Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Abbeystrewry NS
Skibbereen, Co. Cork
Uimhir rolla: 14433K

Date of inspection: 21 March 2011
1. **Introduction**

Abbeystrewry NS, Skibbereen is a co-educational primary school under the patronage of the Church of Ireland Bishop of Cork, Cloyne and Ross. Currently, there are 93 pupils enrolled in the school. Enrolment statistics indicate a significant increase in recent years. The practices of the board with regard to pupil attendance are effective and in line with National Education Welfare Board (NEWB) and with Departmental guidelines and best practice.

During the whole-school evaluation, teaching was observed in four mainstream classes and in two support teaching contexts. Questionnaires were issued to all parents in the community and to all pupils from third to sixth class. 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 a strong community base.
- A clear ethos and characteristic spirit permeates the work of the school at all levels.
- The school has a very effective board of management which articulates a clear outcome-focused vision for the school and promotes an agenda for improvement.
- The school has a professional and dedicated teaching staff all of whom co-operate in the effective provision of a broad and balanced education for pupils.
- The principal is an effective leader who has played an important role in the creation of a supportive and positive teaching and learning environment.

The following **main recommendations** are made:

- It is recommended that the school continue the school improvement agenda through the consolidation of existing projects and by broadening the framework to include assessment and self-evaluation as critical components of school improvement.
- It is recommended that, in consultation with the relevant partners, the clustering arrangements with regard to provision for pupils with special educational needs be re-visited with a view to the consolidation of one permanent post in the school.
- It is recommended that a formal school policy on teacher continuing professional development (CPD) should be drawn up, in order to build on the internal capacity of the staff and develop further the concept of a ‘learning school’.
3. Quality of School Management

- The board of management has played a key role in the strategic development of the school. A new principal and an effective team of teachers have been employed. The premises have been re-developed to the highest standards. School policies and procedures have been re-visited and amended, where necessary, to reflect the agreed vision of the school community. The recent school development project has been effectively financed using Departmental funding and other local sources of finance. The financial affairs of the school are managed effectively by the board and there is a high level of compliance with Departmental guidelines with regard to the management of primary schools.

Almost all (98.2%) of the parents surveyed consider the school to be well run. The board also works to create effective channels of communication and almost all parents (90.2%) were aware of the work the board was doing in support of the school community. One hundred percent of the parents stated that they were happy with the school overall. The board are commended for the strategic manner in which they have addressed, through reflection and self-evaluation, their areas for development and built on their strengths.

- The formal in-school management team is comprised of the principal and deputy principal. Both play an effective role in the leadership and management of the school. On an informal level, a collegial and inclusive atmosphere exists. Knowledge is shared and information is disseminated throughout the school. Leadership is empowered at all levels within the school community. Staff members collaborate effectively and use their individual strengths to support one another and the agreed learning outcomes of the school.

- The board have prioritised resource provision in support of teaching and learning. Teaching and ancillary staff have been selected with care and a wide range of equipment in support of teaching and learning is provided. All of the parents (100%) believe that teaching is good in the school. The provision of appropriate ICT hardware and software is at an advanced stage of development and it is used effectively as a teaching tool in many curricular areas. All parents surveyed consider facilities to be good in the school.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- The quality of the school planning is very good. All plans are carefully constructed, following collaboration, and every effort is made to reflect actual school practices. A continuous process of review occurs and all plans are subject to change in line with evolving school needs or changing circumstances. School policy documents indicate an acute awareness of the legal framework in which schools operate and of the responsibility of the board to manage the school on behalf of the patron and in line with Departmental guidelines. School planning is a significant strength in the school and the principal plays an effective co-ordinating role in the planning process.

- There is evidence of an effective school self-evaluation process and the work of the board in re-developing the school and re-visiting first principles has been part of a five-year strategic plan, now nearing completion. Much has been achieved in that period and the current facilities are excellent. In the course of the evaluation, advice was given with regard to the publication of an annual school self-reflection report which would both celebrate and critically review the work of the school in all aspects. Ideally, this would incorporate ongoing monitoring and evaluation of progress, target setting and the provision of optimal conditions for teaching and learning.
• School planning documents are used to guide planning at individual teacher level. All individual teachers plan their work effectively and progress is recorded on a monthly basis. It is recommended that a more user-friendly model of recording monthly learning outcomes be developed in order to facilitate the evaluation of progress across the school in specific curricular 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

• The quality of overall teaching, learning and pupil achievement in the school is very good and, in general, the school is a learning organisation with an outcomes focus and an acceptance of the need for growth and change. Pupil achievement is, in almost all cases, commensurate with age. The board and the representatives of the parents’ association expressed high levels of confidence in the principal and staff. The results of the questionnaires revealed high levels of trust and confidence in the quality of the education currently being provided in the school.

• Sonraithe atmaisféar fábhrach don Ghaeilge sa scoil agus tá cumas cainte na n-oidí go maith. Moltar iarrachtaí éifeachtacta na fóirne maidir le múineadh na teanga. Stiúrtar na ceachtanna go taitneamhach agus go spreagúil. Cuirtear béim ar na snáitheanna uile idir éisteacht, labhairt, léitheoireacht agus scribhneoireacht agus léiríonn formhór na ndaltaí tuiscint oiriúnach ar Ghaeilge bhunúsach. Chun éifeacht na h-oibre a tholbaí a thuilleadh, moltar don fhoireann leanúnach foclóra agus forbairt na cumarsáide, ach go háirithe. Moltar, chomh maith, a chur a h-áite, thraidisiúin agus chultúr na h-áite agus na tíre. B'fhiú, cho mháith, gnéithe den tumoideachas a triail mar chur chuige ar laethanta nó tréimhsí éagsúla.

