An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Bunscoil na Toirbhirte,
Mitchelstown, Co. Cork
Uimhir rolla: 16128P

Date of inspection: 24 November 2011
1. Introduction

Bunscoil na Toirbhirte, Mitchelstown, under the apostolic administration of the diocese of Cloyne, caters for 348 pupils from junior infants to sixth class, including mixed infants classes with 77 boys. The boys transfer to the C.B.S. primary school after senior infants. Bunscoil na Toirbhirte was established by the Presentation Order in 1853 and the first lay principal was appointed in 1991. The Presentation Order maintains its connection with the school through its trusteeship of the buildings and ethos and its maintenance of a chaplain Sister in the school. 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 board of management ensures high standards of maintenance in the building.
- The commitment of principal and staff to the pupils and to achieving high standards was very evident throughout the WSE.
- Sa Ghaeilge, múintear gach gné de theanga na Gaeilge go beách. In relation to the Irish, every aspect of the Irish language is taught accurately.
- In English, class novels are used very effectivity.
- High standards are achieved in Mathematics.
- A high standard of teaching and learning was observed in the support context.

The following main recommendations are made:

- The board should be kept informed of teaching approaches, curriculum policy and standardised test results.
- Formal meetings of the in-school management (ISM) should aim to promote collegiate leadership and a mentoring system for new staff.
- Greater pupil participation in classroom activities during Mathematics support should be considered.
- Beneficial English reading practices should be augmented by special programmes.

3. Quality of School Management

- The board and staff are to be complimented on the very high standard of maintenance in the building, parts of which date from 1911. The chairperson has served on the board with the utmost of dedication over many years. He maintains regular contact with the
principal and staff. Annual external certification of the finances is commissioned. The board is advised to develop a five-year maintenance plan to maintain facilities at their current high standard.

- In line with good practice, administrative policies are presented to the parents’ association committee before they are sanctioned by the board. In general, curricular policies are not submitted to the parents’ association committee and are not discussed in detail by the board of management. It is now recommended that the board should be kept informed regularly as to teaching approaches, curriculum policy and learning outcomes in the school.

- The principal seeks to build with total commitment on the strengths of the school and displays commendable loyalty to an institution which she attended, taught in and is now its second lay principal. She supports strongly the work of the support team as a means of ensuring learning progress for all pupils. The principal is supported by members of the in-school management (ISM) team who carry out tasks, in many cases, with very high levels of personal input, thereby enhancing school life. Members now need to focus on acting together as an ISM team. Formal meetings should be initiated outside school hours to promote collegiate leadership on policy and curriculum initiatives.

- The school is very well resourced and the board has used Department of Education and Skills grants and local funding very wisely for resources, among which are very effectively used interactive whiteboards. A formal mentoring system should be established to mentor new staff members. The secretary and caretaker support administration and maintenance in a willing and friendly manner.

- The principal attends all meetings of the parents’ association. Parents support the school with fundraising and with help for particular events. Parent-teacher meetings are organised by a post-holder and the principal convenes specific meetings with new parents during enrolment week.

- The pupils and teachers interact in a respectful and friendly manner and there is a strong ethos of mutual care evident in the classrooms.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- Policies are devised collaboratively and coordinated by ISM members. In reviewing curricular plans, the staff is advised to bear the criterion of usefulness strongly in mind when selecting content so that these plans form the core of teachers’ long-term planning and practice. As part of school self-evaluation, a professional development needs analysis has been documented together with a review of practice in learning support. Staff is encouraged to develop further self-evaluation processes and action plans for current and future initiatives.

- All teachers record long-term and short-term plans and in many cases clear aims and objectives are recorded. The challenge for teachers now is to align the school plan with teachers’ classroom planning. The school should also consider a more useful layout for the monthly report to aid the general overseeing of curriculum implementation.

- Confirmation was provided that the board of management has formally adopted the Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-primary Schools (September 2011) without modification. The school is compliant with the requirements of Primary Circular 0061/2006. School authorities provided evidence that arrangements are being put in
place to ensure compliance with the requirements of the recently published Circular 0065/2011 and Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools as a matter of priority.

5. Quality of Teaching, Learning and Pupil Achievement

- Standards of teaching and learning are notably high in many aspects of the curriculum. Positive learning outcomes in Irish are evident and very beneficial reading practices were observed in English. By adopting specific programmes, further gains in reading outcomes will be achieved. Results in Mathematics demonstrate strong gains in achievement and the aims of the SPHE programme are being fulfilled successfully.

- Sna naoináin agus sna bunranganna, baintear dea-úsáid as an gclár bán idirghníomhach, as fearas corportha agus as puipéid chun tuiscint a chothú. Múintear an teanga go direach cèimniúil le spreagthaigh shúil, athrá ranga agus slua-athris chun abairt, amhráin agus rainn a mhuíneadh. Cuirtear an teanga múinte i bhfeidhm le comhrá beirte, ról imirt, ceisteanna agus cluichí dea-eagraithe. Sna meánranganna agus sna hardranganna, cleachtaitear scileanna léitheoirigeachta go héifeachtach le raon de straitéisí, agus úsáidtear eifeachtach an chláir bháin idirghníomhach san áireamh. Léann na daltaí go muíneach. Tugtar struchtúir chabhracha do na daltaí chun comhráití a cheachtadh i ngrupaí agus cleachtaitear drámaí go rialta. Tá briathra, ceisteanna, seanfhocal, scéalta, amhráin agus dánta múinte go pras. Tá béim inmholta ar chruinneas cainte agus ar chruinneas gramadai sna ceachtanna.

