An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Saint Patrick’s National School
Murlog, County Donegal
Uimhir rolla: 16054M

Date of inspection: 22 September 2011
1. Introduction

Saint Patrick’s is a mainstream, co-educational primary school under the patronage of the Catholic Bishop of Derry. There are 164 pupils enrolled and attendance patterns are very good. The school participates in Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS, Urban Band 2), the action plan of the Department of Education and Skills for educational inclusion. It also participates in the School Completion Programme and the Home-School-Community-Liaison Programme (HSCL). At the time of this evaluation the deputy principal teacher/special needs coordinator was on approved leave and a newly qualified substitute teacher was employed by the board. Provision for English, Irish, Mathematics and Science was inspected. 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 school is managed by a very supportive board of management. Members are committed to continuous school improvement.
- The principal works in a highly dedicated and efficient manner and is very supportive of pupils, parents and staff.
- The teachers are commended for their diligence, openness to new initiatives and the innovation they display in embracing a wide range of teaching methodologies.
- The quality of school planning is excellent.
- The quality of display throughout the school is highly praiseworthy.
- The school provides an encouraging, secure learning environment for pupils.
- Parents’ involvement is very good.

The following main recommendations are made:

- Further improvements in the pupils’ attainment in literacy, numeracy and Irish are necessary.

3. Quality of School Management

- The work of the board of management is efficient and purposeful. The chairperson visits the school regularly and provides very dedicated support. Board members are well informed of the school’s priorities in respect of literacy and numeracy provision.
- The principal works in a highly dedicated manner and provides very purposeful leadership to the school community. She has a very clear vision for the development of the school and has made very good progress since her appointment to the post in 2009.
The in-school management team works very diligently and contributes to the successful management of the school. Training for members of the in-school management team under the Leadership Development Support Programme, currently underway, will be beneficial.

- Teachers are highly committed, energetic and innovative in their approach to teaching. They demonstrate considerable commitment to professional development and are open to learning and new ideas. Two special needs assistants support pupils very effectively in the mainstream classrooms. The school benefits very significantly from the work of its secretary, cleaner and caretaker.

- School accommodation is excellent. A major building programme, near completion, will contribute further to the facilities for learning. There has been significant investment in information and communications technologies (ICT). The standard of display throughout the school, including photographic displays of the pupils’ extracurricular activities, is highly praiseworthy. Attention is given to environmental awareness and the school has received a green flag in the Green-Schools programme.

- The management of relationships with the school community is good. Parents are generous with their time and enjoy being involved in school activities. The parents’ association is very active and works diligently to raise additional funding for school needs. Responses to parental questionnaires, administered as part of the evaluation, show considerable parental satisfaction with the school. They consider that it has a good reputation, provides a safe environment and is well run.

- The overall management of pupils is very effective. The pupils behave in a very pleasant, respectful manner and are very co-operative. Looking at the pupils’ questionnaire responses, it is evident that they enjoy very supportive relationships with their teachers and other pupils.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- The scope and quality of whole-school administrative planning are excellent. As policies are reviewed, the school uses questionnaires to garner the views of parents. As a next step, consideration might be given to uploading relevant policies to the school web site.

- The quality of curriculum planning is highly commendable. Going forward, it is advised that a developmental and integrated ICT programme for pupils be implemented.

- Appropriate priorities have been identified for development in the three-year DEIS plan for 2011-2013. Suitable literacy and numeracy action plans have been devised for the current school year. The in-school management team track the pupils’ attendance, literacy and numeracy development with great care.

- Classroom planning is very good. Teachers prepare well for lessons and good use is made of the school’s extensive range of resources. Some consideration might be given to planning more specifically for the needs of more able pupils.

- 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

- Le linn na meastóireachta bhí caighdeán sásúil le sonrú i múineadh na Gaeilge i mórchuid de na ranganna agus bhí cleachtas an-éifeachtach le feiceálú i ranganna áirithe. Cé go leiríonn na daltaí suim sa Ghaeilge, tá gnéithe le forbairt i gcumas foghlama na ndaltaí sa teanga. Moltar an phleanán don Ghaeilge a athbhreithniú chun a chinntiú go ndéantar forbairt agus leathnú go córasach ar chumas na ndaltaí sa teanga ó rang go rang. Léann na daltaí le cumais áirithe. B'fhiú athbhreithniú a dhéanamh ar na háiseanna léitheoireachta atá in úsáid chun a chinntiú go bhfuil córas struchtúrtha ar fáil. Tá an tionscnamh “Scríobh Leabhair” le moladh. Chun an caighdeán scríbhneoireachta a threisiú a thuilleadh, áfach, b'fhiú deiseanna níos rialta a chur ar fáil chun a threoirí a thriú, áfach, b'fhiú deiseanna níos rialta a chur ar fáil chun scríbhneoireacht pearsanta a chleachtadh.

