Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Kilbeacanty National School
Gort, Co. Galway
Uimhir rolla: 14394D

Date of inspection: 21 September 2011
1. Introduction

Kilbeacanty National School is a co-educational primary school under the patronage of the Catholic Bishop of Galway. It is located approximately three kilometres from Gort, Co. Galway. At the time of the evaluation, the school had fifty-three pupils, three mainstream teachers and a part-time caretaker. The school also has access to a visiting resource teacher and a visiting learning-support teacher. Work on the refurbishment of the school commenced in 2010 and this necessitated the use of temporary on-site accommodation during 2010/11.

This whole-school evaluation focused on the quality of teaching and learning in Gaeilge, English, Mathematics and Drama. 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 school has an active, vibrant board of management that is keenly interested in engaging in a planned programme of whole-school improvement.
- Parents and the broader community are very supportive of the work of the school and a strong community spirit enhances life in the school.
- The school has a very committed and dedicated team of teachers who are open to exploring new practices to enhance teaching and learning.
- A positive, caring and orderly atmosphere pertains in the school and pupils present as very co-operative and friendly.
- High standards are achieved in most of the curricular areas evaluated.

The following main recommendations are made:

- The board should develop a long-term action plan incorporating the issuing of an annual report on the work of the school.
- The board should encourage the formation of a parents’ association as a means of providing a voice to parents and of strengthening their involvement in the work of the school.
- There is scope to develop planning and classroom practice in order to implement suitably differentiated programmes of work and to ensure appropriate progression of pupils from class to class.

3. Quality of School Management

- The board of management operates effectively and school finances are appropriately managed. The board’s work of late has focused on successfully managing the building
project. The board should now include facets of teaching, learning and overall pupil achievement for deliberation at meetings. It should also prepare a long-term action plan incorporating organisational and curricular targets and timeframes.

- The board maintains regular contact with the principal who capably manages the day-to-day work of the school in close collaboration with the deputy principal. A very positive, caring and orderly school atmosphere is fostered. There is scope to develop the role of the in-school management team in leading the process of whole-school self-evaluation and review. Towards that end, the duties attached to posts of responsibilities should be reviewed regularly and the board should be kept informed of work completed.

- The quality of the management of human and material resources is very good. The school building provides ample accommodation and classrooms are well equipped. It would be of benefit to provide additional materials for the teaching of Irish and English reading and appropriate furniture for support-teaching.

- While the school does not have a parents’ association, parents make a considerable contribution to school life through fundraising, maintaining and developing the school premises and supporting pupils’ participation in a range of activities.

- A number of effective strategies serve to facilitate communication with the parent body including the organisation of information nights and parent-teacher meetings. The board should consider adapting an issue of the school newsletter to provide an annual report on the work of the school.

- Reports on individual pupils’ progress are issued to parents each year. In light of opinions expressed by parents, there is a need for further engagement with the parent body in relation to the provision of meaningful and timely information on pupils’ learning and achievement.

- The pupils are very well managed in the school. Clear boundaries of behaviour are set and pupils respond in a very co-operative manner. A strong sense of community spirit is reflected in the high level of interaction between the school and local organisations.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- Considerable work has been done on the school plan. It contains curricular policies and a range of policies pertinent to legislative requirements and to the general organisation of the school. There is a need to refine the curricular policies in order to delineate the work to be covered at each class level in the dual and multi-grade contexts that pertain in the school.

- The board of management and the staff are the main parties engaging in policy development. The formation of a parents’ association would facilitate greater involvement of parents in this area of the school’s work.

- There is scope to develop the school self-evaluation process. Stronger emphasis should be placed on monitoring the implementation of the school plan, on analysing assessment results and on critically evaluating classroom practices in the light of the standards achieved.

- While all teachers provide long-term and short-term planning and maintain monthly records of the work completed, there is a need in some instances to align classroom planning more closely with the curriculum rather than with the content of textbooks. The
impact of individual teacher planning on classroom practice in some instances would be further enhanced by stating learning outcomes more clearly and by placing stronger emphasis on the use of differentiated approaches.

- Confirmation was provided that the board of management has formally adopted the Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-primary Schools (September 2011) without modification. The school is compliant with the requirements of Primary Circular 0061/2006. School authorities provided evidence that arrangements are being put in place to ensure compliance with the requirements of the recently published Circular 0065/2011 and Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools as a matter of priority.

