use a variety of methodologies during lessons including drills, games, role play, songs and rhymes. The textbook is used to teach reading skills and the pupils regularly complete written exercises.

- The quality of teaching and learning in English is good. Opportunities are provided for the development of pupils’ oral language skills using appropriate resources. Emergent reading skills are nurtured effectively through the development of word identification strategies and phonological awareness. A culture of reading is promoted throughout the school. The use of parallel reading material is praiseworthy and class novels are effectively used in the middle and senior classes. Teachers provide opportunities for pupils to write in a range of genres. The recitation, memorisation and composition of poetry is actively encouraged. Learning outcomes in English are of a high standard.

- The quality of teaching and learning in Mathematics is good. Emphasis is placed on introducing learning activities to promote pupils’ grasp of mathematical concepts. Concrete materials and visual resources are used to consolidate and reinforce new learning. The correct use of the language of mathematics is a feature of lessons and pupils are afforded opportunities to explain their work. The environment is regularly used to enhance pupils’ understanding of the practical aspect of mathematics.

- There is some effective practice in the teaching and learning of Social Personal and Health Education (SPHE). Pupils have opportunities to engage in practical activities such as healthy eating projects and the school celebrated the awarding of its first green flag as part of the Green Schools Programme in the months prior to the evaluation. Many programmes such as Stay Safe and Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) are used to supplement the work of the curriculum. Assemblies are held every week in which pupils’ achievements are identified and celebrated.
There is effective practice in the teaching and learning of Music. The school requested that this additional subject be included in the evaluation. A range of percussion instruments is used to perform beat and rhythm exercises during class activities. Musical concepts are introduced incrementally and pupils’ musical literacy is developed appropriately. Listening and responding activities are well organised. Pupils learn to play the recorder with enjoyment. There is a focus on the composing strand of the curriculum in teachers’ planning and practice. The school’s participation in local religious ceremonies and concerts complement the musical activities undertaken in the classroom.

All teachers undertake some form of assessment to determine learning outcomes. Standardised tests are administered annually and the results are communicated both orally and in written format to parents. The school maintains well-presented pupils’ profiles and Rewards Books which are completed weekly by class teachers.

6. Quality of Supports for Pupils

Provision for pupils with special educational needs is good. The learning-support teacher and the shared resource teacher are experienced in teaching in support settings. Planning for individual pupils was at an advanced stage at the time of the evaluation. The involvement of both parents and pupils in the development of these plans is commendable. To improve the already high quality of the individual education plans (IEPs) that are in place, the school is advised to focus on pupils’ learning targets in planning documents and to maintain a record of meetings with parents.

Support teaching is provided on both a withdrawal and an in-class support basis. Going forward, it is recommended that provision for a variety of support settings be explored. Communication between classroom teachers and support teachers should become more structured to ensure a collective approach to addressing pupils’ individual needs.

In line with the schools’ ethos, staff are sensitive to the principles of inclusiveness and isolated instances of disadvantage. Discreet support is provided for all pupils to ensure that they participate fully in school life and its related activities.

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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

On behalf of the whole school community, the Board of Management of Abbeyleix South National School would like to thank the inspector for making the inspection and the report a positive experience.
We are delighted that the commitment, dedication and hard work of the Board of Management, Principal, teachers and all the partners in education has been affirmed.
We welcome the acknowledgement of very good practice and high standards and learning in our school and the positive comments in the report, especially those which relate to the safe and well-organised educational environment for our pupils and the high quality of individual teachers’ planning and progress records.

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 Board of management, in consultation with the Principal and staff, is taking the necessary steps to implement the recommendations as outlined in the report.

- The staff is currently working on developing a common template for use in individual teachers’ planning, to replace the two templates currently in use.
- Building on the good communication that already exists between the Board of Management and members of the school community, and agreed report is now being issued to the parent body following the Board of Management meetings.
- We, at Abbeyleix South National School remain committed to developing our strengths. The recommendations made in relation to all aspects of our school will allow us to maintain and further develop the educational experiences, happy school environment and good practice currently being implemented.