Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Curragh Girls National School
Curragh Camp, County Kildare
Uimhir rolla: 16636L

Date of inspection: 10 November 2010
1. Introduction

Curragh Girls NS, which is situated in the Curragh Military Camp in county Kildare, provides education for girls from junior infants to sixth class. The school participates in Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS), a programme of the Department of Education and Skills that aims to alleviate educational disadvantage. The school is under the joint patronage of the Bishop of Kildare and Leighlin, and the Minister for Defence. 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 overall quality of teaching and learning in the school is good.
- The teachers’ commitment to the welfare of the pupils and their families is evident.
- Most of the policies in the whole-school plan address the specific needs of this school.
- The school is to be commended on the way in which data on pupil achievement in English reading and Mathematics is collated and used to establish baselines and measurable targets in the areas of literacy and numeracy.
- The school is very well resourced with regard to information and communications technology (ICT).

The following main recommendations are made:

- It is recommended that a board of management be constituted and operated in accordance with the Education Act, 1998 and the Department’s Constitution of Boards of Management and Rules of Procedure.
- It is recommended that the school building be refurbished.
- It is recommended that relevant information regarding each pupil’s performance in standardised attainment tests be communicated to parents in an annual written report, in accordance with Department circular 138/2006.
- It is recommended that the school design and implement a workable procedure for dealing with parental complaints.
- It is recommended that the school revise its child-protection policy with a view to ensuring the effective implementation of the Department’s Child Protection Guidelines for Primary Schools.

3. Quality of School Management

- Curragh Girls NS does not have a board of management. The school is managed by the army chaplain in consultation with the General Officer Commanding in the Curragh Camp. There is evidence of positive relations between the school staff and the manager.
There are significant deficiencies, however, in the current arrangements for the management of the school. Parents, teachers and the wider community are not represented in the school’s management structure. There are no minutes or records available of discussions held or decisions taken by school management. The school does not have a designated treasurer. The school accounts have not been certified or audited annually by an independent accountant in accordance with the Education Act 1998. These factors give rise to a lack of transparency in the management of the school.

- Certain school policies and procedures, including some that are required by legislation, do not appear to be workable in the absence of a board of management. These were discussed at the post-evaluation meeting. It is recommended that a board of management be constituted and operated in accordance with the Education Act, 1998 and the Department’s Constitution of Boards of Management and Rules of Procedure.

- It is recommended that school accounts be certified or audited annually by an independent accountant in accordance with the Education Act 1998.

- The school building was constructed in 1962 and inspectors were informed that it is owned and maintained by the army. Good work has been done on the development of a central courtyard in the school. The provision of outdoor furniture and play equipment for younger pupils makes this an attractive and useful resource. It is recommended that there be a complete refurbishment of the school building. During the evaluation, the inspectors observed deficiencies that are believed to constitute a risk to the health and safety of pupils and staff. It is recommended that these hazards be addressed as a matter of urgency.

- The former school principal retired in 2009 after 38 years of service. There is evidence in school policies and practice that she provided very good leadership for the school. The current principal is in her first full school year in the post. The implementation of the DEIS programme and the maintenance of the school’s pastoral role in the community are central to her vision for the school. She manages the day-to-day operation of the school with support from the acting deputy principal, whose commitment and ability are evident. Staff meetings are held regularly.

- The school is very well resourced with regard to information and communications technology (ICT). There is a dedicated computer room. All classrooms have an interactive whiteboard, as well as computers for the pupils’ use.

- There is evidence of good communication between the school and parents. Newsletters, induction packs, homework journals, annual parent-teacher meetings, an end-of-year written report and a text-a-parent service are all used effectively. The school has a parents’ council, which co-ordinates various fundraising activities in the school. It is recommended that relevant information regarding each pupil’s performance in standardised attainment tests be communicated to parents in an annual written report, in accordance with Department circular 138/2006.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- Those responsible for developing the current school plan are to be commended on the effort that has gone into making most of the policies specific to the unique context of this school. Some of the school’s policy statements on organisational issues are very good. The attendance policy and homework policy are among those that are particularly clear, specific and user-friendly. The school’s curricular policies are generally not as reader-friendly as its organisational policies. It is recommended that these be revised with a view to providing clearer guidance for teaching and learning. It is recommended that the date
of ratification and a target date for review be recorded clearly on each policy statement and that all policy statements be signed by the school management.

- The procedure that the school has adopted for dealing with parental complaints was designed for schools with boards of management. In the absence of a board, this procedure lacks coherence and may not guarantee parents a fair hearing. It is recommended that the school design and implement a workable procedure for dealing with parental complaints. In some other areas, the school’s stated procedures make reference to a board of management and are consequently not workable in Curragh Girls NS. It is recommended that these be addressed. Several of the school’s policy statements use the term “principal/manager” to refer to school management. It is recommended that this be amended with a view to ensuring clarity about the respective roles of the principal and manager.

- The school is to be commended on the way in which data on pupil achievement in English reading and Mathematics is collated and used to establish baselines and measurable targets in the areas of literacy and numeracy respectively.

- It is recommended that the DEIS plan for 2010-2013 be further developed, to include targets and actions in the areas of pupil attendance, involvement of parents and the development of other community partnerships. It is recommended also that the plan describe how the actions set out will be monitored and evaluated.

Child protection policy and procedures

- School authorities provided evidence that, in compliance with Primary Circular 0061/2006, the 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. It is recommended that these people be named in the school’s child-protection policy.

- The school’s child-protection policy is adapted from a procedure that was designed for schools with boards of management. There is some confusion in the document regarding roles and responsibilities. The use of the term “manager/principal” is particularly problematic. It is recommended that the school revise its child-protection policy with a view to ensuring the effective implementation of the Department’s Child Protection Guidelines for Primary Schools.

