Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

St Mary’s Primary School
Edenderry, Co. Offaly
Uimhir rolla: 16013V

Date of inspection: 12 May 2011
1. Introduction

St Mary’s Primary School is located in Edenderry, County Offaly. It caters for boys and girls to first class and girls only from second to sixth class. Under the patronage of the Bishop of Kildare and Leighlin, the school was originally established by the Sisters of St John of God and the school’s ethos is still strongly influenced by its founders. There are 507 pupils enrolled in the school and attendance rates are improving each year. During the whole-school evaluation inspectors observed teaching and learning in twelve mainstream class settings and four support teaching 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:

- The quality of teaching and learning in all four curricular areas observed is very good with the levels of achievement in Irish and Music being particularly noteworthy.
- The school plan is very well laid out with appropriate and carefully considered curricular plans that guide and impact significantly on classroom practice.
- The school is bright, clean, well maintained and very well resourced.
- A high level of co-operation among staff members contributes significantly to the creation of a caring, positive and welcoming school atmosphere.

The following main recommendations are made:

- The school should continue to explore a variety of models of support for pupils with additional learning and language needs.
- The good practice in evidence with regard to inclusion should be incorporated into policies on intercultural education and disadvantage.

3. Quality of School Management

- The board of management is properly constituted, meets regularly and complies with statutory requirements. Finances are carefully managed. The work of the board, in combination with the efforts of the auxiliary staff, adds considerably to the atmosphere and attractiveness of the school. In order for the board to continue its contribution towards school improvement it is recommended that it should involve itself to a greater extent in the key areas of teaching and learning.
- The principal provides effective pastoral leadership and is committed to the welfare of the pupils. His interpersonal skills facilitate co-operation and collaboration among the staff and contribute to the overall development of the school. He is ably supported by the in-school management team who undertake a wide range of duties in a diligent and highly-committed manner. Assigned duties are reviewed regularly and reflect the on-going priorities of the school.
• Teaching staff are deployed effectively and all teachers experience a range of teaching contexts and class levels. The school is very well resourced and all classrooms provide bright, clean, stimulating, print-rich and number-rich learning environments.

• The management of relationships with the school community is very good and parents are kept well informed about school activities through regular newsletters and the school’s website. Questionnaire responses indicate that the vast majority are happy with the school. The parents’ association is very active and parents make a considerable contribution to school life.

• The management of pupils is very good. Standards of behaviour and discipline are high. Pupils work conscientiously and cooperatively with staff and with one another and are polite, respectful and courteous. Very good pupil-teacher relationships are evident. Pupils participate actively in the Green Schools committee.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

• The quality of school planning is very good. The culture of planning is well-established and the resulting plans are practical and realistic. Curricular plans are contextualised to the circumstances of the school and impact positively upon teaching and learning in all classrooms. Planning is informed by review and school self-evaluation. Priorities for development are identified and effective action plans are created.

• All teachers provide long and short-term plans and prepare very well for their teaching. The on-going work of refining the school’s approach to recording short-term planning and monthly progress is commended. It is recommended that the good practice observed in many plans of placing greater emphasis on the use of curriculum objectives and learning outcomes be adopted by all teachers.

Child protection policy and procedures

• 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, learning and pupil achievement is very good. Suitable teaching and learning materials are prepared and the widespread use of a variety of approaches and methodologies demonstrates a keen awareness of pupils’ learning styles. Most teachers skilfully differentiate learning activities to take account of the range of pupil abilities. Positive learning environments and well-developed classroom management skills are evident. Many teachers engage in critical reflection on the impact of their teaching. Pupils demonstrate very good levels of achievement in the curriculum areas evaluated. Questionnaire responses indicate that most pupils enjoy their learning. The standard of presentation of written work is excellent. In order to build on the good work, further attention to the provision of structured play activities in the infant classes is
The quality of assessment is very good. Procedures used for assessing and recording pupil achievement, progress and needs are accurate and efficient. A broad range of formal and informal assessment modes is used at every class level. A variety of diagnostic tests is used where appropriate. Close analysis of overall results, in addition to tracking of individual pupil progress, informs teaching in mainstream and support settings. Results of tests are communicated to parents and the quality of record keeping and reporting is very good.

