Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Scoil Chonnla Phádraig,
Newbridge, Co. Kildare
Roll Number: 15870O

Date of inspection: 10 June 2011
1. Introduction
Scoil Chonnla Phádraig, known locally as the Patrician Primary School, is a mainstream, co-educational primary school under the patronage of the Catholic Bishop of Kildare and Leighlin. It is situated in Newbridge, Co Kildare and caters for pupils from second class to sixth class. At the time of the evaluation there were 361 pupils on roll and the teaching staff consisted of thirteen mainstream class teachers and five teachers in support roles, two of whom were shared with another school. During the whole-school evaluation inspectors observed teaching and learning in eight mainstream class settings and three support settings. 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:

- Teachers in mainstream and special educational needs settings display well-developed teaching skills and manage classroom routines very proficiently.
- The management of pupils is very effective.
- Very positive links are fostered with parents and with the local community.
- The quality of teaching and learning in Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE), in particular, is very good.

The following main recommendations are made:

- The in-school management team, under the leadership of the principal, should lead the process of reviewing and updating curricular policies.
- The principles of the Continuum of Support (Department of Education and Science 2007) should become central to the schools’ approach to special educational needs and to differentiation.

3. Quality of School Management

- The board of management discharges its duties effectively. Its meetings are well structured and consider a broad range of issues. The inclusion of items relevant to teaching, learning and pupil achievement on board agendas would further enhance the quality of management. The board is advised to record the contents of the agreed report of each meeting and the means for its dissemination, in the minutes.
- The principal affords very proficient leadership to the school. He is committed to the school and enjoys the respect of all members of the community. He is a visible presence throughout the school and ensures the provision of an inclusive, well-ordered learning environment.
- All members of the in-school management team display well-developed leadership skills. They discharge their duties competently and make a significant contribution to school life. It is recommended that the in-school management team increase the emphasis on
curriculum leadership by leading the process of reviewing and updating curriculum plans so that they facilitate continuity and progression in pupils’ learning.

• The analysis of parent questionnaires indicates that parents feel welcome in school and are very satisfied with arrangements for parent-teacher meetings and school reports. Overall they are well-informed of routine school matters and receive valuable information on the school when their child enrols. Means of affording parents greater access to school policies should be explored.

• The school has an active parents’ association which provides it with valuable assistance. In order to strengthen the relationship between the parents’ association and the board of management, consideration should be afforded to appointing the parent representatives on the board of management as ex-officio members of the parents’ association committee.

• The school is commended for the various initiatives undertaken to foster positive links with the local community.

• The management of pupils is very effective. Throughout the school they are courteous and respectful. Their confident participation in class activities is carefully nurtured by all teachers. Very effective pastoral care schemes operate within the school and senior pupils adopt responsibilities throughout the school.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

• Administrative policies provide clear guidance on school procedures. The school is advised to devise a data protection policy.

• The English plan details appropriate content and methodologies for each class level across the strands of the curriculum. The Irish plan would benefit from affording similar guidance and from enhancing the section on the communicative approach. In the SPHE plan the content and language utilised in dealing with sensitive topics in Relationship and Sexuality Education should be detailed. Planning for a two-year cyclical treatment of the strands and strand units of the SPHE curriculum should be considered. A section on skills development for each class level should be added to the mathematics’ plan.

• All teachers compile long-term and short-term plans and monthly progress records. It is recommended that all short-term plans be based on specific curriculum objectives and include a section on differentiation. Planning for English and Irish would benefit from being explicit about the intended language to be learned. The school should consider a uniform approach to monthly progress records that facilitates the recording of attained curriculum objectives.

• Individual Educational Plans (IEPs) or Individual Profile and Learning Programmes, some of which are of a very good standard, are available for all pupils in receipt of support. Parents of pupils with low-incidence special educational needs should sign and retain a copy of IEPs pertaining to their children.

• 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 in mainstream classes and special educational needs settings is very good. Lessons are well structured, a range of appropriate methodologies is employed and pupils’ engagement is very high. In some cases learning objectives and success criteria are made explicit to pupils at the beginning of lessons. This is very good practice.

