Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

St Brigid’s Primary School,
Moate, Co. Westmeath
Uimhir rolla: 15512L

Date of inspection: 8 March 2012
1. Introduction

St Brigid’s Primary School, Moate is a co-educational school up to first class and caters for girls only from second to sixth class. It currently has 221 pupils enrolled. Under the patronage of the Bishop of Ardagh and Clonmacnois, the school espouses a Catholic ethos and its stated mission to create an atmosphere of respect, friendship and concern for one another is evident in daily routines. Attendance rates for the majority of pupils are very good and the school is commended for its efforts to promote pupils’ attendance. 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 and parent body actively support the work of the school.
- The principal provides highly effective leadership for the school.
- All staff display a deep commitment to their work and collaborate effectively in the best interests of pupils.
- Teaching, learning and pupil achievement in English, Mathematics and Physical Education is of a very high quality.
- Teachers in special education settings provide very effective support for individuals and groups of pupils.
- A positive learning atmosphere exists in the school and pupil management is of a very high standard.
- The school provides for the holistic education of pupils through a wide range of co-curricular and extracurricular activities.

The following main recommendations are made:

- A structured, curriculum-based oral language programme should be implemented throughout the school.
- The assessment and documentation of pupils’ progress across the curriculum should be further developed.

3. Quality of School Management

- The board of management provides effective governance for the school. It is particularly commended for the provision of a very attractive and well-resourced learning environment. School finances are managed carefully and the board has recently adopted an annual budget. Members play an active role in the development of plans and policies and parents are consulted as appropriate. The board should ensure that all teachers are eligible for appointment to positions in support settings.
• The principal displays highly effective leadership skills and the nurturing of each child is at the core of her child-centred vision for the school. Her commitment and dedication to the school is palpable and she fosters positive relationships among the school community. She is capably supported by the in-school management team who diligently carry out a broad range of assigned duties that reflect the priorities of the school.

• The management of the school’s resources is very good. Classrooms provide clean, stimulating and well-ordered learning environments. Very good use is made of the school’s plentiful curriculum resources to support teaching and learning. A commitment to ongoing professional development and openness to new initiatives are evident among the teaching staff. There is a strong spirit of collaboration and co-operation among all members of staff. Procedures for the retention of pupils should be more closely in line with the provisions of Circular 32/2003.

• The management of relationships and communications is of a very high quality. The parents’ association is very active and provides valuable support to the school. Effective communication structures are in place between the board, parents and teaching staff. Parents are kept well informed about school activities and the learning progress of their children. In questionnaires and meetings with officers of the parents’ association, parents expressed very high levels of satisfaction with all aspects of the operation of the school.

• The management of pupils is highly commendable. Overall, positive and affirming relationships are evident throughout the school. Pupils are inculcated with a strong work ethic and they work conscientiously and co-operatively with staff and with one another. They are enabled to develop holistically through the provision of a wide variety of co-curricular and extracurricular activities. The vast majority of pupils indicate in questionnaires that they are having a positive experience in school.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

• Whole-school planning is of a high quality and is developed collaboratively. A comprehensive suite of organisational plans has been developed to inform the efficient and effective operation of the school. Overall, curriculum plans are well contextualised to the needs of the school. They are informed by existing practice and contribute to the implementation of whole-school approaches across the curriculum. Some suggestions for refinement were discussed at the post-evaluation meetings.

• A positive culture of professional reflection is evident in the school and school self-evaluation practices are well established. A number of action plans have been developed and are in the process of implementation. The school is advised to collate existing plans into an over-arching three-year action plan for the school.

• The quality of teachers’ individual planning is good. It is closely aligned with whole-school plans and reflects the structure of the curriculum. Long-term plans are of a very high quality. Some teachers were advised to make more consistent use of objectives in their short-term English and Irish planning and to record specific provision for differentiation.

