An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

St. John of God NS
Owning, Piltown, County Kilkenny
Uimhir rolla: 16430O

Date of inspection: 28 January 2011
1. Introduction

St. John of God NS is a co-educational, rural primary school under the patronage of the Catholic Bishop of Ossory. There are 91 pupils enrolled in the school and attendance rates are good. The board of management was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the evaluation, and the response of the board will be found in the appendix to this report.

2. Summary of Findings and Recommendations for Further Development

The following are the main strengths of the work of the school:

- There is a caring, friendly and open atmosphere in the school.
- The board of management functions competently and supports the work of the school.
- The general parent body along with the parents’ association provide valuable support to various aspects of school life.
- The principal is very committed to the school and diligent in the discharge of his duties.
- The quality of teaching and learning in the school is good.
- The pupils in the school are courteous, mannerly and responsive.
- Much good quality support is provided for pupils with special educational needs and the support teachers demonstrate a high level of commitment to the pupils.

The following main recommendations are made:

- The board is advised to liaise with the Department of Education and Skills immediately regarding the provision of staff toilet facilities.
- The content aspects of curricular plans should be further developed to ensure continuity and progression in programmes of learning. Parents should be encouraged to play a more active role in the consultation process as part of policy development and review.
- In providing for pupils with special educational needs, it is advised that models of in-class support be developed along with a clear programme of early intervention for infant and junior classes.
- The use of supplementary readers and novels in English should be expanded to help to further develop the pupils’ reading skills. A greater emphasis should be placed on the promotion of personal writing across the genres, and a structured phonological awareness programme should be implemented.
- In Mathematics, there is a need for a greater emphasis on mental mathematics at all class levels along with a whole-school approach to problem solving.
3. Quality of School Management

- The board of management is properly constituted, functions competently and supports the work of the school. The board is advised to liaise with the Department of Education and Skills immediately regarding the provision of staff toilet facilities. Communication structures with the parents association should be reviewed to ensure that all parties have a clear understanding of their respective roles and responsibilities, and can continue to work harmoniously.

- The principal is very committed to the school and diligent in the discharge of his duties. Warm relationships exist throughout the school and he is to be commended for the caring, positive and open atmosphere cultivated. He is ably supported by the deputy principal and one special-duties post holder through their dedicated work. The further review of assigned responsibilities should aim to ensure that the duties allocated reflect the developing needs of the school, particularly in terms of leadership for curriculum development.

- A range of appropriate material resources enhance learning for the pupils. ICT provision in the school is good but the more widespread use of computers by the pupils in their classrooms should be developed. The new school website will be a valuable resource to the school community.

- The pupils are courteous and mannerly, and co-operate willingly with their teachers during all school activities. The pastoral care needs of the pupils, including those pupils with specific learning, emotional or social needs are managed well by the school staff and the pupils’ holistic development is nurtured. The students’ council provides a valuable opportunity for pupils to voice their opinions and offer suggestions in relation to many aspects of school life.

- Parents are very supportive of and happy with the work of the school, as is demonstrated in the responses to the parents’ questionnaires. The parents’ association provides valuable support in various aspects of school life including school maintenance and social events for the pupils. However, their valuable work and role should be communicated more effectively to the broader parent body, a point noted in the responses to the parents’ questionnaires.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- The teaching staff is commended for its work in developing the school plan. While curricular plans provide some guidance for teachers, their implementation and effectiveness should be reviewed and the content aspects of such plans should be developed further. The curriculum content should then be implemented on a consistent basis across the school to ensure further continuity and progression in programmes of learning. Parents should be encouraged to play a more active role in the consultation process as part of policy development and review.

- All teachers plan for their work with emphasis on the textbooks in some cases. It is recommended that all teachers’ planning be based on specific learning objectives and make explicit provision for differentiation to accommodate the range of pupil abilities and needs.

