Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

St. Stephen’s Boys’ NS
Waterford
Uimhir rolla: 15046l

Date of inspection: 3 October 2011
1. Introduction

St. Stephen’s Boys’ NS is a large urban vertical primary school, under the patronage of the Catholic Bishop of Waterford and Lismore. It was founded by the De La Salle order and continues to promote the caring ethos and vision of St. John Baptist de La Salle. The school participates in the Department’s Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) programme and it also receives funding through the School Completion Programme (SCP). There are 424 pupils enrolled and attendance rates are good. During the whole-school evaluation inspectors observed teaching and learning in ten mainstream class settings and in numerous support teaching settings. The board of management of the school was given an opportunity to comment on the findings and recommendations of the evaluation; the board chose to accept the report without response.

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 is supportive of the work of the school and conscientiously oversees the maintenance of the building and grounds.
- The principal and staff are highly praised for their continued promotion of the caring ethos of the De La Salle order. They provide a broad range of extra-curricular activities and initiatives that benefit the pupils.
- The parents’ association provides significant support to the school, and the school benefits from the valuable link between home and school created by the home school community liaison service.
- The school’s engagement in self-evaluation has produced a comprehensive DEIS plan which has resulted in the successful implementation of a range of early intervention programmes for literacy and numeracy.
- There is very good provision for pupils with special educational needs and for pupils for whom English is an additional language.

The following main recommendations are made:

- There is scope to improve the quality of teacher’s individual planning in order to enhance the quality of teaching and learning in classrooms.
- In English, discrete oral language lessons based on identified language needs, along with extended opportunities for writing across a range of genres, should be regular features of practice in all classes.
- Sa Ghaeilge, ba chóir go mbeadh an chumarsáid ina cuid lárnach den phróiseas teagaisc agus foghlama. In Irish, communication should be a central feature of the teaching and learning process.
3. Quality of School Management

- The board of management is supportive of the work of the school and conscientiously oversees the maintenance of the building and grounds. The board is advised to develop its role in relation to school planning matters and, with the assistance of the principal and staff, to engage as appropriate with the issue of monitoring learning standards.

- The principal manages the school competently. He maintains a strong, visible presence and he is respectful in his dealings with staff, pupils and parents. He is ably assisted by a committed in-school management team. They demonstrate a keen interest in the ongoing development of the school and carry out their duties capably.

- The school building provides a comfortable environment for pupils and teachers. A range of appropriate teaching and learning resources, including information and communication technology (ICT), is available to support the implementation of the curriculum and is used widely by teachers. The greater availability of appropriate reading material in both English and Irish is advised.

- Good communication within the school community is in evidence. The parents’ association provides significant support to the school. Parents are involved in a range of school-based activities including Maths for Fun, a Healthy Eating Day and sporting activities. The home school community liaison service creates a valuable link between home and school. Questionnaire results indicate that almost all parents are happy with the school and feel welcomed.

- Overall, the management of pupils is good. The school community is committed to meeting the care and welfare needs of the pupils. Their dedication in the provision of a range of extra-curricular activities outside of school hours is acknowledged and commended. Questionnaire responses show that almost all pupils feel safe in school and that the majority of them like coming to school.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- The quality of whole-school planning is commendable. Organisational policies provide good guidance on various aspects of the operation of the school. Curricular plans give appropriate guidance to teachers regarding all subject areas. As school plans are revised and developed, parental involvement in the process should be facilitated.

- The school engages very well in self-evaluation. A comprehensive DEIS plan sets out the school’s targets for addressing identified areas of need. Action plans have been devised, and resources and responsibilities allocated as appropriate.

- There is scope to improve the quality of individual teachers’ planning. While a whole-school template has been developed for short-term planning and reporting monthly progress, it is limited in its capacity to allow teachers to plan appropriately for expected learning outcomes. Furthermore, long-term plans should clearly outline the specific content to be taught and reflect the particular learning needs and abilities of the pupils in each individual class.

- 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 teaching and learning is good. Well-structured whole-class teaching is the principal methodology used. Some effective pair and group activities were observed in a number of classes. Attractive learning environments have been created in most classrooms. Teaching and learning could be further enhanced through the consistent use of more collaborative methodologies.

- There is effective practice in relation to whole-school monitoring of pupil progress in literacy and numeracy. The progress of all individuals is tracked consistently in these areas and appropriate support is provided in response to identified needs.

- Múintear an Ghaeilge go sásúil sa scoil. I ranganna aírithe, baintear dea-úsáid as cluichí cainte, rainn, obair bheirte agus filíocht chun foclóir agus teanga na ndaltaí a neartú. Ba chóir anois an dea-chleachtas seo a fhorbairt tríd an scoil. Moltar go mbeadh bhéim ar an gcumarsáid mar chuid lárnach den próiseas teagaisc agus foghlaí agus go mbeadh na daltaí ag baint úsáid rialta as an dteanga. Úsáidtear téacsleabhair chun an léitheoireacht a mhúineadh agus léann cuid de na daltaí le múinín. Moltar anois scéim léitheoireachta a úsáid, ó rang go rang, chun go mbeadh scileanna léitheoireachta á fhorbairt go córasach. Ba chóir chomh maith éagsúla de dheiseanna scríbhneoireachta a sholáthar do na daltaí.

Irish is taught satisfactorily in the school. In some classes, good use is made of language games, rhymes and poetry to increase the pupils’ vocabulary and language. In these classes, suitable speaking opportunities are created for the pupils. It is advised that this good practice be developed throughout the school. Communication should be a central feature of the teaching and learning process and the pupils should be using the language regularly. Textbooks are used to teach reading and some of the pupils read with confidence. It is now advised that a reading scheme be used from class to class to ensure that reading skills are developed systematically. There should also be more variety in the writing tasks for pupils.

- The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in English is satisfactory. Some good practice is being developed in the area of reading. However, it is advised that continued emphasis be placed on ensuring that pupils have access to a variety of reading material appropriate to their instructional level in their classrooms. Discrete oral language lessons based on identified language needs should be regular features of practice in all classes. A commendable plan has been formulated to develop and extend opportunities for writing across a range of genres. Systematic monitoring of its implementation should lead to further improvements in standards. The pupils’ capacity to engage in process writing should also be further developed. The quality of the pupils’ handwriting and presentation skills is good.

- The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in Mathematics is good. A range of resources, along with active-learning methodologies, are used successfully as central features of lessons. Good work is undertaken on the strand of number and an appropriate balance is achieved across all strands. The quality of many mathematics lessons is significantly enhanced by targeted and effective in-class support. The pupils are enabled to experience success in problem solving through the careful implementation of agreed whole-school approaches.
• The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in Music is commendable. All strands of the curriculum are addressed and there is particular emphasis on performing. The pupils sing a suitable repertoire of songs with enjoyment. Percussion instruments are used to develop rhythmic skills in many classes and the pupils from first to sixth classes play the recorder enthusiastically.

6. Quality of Support for Pupils

• Provision for pupils with special educational needs is very good. Members of the special education team engage in continued professional development and willingly embrace new initiatives and approaches. The implementation of early intervention programmes such as Reading Recovery, Maths Recovery and Literacy Lift Off enable the pupils to make progress in literacy and numeracy. The pupils’ individual needs are assessed and planned for appropriately. Intervention programmes, that are clearly responsive to their needs, are developed and implemented successfully through both team-teaching and pupil-withdrawal measures.

• Effective support for pupils for whom English is an additional language is provided both on a withdrawal and an in-class basis. Lessons are well planned and suitable strategies are in place to facilitate language acquisition and usage. The pupils demonstrate progress in their ability to communicate.

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