• Confirmation was provided that the board of management has formally adopted the Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools without modification and that the school is compliant with the requirements of the Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools.
5. Quality of Teaching, Learning and Pupil Achievement

- The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement is very good. Teachers exhibit well-developed classroom management skills and set high expectations for pupils. Infant and support teachers effectively promote pupils' early literacy and numeracy skills during daily station activities. Lessons are well structured, learning intentions are regularly shared and learning is consolidated. Teachers model language precisely and use questioning effectively. A wide variety of methodologies and resources are employed successfully by teachers. The standard of presentation of written work is good and overall, this is carefully monitored by teachers. Pupils' engagement is very good and they discuss aspects of their learning competently and confidently.

- Good quality provision is made for recording pupils’ progress at a whole-school level through the use of a wide variety of tests. Commendably, pupils' standardised test results in literacy and numeracy are tracked and compared to national norms. Various good examples of assessment for learning strategies were observed throughout the school, particularly in literacy and numeracy. The further development of formative assessment strategies to document pupils’ progress across the curriculum is recommended. A more formal approach to recording provision for pupils at stage one of the continuum of support is advised.

- A good standard is achieved in the teaching and learning of Irish. A positive attitude to the language is nurtured. Lessons are very well structured and a good emphasis is placed on the communicative approach. Teachers use effective methodologies and resources to teach the language. As a result, the majority of pupils can engage in basic social conversations. Pupils’ reading and writing skills are developed systematically. To build on this good practice, pupils’ experiences in reading and writing should be extended.

- The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in English is very good. To enhance current good practice for oral language development, the introduction of a structured, curriculum-based oral language programme is recommended. A whole-school approach to the teaching of phonics is successfully implemented. The positive culture of reading throughout the school nurtures pupils’ interest and develops fluency. Regular opportunities to write in a range of genres and for different audiences are provided at each class level. Pupils listen to, read, write, learn, recite and respond to a broad repertoire of rhymes and poems.

- Teaching, learning and pupil achievement in Mathematics is of a very high quality. Some very good use of oral mental mathematical activities was observed. Appropriate emphasis is placed on the introduction and use of correct mathematical language. Lessons contain a valuable blend of explicit teaching, pupil discussion and practical exploration using appropriate resources. Overall, pupils display a good ability to estimate and problem solve. Assessment results indicate that pupil achievement in Mathematics is improving following targeted provision of additional support to pupils most in need.
Teaching and learning in Physical Education is highly commendable. Pupils experience a broad and balanced curriculum. Lessons are well structured and include appropriate emphasis on safe participation, skills’ development, active pupil engagement and teamwork. Talk and discussion is used to enhance pupils’ understanding and appreciation of the various physical activities in which they engage. The benefits of using incidental Irish to a greater degree during lessons could be further explored. Pupils participate actively in a wide range of sporting initiatives and competitions.

6. Quality of Support for Pupils

The quality of planning and provision for pupils in receipt of additional support is of a very high standard. Teachers employ a wide range of tests to determine pupils' learning needs and the views of parents, pupils and external professionals are incorporated in planning. Effective collaboration between classroom teachers and support teachers is evident to ensure a holistic approach for pupils. A wide range of models of provision is in place and these are flexible to evolve in line with pupils’ needs. Teaching observed was encouraging of pupils’ self-esteem and employed a wide range of effective methodologies and resources. Pupils’ progress is carefully documented. The special-needs assistants effectively promote the participation of assigned pupils within the school.

The school is sensitive to instances of educational disadvantage and supports pupils discreetly. It runs a Rainbows group for children who have suffered loss or bereavement. The long-established book-rental scheme reduces costs for parents.

Published June 2012.
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 St. Brigid’s Primary School, Moate wish to thank the DES inspectors for the professional, courteous manner in which they carried out the Whole School Evaluation.

The Board note the contents of the report on the Whole School Evaluation carried out in March 2012.

We welcome the positivity of the report and the affirmation of the teaching standards being implemented which fosters easy learning in a happy, safe and comfortable environment.

The Board members are grateful that the inspectorate acknowledged the level of co-operation between staff and parents resulting in each child being given every opportunity to take full advantage of all aspects of the primary school curriculum.

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 notes the thoroughness of the report and the observations of the inspectorate and is already supporting the Principal in implementing the recommendations made.