- During the evaluation the standard of teaching in Irish was satisfactory with some very effective practice observed in a number of classes. While the pupils display an interest in Irish, there is scope for development in the quality of their learning in the language. It is recommended that planning for Irish should be reviewed to ensure that the pupils’ language ability is developed and extended systematically from class to class. The pupils read with varying abilities. The reading materials in use should be reviewed and a structured programme put in place. The “Write a Book” project is commended. However, to raise the standard of writing further, more regular opportunities to engage in personal writing should be provided.

- Provision for English is satisfactory. Lessons observed during the evaluation were well-organised and participative. Teachers intend to introduce a more structured approach to oral language development. This should prove very beneficial when coupled with appropriate assessment approaches. Reading in the junior classes is handled with great care. Thereafter, in the middle and senior classes, most reading activities are handled effectively. As a next step, the current use of class readers and novels should be examined to ensure that assigned texts best match the pupils’ reading abilities. More emphasis on learning to read expressively is also advised. Teachers have introduced a whole-school approach to writing and the pupils are becoming more confident and independent writers. Further emphasis on vocabulary enrichment will help to boost outcomes. Handwriting is good overall and copies present very well.

- Provision for Mathematics is satisfactory. In the lessons observed, new concepts were introduced effectively. Written work presents very neatly and is monitored carefully. While many pupils display satisfactory numeracy, prediction and estimation skills, more emphasis on the memorisation of tables and number facts is needed. There should also be greater focus on linkage across the subject strands and on problem solving. Pupils’ overall attainment in standardised tests has room for improvement. As a consequence, teachers have introduced a number of interventions, including intensive station-teaching in the junior classes, which they hope will yield successful results in the near future.

- Teaching and learning in Science are very good. Teachers provide a variety of creative learning experiences and make good links with previous learning. Lessons build upon pupils’ existing knowledge and understanding carefully. Pupils participate actively in lessons and their scientific skills are nurtured through involvement in prediction activities, hands-on exploration and discovery learning. Science displays and investigation areas are praiseworthy.
• The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement is good overall. In this school, teachers are keenly aware of the need to improve their pupils’ literacy and numeracy levels and show considerable dedication to this goal. Additional whole-school focus on the development of pupils’ listening skills will be beneficial. Collaborative approaches were observed in a number of classrooms; this should be developed further in every classroom. It is evident from questionnaire responses that the pupils feel teachers explain lesson content very clearly and provide them with very good direction in how to improve their work.

• Teachers use a good range of assessment approaches including assessment for learning strategies. Suitable screening tests are administered to infant pupils and standardised tests are used from first to sixth classes in English reading and numeracy. There is a need for in-depth analysis of the outcomes of such tests so as to inform teaching further. On-going class-based assessment and analysis of learning in literacy and numeracy are recommended. Parents are informed of their children’s standardised test results at parent-teacher meetings.

6. Quality of Support for Pupils

• The quality of support for pupils with additional and special educational needs is satisfactory overall. Four teachers provide specific support in this area; two are based in the school and two visit from other schools. Assessment, planning and preparation are effective.

• A large number of pupils are in receipt of learning support. A review of the current caseload should be undertaken to ensure that there is maximum support for those who require it most. Station teaching for numeracy in the junior classes is working well. A review of in-class support in the middle and senior classes is needed to ensure a similar level of intensity and efficiency.

• A HSCL coordinator, based elsewhere, visits the school daily for half a day. The work completed in this context is very effective. Home visitation and the promotion of parental involvement in education are prioritised. As a next step, the training of parents as home visitors should be progressed.

• The school receives very good support from the School Completion Programme (SCP). Going forward, further support for literacy and numeracy interventions is advised.
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 and staff wish to thank the inspectors for the very professional way they interacted with the Board, parents, pupils and teachers during the course of the WSE.

The Board acknowledges and commends the strengths of the school as identified by the Inspectorate.

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 and staff welcome the advice and recommendations in the report and will use them to further advance the quality of teaching and learning in the school. The caseload for Learning Support has already been reviewed as recommended and a whole-school approach to guided reading has been implemented.