- 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 overall teaching, learning and pupil achievement is good. Whole-class teaching and discussion are the main methodologies utilised. There is some good provision for pair and group work activities in some classes and this should be extended. A range of assessment strategies is used by the teachers. Standardised test results in English reading and Mathematics should now be analysed in order to track individual pupil progress. This analysis should be used to inform classroom practice and the work of support teachers.

- Múintear an Ghaeilge go sásúil sa scoil. Baintear úsáid mhaith as acmhainní, cluichí cainte agus rainn chun foclóir na ndaltaí a neartú. Moltar anois a thuilleadh de dheiseanna cainte agus obair bheirte a chruthú do na daltaí agus bheith cinnte go bhfuil clár leanúnach cainte ag dul tríd an scoil. Léann na daltaí piosóí ó na tèacsleabhair le muínín don fhormhór. Ba chóir ábhair léitheoireachta breise agus fíor leabhair Ghaeilge a chur ar fáil i ngach seomra. Moltar chomh maith éagsúlacht níos mó de dheiseanna scríbhneoireachta a thabhairt do na daltaí.

The teaching of Irish is satisfactory. Good use is made of resources, language games and rhymes to develop the pupil's language. It is now advised that increased speaking and pair work opportunities are created for the pupils, and a progressive speaking programme is implemented through the school. The majority of pupils read extracts from their textbooks with confidence. Extra reading material and Irish reading books should be provided in all classrooms. It is also advised that pupils be given a greater variety of writing tasks.

- Müller the quality of teaching and learning in English is good. The development of the pupils' oral language skills is emphasised appropriately in all classes. While the skills of reading are generally taught well, the use of additional reading materials and parallel reading schemes would help to improve reading fluency and interest in books. A clear phonological awareness programme should be implemented in infant and junior classes. There is scope for the further use of class novels throughout the school. The pupils are exposed to a range of writing activities. However, a structured approach to the development of their personal writing skills across the range of genres, along with the writing process, should be implemented. Consideration should also be given to the introduction of cursive writing.

- Overall, the quality of teaching in Mathematics is good. In some classrooms, appropriate emphasis is given to the development of mathematical language during lessons and manipulatives and concrete materials are used well and consistently in most classes. However, the structure of most lessons observed did not include appropriate attention to the development of mental mathematics' skills. There is a need for a greater emphasis on mental mathematics at all class levels, and the implementation of a whole-school approach to problem solving is recommended.

- The overall quality of provision for the Visual Arts is good. In all classes, some good-quality work is undertaken and the pupils have enjoyable and purposeful experiences using different art media. Some creative samples of artwork are displayed throughout the school. There is reasonable continuity and progression from class to class in the various
strands of the Visual Arts but this could be improved significantly through the implementation of the whole-school approach as outlined in the school plan. Looking at and responding to art is developed well in some classrooms. Collections of the pupils’ work are maintained in most classrooms.

6. Quality of Support for Pupils

- Much good quality support is provided for pupils with special educational needs and the support teachers demonstrate a high level of commitment to the pupils. In general, lessons in support contexts are well structured and a variety of purposeful learning strategies are employed. All support is currently provided through the withdrawal of pupils from class. Current practice and policy should be reviewed, and developed in the context of Circular 02/05 and the staged approach to support. It is advised that models of in-class support be developed along with a clear programme of early intervention for infant and junior classes. Specific education programmes are developed for pupils receiving support. While these are comprehensive in many respects, clear learning targets should be included. In some instances further diagnostic testing should be administered to ensure that relevant targets are set for pupils.

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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 Owning N.S. wish to acknowledge the thorough, professional and courteous matter in which the inspector carried out the W.S.E. in our school.

The Board of Management is very pleased with the report and welcomes the positive findings and the recommendations contained therein.

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

Planning permission is currently being sought for an extension to the school to include staff toilet facilities. The recommendations in curricular areas have been taken onboard and will guide future planning and implementation.

Our Learning Support teacher has already set in place support programmes in the infant classroom these are now being progressed to the Junior classes.