5. Quality of Teaching, Learning and Pupil Achievement

- The overall quality of teaching and learning in mainstream classrooms is very good. The quality of pupil management is generally excellent. The lessons observed were purposeful and engaging. The teachers use a wide repertoire of teaching strategies. There was a good balance between whole-class teaching and opportunities for pupils to work in pairs and small groups. All of the teachers made very good use of the interactive whiteboard.

- In English, the teachers are to be commended on the emphasis that is placed on oral-language development. There is very good use of structured play as a vehicle for language development in the infant classes. It is recommended that the intended
language outcomes for each play activity be identified in short-term plans and progress records.

• The teaching of English reading is very good overall. There is effective use of large-format books and of the language-experience approach in infant classes. The use of class novels and initiatives such as the annual book fair and a buddy-reading programme support the development of positive attitudes towards books and reading. The school has a fairly well-stocked central library and there are pupils’ libraries in each classroom. It is recommended that classroom libraries be made more visually attractive to pupils and that key vocabulary regarding books and reading be displayed.

• The school provides good opportunities for pupils to develop their writing ability in a variety of genres. Pupils’ writing is displayed in classrooms. It is recommended that the school identify a core repertoire of suitable poems for recitation by pupils at each class level.

• Tá caighdeán na múinteoireachta agus gnóthachtáil na ndaltaí sa Ghaeilge measartha. Tá spiorad rannpháirtíochta agus sástacht na ndaltaí í follasach sa chur chuige. Soláthraítear clár struchtúrtha sna bunleibhéil, ba intear úsáid as feidhmeanna teanga mar bhunús cumarsáide sna téamaí aitheanta. Úsáidtear ar an clár bán idirghníomhach, puipéid agus suimh réalaíochta chun na spríocanna teanga a chleachtadh. B’fhéidir níos mó béime a leagan ar an tréimhse cumarsáide ionas go mbeidh na daltaí in ann an Ghaeilge atá foghlaímtha acu a úsáid agus a shealbhú. D’fhéadfaí freisin úsáid bhreise a bhaint as an leabharlann, leabhair mhóra agus as an gclár teanga ‘Seideán Sí’ chun na snáitheanna teanga a fhóirdiú. Éiríonn leis na daltaí caighdeán measartha a bhaint amach i léamh agus scriobh na Gaeilge. D’fhéadfaí áfach úsáid níos leithne a bhaint as teicneolaíochtaíais agus cumarsáide chun teanga a thréimhse. Is gá clár Gaeilge sainithe, timthriallaithe, fo-chéimíthe a bheith in ann deacair a bheith in ann na daltaí a bhaint amach i léamh agus scriobh na Gaeilge.

• The quality of teaching observed in Mathematics was very good. There is evidence of very good use of the methodologies and resources that are promoted in the Primary School Curriculum. During the evaluation, there was widespread use of loop cards, number fans, mini-whiteboards and a wide range of blocks and other manipulative materials. The teachers introduced new concepts very clearly and competently, often making exemplary use of the interactive whiteboard. There was very good use of suitable strategies to develop Mathematical language. Pupils generally responded well to questioning on topics that had been covered recently. There was evidence, however, of a need for an increased emphasis on mental arithmetic and the learning of number facts.

• The quality of teaching, learning and pupil attainment in Drama is good. The teachers, working with an external facilitator funded through the School Completion Programme,
have identified and agreed a programme of instruction in Drama. Good use is also made of Drama to enrich learning in other curricular areas. The Drama activities observed during the evaluation were in accordance with the Primary School Curriculum. The lessons were well structured and formative for pupils.

6. Quality of Supports for Pupils

- The school provides a range of supports for pupils as part of the DEIS programme. There is evidence that initiatives such as Reading Recovery, Maths Recovery, First Steps and Ready Steady Go Maths are having a positive impact on pupil’s attitudes and achievement. The School Completion Programme also provides a broad range of co-curricular and extra-curricular activities that support positive attendance and engagement by pupils. During the evaluation, there was good differentiation of lesson content in accordance with the different levels of ability in each of the mainstream classes.

- The quality of planning, teaching, learning and assessment observed for pupils with special educational needs (SEN) was good overall. Working relationships between the two SEN teachers and their pupils are very positive. There is good use of resources, including ICT. It is recommended that the school provide supplementary teaching for pupils achieving at or below the 12th percentile in Mathematics.

- The school has a part-time teacher for pupils with English as an additional language (EAL). The quality of planning, teaching and learning observed in this context was very good.
Appendix

School Response to the Report

Submitted by the Board of Management
Area 1  Observations on the content of the inspection report

We welcome the recognition of the academic achievements of the school in the context of its DEIS band 1 status, our strong relationship with the parents and the wider community of the Curragh and the quality of the teaching and leadership.

We feel that the views expressed in relation to a Board of Management show a lack of understanding of the unique ownership and patronage of the school. This finding appears to have undue prominence and overshadows the other positive aspects of the report.

Items that did not feature in the report include:

- Parental satisfaction with the management of the school (almost all parents expressed satisfaction in survey conducted as part of WSE).
- The Bio diverse school garden funded by the Department of Defence.

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 inspection we are in discussion with the Department of Defence and patrons in relation to a Board of Management. Health and Safety issues noted in the report have been addressed. Work on refurbishment of the school building has commenced. Amendments to the relevant policies are being made. Information regarding pupil’s performance in standardised tests is being communicated to parents. An accountant has been retained to certify School Accounts.