The teaching of Irish is very good in the majority of classes and pupils are enabled to communicate accurately and fluently. Differentiated strategies are used to make the teaching suitable for pupils and they are kept active in the learning. Correct emphasis is placed on using Irish as the language of instruction and teachers succeed very well in effectively managing the three phases of communication. A wide range of effective strategies is selected to develop the four language skills. A programme of grammar is systematically and beneficially implemented in the school. Pupils in some classes are enabled to elucidate a wide range of poetry and songs. Opportunities are provided in some classes for pupils to skilfully link reading and writing activities with speaking and listening activities.

The quality of teaching and learning in English is very good. Lessons are creative and stimulating and enable the systematic development of the pupils’ oral, reading and writing abilities. Good modelling and the effective use of questioning help to expand pupils’ vocabulary, enabling them to use language accurately, fluently and expressively during oral language activities. A reading culture is cultivated and pupils are given ample opportunities to develop their reading skills. Emotional and imaginative aspects of the curriculum are being developed through the use of poetry, story and other creative resources. Written work is approached in a manner that is cognisant of the curriculum and most pupils write accurately and fluently.

The quality of teaching and learning in Mathematics is very good. The teachers provide purposeful mathematical activities, use a variety of resources and employ a wide range of creative approaches. There is systematic development of all the curriculum strands. Lessons are well-structured and effective use is made of oral discussion and mental mathematics. Estimation and problem-solving skills are developed incrementally. Commendably, mathematical trails have been devised.

The quality of teaching and learning in Music is very good and there is a wealth of expertise among the staff. All strand units are taught effectively and the programme enables pupils to participate in a wide range of enjoyable music-making activities. Music literacy is afforded appropriate attention and pupils are taught to play the tin-whistle. Opportunities are provided to listen and respond to music in a variety of genres.
Praiseworthy attention is given to the development of singing skills with a range of breathing and vocal exercises being employed at different class levels to enhance vocal quality. Song-singing is of a very high standard and the school choir delivers accomplished performances.

6. Quality of Support for Pupils

- Good practice was observed in the provision of support for pupils with additional learning needs and the staged approach is implemented effectively. Programmes of work are informed by regular assessment. Support settings are very well resourced. Pupils’ self-esteem is enhanced through a range of cross-curricular activities and the team is commended for creating positive, stimulating learning environments. The school is advised to explore other models of support in addition to withdrawal and to collaborate closely with mainstream teachers in developing programmes of work.

- School procedures promote and celebrate inclusion and interculturalism. Pupils’ additional English language needs are addressed in well-resourced, bright and attractive classrooms. Teacher-pupil interactions are positive and supportive. The English as an Additional Language (EAL) team is very open to exploring other models of support in addition to withdrawal which will enable pupils to engage more fruitfully with mainstream curriculum learning.

- The school community provides a warm, caring and affirming school atmosphere which serves to create a very nurturing and supportive environment for all pupils. Instances of disadvantage are dealt with sensitively and discreetly.

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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 St. Mary’s Primary School, Edenderry welcomes this W.S.E. Report. We thank the inspectors for the professional and courteous manner in which the inspection was conducted. We welcome the acknowledgement of the high levels of co-operation and collaboration which exists among staff members. It is encouraging that the quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement is deemed to be very good. We are pleased that the report commends the work of the Board of Management and the supportive role played by the auxiliary staff in promoting a positive atmosphere and maintaining an attractive school. The Board of Management very much appreciates and acknowledges the contribution made by the parents, pupils and by the active Parents’ Association. The Board of Management responds very favourably to the report’s acknowledgement of the warm, caring and welcoming ethos in our school. Our school has followed in the footsteps and nurtured the traditions of our founders - The Sisters of St. John of God. As we celebrate a century of education in St. Mary’s we do so with respect for our past, while working with conviction in the present and willing to face the educational challenges of the future.

Area 2  Follow-up actions planned or undertaken since the completion of the inspection activity to implement the findings and recommendations of the inspection.

Our planning is informed by the W.S.E. Report and the needs of the school. As reflective practitioners, we are currently exploring other models of support for pupils with additional learning and language needs. A plan of in-class support has been introduced. This plan will be reviewed, extended and evaluated on an on-going basis.

The good practice in evidence with regard to inclusion is being incorporated into formal policies on intercultural education and disadvantage.

As we continue our work on school planning, we hope to build on and enhance the strengths of our school.