- The vast majority of pupils, who completed questionnaires during the evaluation, affirm that their lessons are interesting, that concepts are explained clearly to them and that they enjoy their learning.

- Currently the school administers standardised tests in English and Mathematics annually to all pupils and a non-reading intelligence test to all pupils in second class. In some cases pupils’ progress in standardised mathematics’ tests is tracked on a year-on-year basis. This should now be extended to all pupils and to English tests results. It is also recommended that pupils’ standard scores in standardised tests be benchmarked against their standard score in non-reading intelligence.

- A variety of assessment modes is in operation at mainstream class level. The school should devise and implement a whole-school approach to assessment in mainstream classes with reference to strategies contained in *Assessment in the Primary School Curriculum* (NCCA 2007).

- Irish is taught well. Pupils are able to answer questions based on curriculum themes and the majority of them have a broad vocabulary. However their ability to engage in natural conversations could be improved. To this end it is recommended that a greater emphasis be placed on the communicative stage of lessons. It would also be beneficial to include a broader range of poetry and song in the Irish plan. Appropriate exercises are undertaken in Irish reading and writing, although there is scope to provide a broader experience in reading and writing different genres.

- The quality of teaching and learning in English is very good. A commendable emphasis is placed on oral language at all levels and in all settings, which is complemented by very good work on poetry. Reading is taught very effectively and a variety of successful initiatives such as an early intervention phonics programme, systematic use of the novel and a paired-reading scheme enhance the programme. The range of books available in class libraries should be improved. In writing pupils engage with a broad range of genres and are familiar with writing processes. A more consistent approach to handwriting is recommended.

- Mathematics is taught effectively. Concepts are clearly explained, appropriate learning tasks are organised and lessons conclude with consolidation activities. Very good
attention is paid to the subject-specific language of Mathematics in many classes. It is now recommended that all lessons begin with the explicit teaching of this language. Mathematical games are well used to reinforce teaching and frequent work is completed on number facts. Some very effective differentiation strategies are implemented at senior level in the school. Teachers should now ensure that differentiation is central to Mathematics teaching at all levels. A greater emphasis should also be placed on developing pupils’ problem-solving skills.

- SPHE is taught very well. Lessons contain an effective blend of methodologies and make very good use of information and communication technology. Opportunities for collaborative work are exploited and pupils participate willingly in all activities. A broad range of topics is covered in the programme and pupils discuss their learning with confidence and competence.

6. Quality of Support for Pupils

- The quality of provision for pupils with special educational needs is very good. Support teachers operate very effectively as a team. Pupil-teacher relationships are affirming; lessons are clearly focused and cater for the holistic needs of pupils. A broad range of methodologies is employed and resources are well used.

- A greater emphasis should be placed on the principles of the Continuum of Support (Department of Education and Science 2007) in the policy and practice of the school.

- The school shares the services of a school completion officer with other schools. It is advised that the analysis of pupils’ attendance data and the implementation of targeted interventions based on this analysis be prioritised in future planning for this service.

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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 Patrician Primary School welcomes this Whole School Evaluation, which highlights some of the strengths of our school. We wish to thank the inspectors for the professional manner in which the inspection was conducted, for the impressive manner of feedback, and for their courtesy. The Board of Management, Staff, Parents and Children are pleased with the affirmation of all the good work done in Patrician Primary School.

However, the Board of Management feels strongly that within the W.S.E. process there should be developed a flexibility and willingness to seek out and to include in the report such areas of special interest which make a school different to any other school. No two schools are the same and the areas of positive diversity should be highlighted.

In our particular case the School Band, with its 103 members, was identified and acknowledged as playing an important role in the life of Patrician Primary School and while it was highlighted in oral feedback, no mention of this appears in the final report. We feel that the phrase “positive links are fostered with the local community” does not do justice to our school community and therefore does not give a true reflection of life in our 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.

Following the 2 main Recommendations the following has been implemented.

- The process of reviewing and updating curriculum policies is currently under way.
- The “Continuum of Support” is now central to the school’s approach to Special Education needs and to Differentiation.