In infants and junior classes, good use is made of the interactive whiteboard, of equipment and of puppets to cultivate understanding. Direct and systematic teaching approaches, incorporating visual stimuli, class and group recitation are employed to teach sentences, songs and rhymes. The language learnt is applied with pair work, role play, questions and well organised games. In the middle and senior classes, reading skills are practised effectively with a range of strategies, including the effective use of the interactive whiteboard. Pupils read confidently. Pupils are given helpful structures to practise Irish in groups and drama is practised regularly. Verbs, questions, stories, songs and poems are taught with fluency. There is praiseworthy emphasis on language accuracy in lessons.

- In the infants and junior classes, readers’ theatre is used very effectively to develop reading aloud skills. Comprehensive sets of reading resources are available for paired reading and teachers employ various strategies during the lessons to consolidate word recognition. Good use is also made of the interactive whiteboard, Jolly Phonics and pupil devised books for teaching purposes. In many classes, rhymes are recited regularly between lessons. In the middle and senior classes, there are very good displays of pupils’ writing in classrooms. Reading and writing are integrated well with other subjects including SPHE and SESE. Interesting written work based on class novels has been undertaken. Good use is made of pair work and group brainstorming for discussion on novels. The use of the class reader as a springboard for wider reading has worthwhile potential but should be resourced with more copies of books linked to the reader. Very good links were observed between writing, oral English and reading, all based on class novels. Very good library reading records are maintained and pupils are facilitated to join the local library. Poetry is taught and recited admiringly.

- Effective teaching routines are in place for Mathematics, incorporating regular revision and consolidation of learning. Teaching is characterised by effective use of concrete material, the interactive whiteboard, number lines and maths displays. Mathematics language is documented in the school plan and explored effectively during classroom activity. Child-centred active learning incorporating group and pair work is undertaken.
and independent learning is encouraged. High standards of recording in copies are in evidence. Teaching staff are now urged to promote problem-solving and to introduce a variety of opportunities for pupils with learning needs to participate in classroom activities.

- Through the SPHE programme teachers seek to develop pupils’ self-esteem and to enhance their social and communication skills. Teachers draw from Walk Tall, Stay Safe and RSE to imbue pupils with respect for peers and adults and to encourage responsible behaviour. Good use is made of the interactive whiteboard, group activity and pair work to develop pupils’ knowledge. Circle time is used to good effect to explore feelings and to promote discussion. SPHE is integrated successfully with English, Music and Science. It is advised to devote further time to language development when exploring topics by integrating the subject with oral English lessons.

- The school has devised its own school report format and teachers maintain comprehensive sets of records. The school now needs to begin a process of analysing standardised test results both at staff and board of management levels.

6. Quality of Support for Pupils

- The school's education support programme is underpinned by useful policy documents. The special-education team comprises a special class teacher for pupils with mild general learning disabilities and five support teachers who provide a mixture of learning-support, resource teaching and English language support. The inclusion of Reading Recovery greatly enhances the overall provision. The teachers approach their work in a professional manner, display strong commitment and caring attitudes. Programmes of work are carefully planned in collaboration with class teachers. The majority of teachers ensure pupils’ individual needs remain central to the learning programmes and they carefully monitor pupils’ progress. This good practice should be implemented more consistently. The standard of teaching and learning observed was high, incorporating effective methodologies and judicious use of resources. The withdrawal of pupils from their mainstream classes is the predominant method of provision. Worthwhile examples of in-class support are in place and it is recommended that further opportunities to develop this approach be identified. The expertise of teachers who have engaged in continuous professional development should be gainfully exploited.

- Ten pupils attend the special class for pupils with mild general learning disabilities. The class teacher collaborates closely with external agencies, the speech and language therapist in particular, thereby enhancing the pupils’ learning experiences. She prepares conscientiously for her work and has successfully created a positive and stimulating environment. A broad and balanced curriculum is provided and pupils are actively engaged in child-centred activities and enthusiastically engage in collaborative group tasks. Individual education plans are carefully developed by the teacher and pupils’ progress is appropriately monitored and recorded. The pupils benefit from inclusion in mainstream activities in a number of subject areas.

Published, May 2012
Appendix

SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

Submitted by the Board of Management
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 staff and Board of Management would like to acknowledge the professional manner in which the inspectors undertook the inspection in the school: their courtesy to staff, pupils, parents and board members was noteworthy.

The school is now holding regular ISM meetings. Post holders will give an annual written report to the Board of Management of their work throughout the year, and post-holders’ duties will be reviewed annually/regularly, to meet the changing needs of the school.

**Literacy Lift-Off**, a whole-class intervention aimed at increasing each child’s competency in oral language, reading and writing is now being implemented in the school. (This is co-ordinated by the Reading Recovery Teacher). This will be used from Senior Infants to the middle classes. The necessary books required to fulfil this programme were purchased, with significant help from the parent body. We already have one trained Reading Recovery teacher and the school has recently been sanctioned to train a further Reading Recovery teacher.