Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Aughavas National School
Aughavas, County Leitrim
Uimhir rolla: 14339S

Date of inspection: 5 October 2011
1. Introduction

Aughavas National School is a mainstream, co-educational primary school under the patronage of the Catholic Bishop of Ardagh and Clonmacnois. The sixty-nine pupils are distributed across three multi-grade classrooms. Overall school attendance is very good. The school has received Green-Schools, Active School and Discover Primary Science awards. Provision for Irish, English, Mathematics and Visual Arts was evaluated. The board of management 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 works effectively and is supportive of the school.
- The principal works earnestly and purposefully to further the success of the school.
- Teachers work in a very dedicated manner and are very committed to their pupils.
- The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement is effective overall.
- The management of pupils is very good. The classroom atmosphere is very positive.
- Pupils participate very successfully in a wide range of co-curricular and extracurricular activities.
- The school fosters and receives very good parental support.

The following main recommendations are made:

- Further focus on differentiated learning experiences is recommended.
- In Irish and the Visual Arts, there should be further emphasis on ensuring incremental learning experiences from class level to class level.

3. Quality of School Management

- The quality of school management is commendable. The board of management works effectively and is very supportive of the school. Amongst other activities, it oversees school maintenance diligently and the building and grounds present very well. Meetings are recorded appropriately and accounts are audited regularly in accordance with diocesan guidelines. The board discusses and ratifies school policies as presented to it by the school staff. This work should be strengthened into the future. The chairperson visits the school regularly and provides very dedicated support.

- The parents’ association is supportive and assists readily with fundraising and event organisation. In the near future, the association hopes to establish more systematic communication procedures with the school and to be involved in a wider range of school support activities. The general parent body provides worthwhile support to school initiatives. In questionnaires, administered as part of the inspection, parents indicated very high levels of satisfaction with the school. They feel that it provides a well-run, safe environment in which their children are happy and well treated.

- In-school management is very good. The principal works earnestly and purposefully to further the success of the school. He promotes a good, all-round education for pupils and facilitates very successfully their involvement in a range of co-curricular and
extracurricular activities. He is supported very ably and positively by the deputy principal and the special duties' post-holder.

- The teaching staff comprises three mainstream teachers and one support teacher. The latter is shared with another school. At the time of the evaluation, one teacher was on approved leave and a substitute teacher was employed by the board. There is good cooperation and cohesion within the staff. The board employs a secretary and a cleaner, both part-time, who provide beneficial service.

- The school provides an attractive learning environment and facilities are good. Plentiful teaching aids, including information and communications technologies (ICT), are available. Class libraries should be augmented and graded.

- The management of pupils is very good. The classroom atmosphere is very positive and pupils present as happy, confident and co-operative. In questionnaires, pupils indicated that they feel safe at school and enjoy very supportive relationships with their teachers and peers. Their responses would also indicate a desire for more opportunities to work with computers and to engage in decision-making through an appropriate forum.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- Most aspects of the planning process are successful. Administrative planning is updated regularly and shared with parents on enrolment of their children. While a number of policies are available on the school's web site, it is suggested that further use might be made of the web site to share policies with parents. Further involvement of parents in policy development and review would also be beneficial.

- Curriculum statements are reviewed on a regular basis and prove useful. Targets for improvement have been identified by teachers in a number of areas. For Irish and the Visual Arts, the use of planning grids should help to ensure more consistent progression from class to class. All teachers provide purposeful classroom planning.

- Teachers display considerable dedication to their work and to their pupils. They are committed also to continuous whole-school improvement. They are welcoming of advice and very willing to try new strategies. Appropriately, the school is viewed as a learning community for all. Such an attitude promises well for the introduction of systematic school self-evaluation approaches.