A favourable attitude to Irish exists in the school and the language competence of the teaching staff is good. Their efforts in the teaching of the language are praiseworthy. Lessons are managed in a pleasant and inspiring way. Emphasis is placed on all of the strands including listening, speaking, reading and writing and the majority of pupils demonstrate an appropriate knowledge of basic Irish. In order to further develop practice, it is recommended that a development plan for Irish be drawn up outlining specific objectives with regard to continuity in vocabulary development and especially, the development of communicative language. It is also recommended that greater emphasis be placed on local and national music traditions and culture. It would be worthwhile, also, to experiment with aspects of immersion education as a teaching strategy on specific days or at specific times.

• The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in English is very good and there is a consistent emphasis on the development of literacy skills as a key cornerstone of learning. The majority of pupils are confident and articulate, display a keen interest in reading and writing and a suitable awareness of the conventions of grammar and punctuation. Standardised test scores indicate above average levels of achievement in most of the curricular bands. In order to further improve the standard of literacy, it is recommended that the purchase of books be afforded priority in all future strategic
planning. It would also be worthwhile to engage in deeper analysis of standardised test scores in order to identify possible groups within specific bands that might benefit from focused short-term interventions. It is also recommended that, without interfering with the content of written work, a whole-school focus be placed on penmanship in order to ensure consistency and quality of presentation.

- The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in Mathematics is very good. Lessons are presented using appropriate, constructivist methods and pupils demonstrate a very good understanding of mathematical concepts. They use mathematical skills effectively and are good at problem solving. Standardised test score in Mathematics indicate above average levels of achievement in most of the curricular bands. Almost all parents (96.3%) believe the school is helping their children progress in Mathematics. Most pupils (81.4%) think they are doing well at Mathematics. In order to further improve the quality of mathematics provision it is recommended that the teaching staff include, in the agenda for future staff meetings, time to evaluate the effective use of school mathematics equipment and develop a structured plan to incorporate environmental Mathematics trails as an aspect of mathematics teaching.

- The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in Art is good. Impressive displays of pupils’ art work were featured in some classes and in school circulation areas. A broad and balanced programme is presented at each class level in line with the principles of the curriculum. Some interesting projects have been completed and there is a regular engagement with the West Cork Arts Centre in Skibbereen. In order to develop further the interest levels of pupils, it is recommended that, in addition to celebrating the achievements of the school community and promoting the history and ethos of the school, the new spacious entrance area should be used to professionally mount and prominently display large collections of pupils’ art work

- In order to maintain these standards it is recommended that the strengths and weaknesses of staff members be identified and that structures are put in place to disseminate existing good practice across the school. It would also be worthwhile to develop the professional competencies of staff on an ongoing basis by means of a formal school continuing professional development programme in line with identified and agreed needs.

6. Quality of Support for Pupils

- Pupils with special educational needs are well catered for by a team of four people. Included are a school-based learning support/resource (LS/RT) teacher who provides support for four hours in a nearby school as part of local clustering arrangements, a visiting LS/RT teacher, with an allocation of fifteen hours, who is based in another school and two special needs assistants (SNAs). It is recommended that the board review current clustering arrangements with a view to consolidating at least one LS/RT position into a full-time permanent post.

- The quality of teaching approaches and interventions for pupils with special educational needs is very good. A wide range of strategies and relevant programmes are used effectively and there is good collaboration between LS/RT and mainstream class teachers.

- The quality of home-school partnership is very good. Information is carefully recorded and shared. All parents (100%) feel welcome in the school and almost all (98.2%) are satisfied with the arrangements for parent/teacher meetings. In addition, most parents (89.1%) are satisfied with the quality of school reports.
• It is recommended that, in order to further enhance existing good practice, the special needs co-ordinator continue to develop the role into a central aspect of the work of the school. This might be facilitated by engaging in deeper analysis of assessment data, developing time-bound interventions for specific groups within curricular bands, exploring new strategies and interventions in support of literacy and numeracy development and by developing reporting and review procedures which make special needs education central to the agenda at all future staff meetings.
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 Abbeystrewry N.S. wishes to acknowledge the professional approach of the Inspector to his work during the WSE in Abbeystrewry N.S. The Board wishes to thank the Inspector for his courtesy to the pupils, staff, parents and Board of Management during his visit. We are delighted that the report affirms the dedication and commitment of the Board of Management team, teachers, staff and parents. We welcome the acknowledgment that the school is functioning very effectively and that the report commends the quality of teaching and learning alongside the affirming and nurturing school ethos.

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 and staff of the school are committed to implementing the recommendations as outlined in the report and believe this work will enhance the operative and performance of the school.

- We have extended the level of in-class support for SEN pupils.
- The school welcomes any advice/assistance the inspector/or department may be able to offer when reviewing our cluster arrangements for LSRT.
- Our existing Irish development plan has been reviewed. Irish traditions and cultures will continue to be promoted in the school.
- A professional development policy has been implemented.
- The B.O.M. is pleased that the report acknowledges the strong spirit of commitment and generosity of time and effort that exists throughout the school.