

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**

**Department of Education and Skills**

**Whole School Evaluation  
REPORT**

**St Mary's National School  
Templemore, Co. Tipperary  
Uimhir rolla: 15795D**

**Date of inspection: 19 February 2013**



## 1. Introduction

St Mary's National School is a co-educational primary school which operates under the patronage of the Church of Ireland Bishop of Cashel, Waterford and Lismore. Enrolment in the school is stable and currently there are 28 pupils on rolls. The school caters for pupils from a broad geographical area.

This report presents the findings of a whole-school evaluation undertaken in the school in February 2013. The evaluation focused on the quality of teaching and learning in English, Irish, 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 is managed effectively by a dedicated board of management.
- The principal teacher leads the school effectively. The in-school management team creates a welcoming, positive and productive learning environment in the school.
- The parents' association makes a valuable contribution to the work of the school and there is very good communication with parents.
- The school plays a vital role in community life and is valued by the board, the parents and the pupils.
- Staff members display an openness and willingness to work collaboratively and to introduce innovative practices into their work such as station teaching and the use of information and communication technologies (ICT).
- In general, the quality of teaching in most lessons observed was good to very good. The standards achieved by the pupils in English and in Mathematics are commendable.
- Pupils' behaviour and application to tasks are very good.
- The quality of supports for pupils with learning difficulties and special educational needs is commendable.

The following **main recommendations** are made:

- The literacy hour should be reviewed and re-structured to ensure that the professional expertise of the teachers is maximised for the pupils' benefit. Approaches to the teaching of reading should be further discussed at whole-school level.
- The school should review the organisation of additional teaching supports for pupils. It needs to ensure that supplementary programmes are provided for pupils in addition to the provision within the mainstream classroom.

### **3. Quality of School Management**

- The board of management manages the school effectively. Board members have attended training for their roles and they assume responsibilities for various tasks such as managing finances and overseeing the maintenance of the building. School accounts are certified annually. The school building is well maintained and the board provides a very good range of resources to support teaching and learning. The school is central to the Church of Ireland community in Templemore and surrounding areas and very good working relationships among the staff, the board and the parents are fostered.
- The board of management has contributed effectively to the whole-school planning process and has reviewed and ratified a very broad range of organisational policies and curricular plans. Whole-school planning and school improvement matters are discussed regularly at its meetings.
- The principal and deputy principal work effectively as a team and decision-making is collaborative. Together with the shared learning support teacher and resource teacher, the teachers demonstrate commendable commitment and teamwork and they have succeeded in bringing about changes in instructional practices. There is commendable focus on improving pupils' outcomes.
- The school has developed effective partnerships with parents and the school's parents' association is an active group that works collaboratively to enrich pupils' experiences. The pupils benefit from parents' and volunteers' contributions to activities such as promoting reading, swimming and the organisation of extra-curricular activities. The parents' association contributes to sustaining the community dimension of the school and it adds generously to the school's resources. Responses from parent questionnaires indicate that there is a high level of satisfaction with the quality of teaching and learning in the school and all parents state that the school is well run and that there is a good atmosphere in the school.

### **4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation**

- Whole-school planning processes receive commendable attention from the staff and the board of management. A wide range of organisational policies and curricular plans has been devised and these are of a high quality and they reflect the specific context of the school. The process of school action planning and setting initial priorities for school improvement has been initiated successfully. The staff is advised to maintain a strong focus on promoting continuous review of teaching and learning in order to enrich the provision for pupils.
- The quality of teachers' planning is good and the lessons observed were generally well prepared. Most teachers devise monthly short-term plans. It is recommended that fortnightly short-term plans should be devised which focus on the specific objectives of the *Primary School Curriculum* (1999) rather than the range of textbooks in use.
- 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