- 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

- Tá obair scilíúil faoi láthair sa Ghaeilge. Gabhann taitneamh agus bríomhaireacht bhreá leis na modhanna múninte. Is cumasach mar a thugann na hoidí deiseanna labhartha do na daltaí tríd an nuacht, an fhíiliocht, amhráin, rólghlacadh agus cluichí teanga. Anois is arís, baineann siad úsáid as an Ghaeilge mar theanga bhainistíochta sa rang agus b'fhéidir
There is skilful work undertaken in Irish. Lively and attractive teaching methodologies are employed. Opportunities for developing the oral language are provided through the skilful use of the news, poetry, songs, role play and word games. From time to time, teachers make use of Irish as the medium for classroom management and it would be worthwhile expanding this practice as much as possible throughout the school. Most pupils are making good progress in the spoken language. The majority of pupils read accurately. However it is recommended that the range of reading material be extended according to the ability of the pupils. It is recommended, also, that a graded reading scheme be utilised. Functional writing is undertaken most frequently throughout the school although certain aspects of free writing are undertaken with some classes. It is recommended that more free writing be practised from the early years on.

Provision for English is good overall. Talk and discussion are prioritised and pupils recite well-chosen poetry with enthusiasm. Going forward, more specific focus on discrete oral language development across the school would be beneficial. Reading is taught well and overall attainment in standardised reading tests is good. As a next step, more use should be made of class novels and, for senior pupils, recreational reading should be encouraged further. Provision for writing is effective overall. Copies present well in the main. Although careful work is underway in some classes, cursive writing would benefit from a more consistent whole-school approach.

Provision for Mathematics is successful. The lessons observed were clear, well paced and active. Most pupils show enthusiasm for the subject and results of standardised tests indicate that overall attainment is good. Appropriate emphasis is placed on the acquisition of number facts and on mental arithmetic. The pupils’ regular use of mini-white boards is proving very beneficial. There is very effective use of number songs and rhymes in the junior classes.

Provision for the Visual Arts is satisfactory overall. The lessons observed were well organised and resource rich. In most cases, the work involved an appropriate level of challenge. There are attractive displays of pupils’ work throughout the school. Craftwork in the middle classes deserves special mention. As aforementioned, planning grids would assist in planning a progressive whole-school programme across the six strands of the subject. The use of portfolios, as evident in the junior classroom, would be beneficial across the school.

Provision across the curriculum is effective. Questionnaire responses indicate that parents are happy with the quality of teaching in the schools and with how their children are progressing. Teachers have a strong interest in music and singing and both are interwoven in lessons regularly. A whole-school focus on the local environment and environmental care is very evident; the school is working towards its fifth green flag. Going forward, teachers should place greater emphasis on differentiated learning activities and ensure that the progression of learning is incremental and consistent from class to class.

Assessment practices are good. Screening and standardised tests are administered and results are shared with parents. Workbooks and copies are monitored and class tests are
a regular feature of school work. Moving forward, whole-school use of pupils' self and peer-assessment strategies would be beneficial.

6. Quality of Support for Pupils

- The quality of support for pupils is satisfactory. A policy for supplementary teaching informs practice. In light of the introduction of a staged approach to intervention, it is now appropriate to review the policy involving all teaching staff in the process.

- The learning-support/resource teacher spends five half days in this school. Most frequently, supplementary support is provided by withdrawing pupils from the mainstream setting. Planning and recording are consistent. Rapport between pupils and teacher is very good and teaching is clear and purposeful. As a next step, a review of group sizes and timetabling is recommended to ensure that the maximum number of pupils benefit from additional support. Also, systematic in-class support is recommended as part of an early intervention strategy.

- The quality of home-school partnership is very good. Regular newsletters are issued and there is an open-door policy towards parents. The web site provides a good link with the school community. Helpful end-of-year progress reports are issued to parents about their children's progress. A book rental scheme is in place.

- Pupils participate regularly and very successfully in a wide range of activities including sport, choir, science, quizzes and charity events.

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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 of Aughavas N.S. would like to acknowledge the professional and enthusiastic approach which made our WSE inspection process overall an affirming, positive experience. We are pleased that the main strengths of the work of the school were identified and that the commitment and dedication of all members of the school community was affirmed. We also welcome very much advice, suggestions or innovations for future implementation as well as the affirmation of best practice already in existence in our school.

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 welcomes and accepts the recommendations made in the report. The Board, in consultation with the Principal and staff, has prioritised implementation of these recommendations as part of our action plan for the current and next school year.