5. Quality of Teaching, Learning and Pupil Achievement

- The quality of overall teaching, learning and pupil achievement is good. There is a need to lessen the reliance on textbooks and, where textbooks are used, to ensure that they are suitably matched to the abilities of the pupils. There is also a need, in some instances, for more carefully structured group work in order to ensure that each class level works on activities that are suitably challenging.

- Sroicheann na daltaí caighdeán réasúnta sa Ghaeilge. Baintear leas as ábhair tharraingteacha agus eagrailtear gníomhaiochtai taitneamhacha chun na ceithre scil teanga a mhúineadh. Usáidtear an cur chuige cumarsáideach go forleathan sa scoil agus léirionn na hoidí dearcadh an-dearfach i dtaoibh na Gaeilge. Biodh sin mar atá, tá réimse cúng teanga ag na daltái agus is doiligh dóibh leas cuí a bhaint as bhríathra. Is gá anois réimse na teanga ba chóir a thabhairt faoi gach rangleibhéal a aimsiú go soiléir agus clár gramadaí a aontú don scoil. Moltar go ndéantar straitéisí idirdhealaithe a chleachtadh agus go n-eagrailtear gníomhaiochtai atá súch dúshláinach chun forchéimniú cuí a chinntiú ó rang go rang. Tugtar faoi dhánta agus amhráin a mhúineadh i roinnt ranganna agus b'fhíú an cleachtas seo a leathnú. Ní mór freisin scribhneoireacht phearsanta a chleachtadh ar bhonn rialta ó na meánranganna ar aghaidh.

The pupils achieve a fair standard in Irish. Attractive materials are used and enjoyable activities are organised to teach the four language skills. The communicative approach is widely used in the school and the teachers display a very positive attitude towards Irish. However, the pupils have a narrow range of language and they experience difficulty in using verbs appropriately. There is a need now to identify clearly the range of language that should be undertaken at each class level and to agree a grammar programme for the school. It is recommended that differentiated approaches be used and that sufficiently challenging activities be organised in order to ensure appropriate progression from class to class. Poems and songs are taught in some classes and it would be of benefit to broaden this practice. Personal writing should also be practised on a regular basis from the middle classes onwards.

- High standards are achieved in English. Appropriate emphasis is placed on oral language and the activities are skilfully integrated with other curricular areas. Interesting, enjoyable and well differentiated tasks are organised throughout the school to progress reading and writing. Pupils read with confidence, fluency and expression. Their written work is very well presented and spans an appropriate range of genres. It would be of benefit to augment the existing pre-reading materials and to develop the school plan in order to guide practice in relation to the teaching of phonics and of poetry.

- The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in Mathematics is good. Pupils are favourably disposed towards Mathematics and display good understanding of the work covered. There is some variation in the pupils' capacity to recall number facts
promptly and greater emphasis could be placed on this aspect of oral Mathematics. A good range of mathematical materials is available and these should now be used to create more mathematically rich classroom environments. While mathematical exercises are recorded very neatly, there is a need to guide pupils in recording each step when working out computations and solving problems.

- The teachers are to be commended for the manner in which Drama is taught. There is a consistent approach to the creation of a safe environment in which ideas, feelings and experiences can be expressed. Variety, good organisation, appropriate progression, careful structuring and pacing of activities and a high level of engagement in post-drama reflection and discussion are features of the practice. The pupils enter physically, emotionally and intellectually into the drama with ease and confidence.

6. Quality of Support for Pupils

- Good provision is made for pupils identified with learning difficulties or special educational needs. Supplementary teaching is provided on a withdrawal basis in one-to-one, and group settings. Individual programmes are very carefully prepared and incorporate clearly stated learning targets. The programmes are regularly reviewed in consultation with mainstream teachers and parents. A range of diagnostic tests is available to inform the planning and organisation of activities. It would be of benefit to clarify the baseline from which the programmes commence in some instances and to explore other models of support in addition to withdrawal.
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 wish to acknowledge the professionalism of the inspector during her visit to our school. This report is a welcome affirmation of the committed good work of the staff, the parents, the board of management and the wider community of Kilbeacanty National 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 of Kilbeacanty National School welcomes the recommendations contained in the whole-school evaluation report.
- The board of management will issue an annual report on the work of the school.
- An active parents’ association has been set up since November 2011.
- All recommendations will be incorporated into further planning especially in the areas of literacy, numeracy and school self-evaluation.