- During the evaluation, pupils' engagement in the learning activities was very good. Pupils carry out much independent work and they collaborate very well in teams. Most are highly adept at managing their own behaviour and they are polite, courteous and respectful. They are keen to contribute to discussions and to respond effectively to questioning by teachers and other adults. Questionnaires from pupils indicate high levels of satisfaction with almost all aspects of school life.
- The teachers know individual pupils very well, they monitor pupils' progress closely and they carefully guide the development of skills within the learning contexts. Teachers use an effective variety of teaching strategies and make good use of resources. Teaching is good to very good in most settings.
- Baineann buanna ar leith le teagasc agus le foghlaim na Gaeilge sa scoil seo. Baintear feidhm éifeachtach as filíocht agus as amhráin chun taithí a thabhairt do na daltaí ar fhuaimneanna agus ar structúr na teanga. I rith na meastóireachta, chonacthas cleachtas maith agus áirítear modhanna spreagúla chun an sprioctheanga soiléir a mhúineadh agus chun scileanna labhartha na ndaltaí a fhorbairt, go háirithe sna hardranganna. Sa chomhthéacs seo, éiríonn leis na daltaí páirt a ghlacadh i gcumarsáid fhóna bunaithe ar na téamaí idir lámha. Tá gá béim níos láidre a leagadh ar fhorbairt scileanna cumarsáide i ngach rangléibhéal. Léann tromlach na ndaltaí go cruinn agus go tuisceanach sna meánranganna agus sna hardranganna agus éiríonn leo alt gearr a scríobh gan cabhair. B'fhiú don fhoireann athbhreithniú a dhéanamh ar ról na dtéacsleabhar i gcur i bhfeidhm an chlár Ghaeilge agus moltar scileanna cumarsáide na ndaltaí a threisiú sna ranganna eile. B'fhiú an Triail Ghaeilge Dhroimchonnrach a úsáid chun caighdeán na foghlama a mheas.

*There are specific strengths in the teaching and learning of Irish in this school. Effective use is made of poetry and songs to provide pupils with experience of the sounds and structure of language. During the evaluation, good practice was observed and stimulating methodologies were used to teach the specific target language and to develop the spoken skills of the pupils, particularly in the senior classes. In this context, the pupils succeed in participating in worthwhile communication based on the topics being studied. There is a need to emphasise the development of communication skills at every class level. The majority of pupils read accurately and with understanding in the middle and senior classes and they succeed in writing a short paragraph without assistance. The staff should review the role of the textbooks in the implementation of the Irish programme and it is recommended that the communication skills of pupils in other classes should be enhanced. It would be worthwhile for the school to use the Drumcondra Irish Test to assess the standard of pupils' learning.*

- The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in English is good. Discrete oral language lessons extend pupils' vocabulary and develop their language skills effectively. A literacy hour has been introduced, with the help of parent volunteers, in both class settings and a commendable range of reading materials is provided for pupils in different classes. In order to maximise the potential of this initiative, the school is advised to review its practices to ensure that pupils receive daily instruction in reading skills, comprehension skills, guided and familiar reading. Pupils should be further facilitated to read at their own level and to progress through different levels at their own pace. Writing skills are taught and pupils are provided with opportunities to write creatively. The implementation of a programme such as *First Steps*

*Writing* is advised and further modelling of the writing process and the scaffolding of pupils' skill development is recommended.

- The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in Mathematics is good. The lessons are purposeful and an appropriate range of resources and methodologies is used to explore mathematical concepts. In particular, good progress is in evidence in the development of the pupils' number skills. Mental mathematics is well developed in the middle and senior classes. Further consideration should be given to organising station teaching in Mathematics and the practice of withdrawing pupils for daily support in Mathematics as whole class groups should be discontinued. Problem-solving skills of pupils in Mathematics should receive further attention.
- The quality of teaching and learning in Drama is good to very good. While classroom environments provide limited space for movement, the teachers facilitate the pupils to work in pairs and in groups as they engage in the dramatic process. In the lessons observed during the evaluation, students collaborated well and actively participated in role-play, frieze frames, circle work and drama games. Students responded well to story and music through drama scenes.

## **6. Quality of Support for Pupils**

- The teaching provided for pupils with special educational needs and learning difficulties is of a good quality. The teachers work collaboratively with the mainstream class teachers in facilitating the literacy hour. They also withdraw whole-class groups for instruction on a daily basis. The teaching observed was of a very high quality. Teachers plan conscientiously for their work.
- The structure of some of the supports provided should be reviewed to ensure that practice aligns with the *Learning Support Guidelines* and *Circular 02/05 Special Educational Needs*. Pupils' learning needs should be provided through in-class supports and the current practice of withdrawing whole-class groups for support should be discontinued. The identification of more specific learning targets which are closely aligned with the recommendations of psychologists and other professionals is recommended. This will ensure that the priority learning needs of pupils, rather than class programmes, form the basis for the work. The use of a range of diagnostic assessment is also advised to assist teachers in monitoring the provision for pupils.

# **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 Mary's N.S. accepts the report as an accurate reflection of the high standards attained in our school. We are particularly grateful to the Inspector for her courtesy shown during the WSE.

**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 has commenced dealing with the recommendations in the report and is confident they will have been addressed by the end of the current school year.