An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

St Mary’s N.S.,
Drumlish, Co. Longford.
Uimhir rolla: 16665S

Date of inspection: 26 November 2010
1. Introduction

St Mary’s NS is a six-teacher co-educational primary school under the patronage of the Catholic Bishop of Ardagh and Clonmacnoise. The school serves the educational needs of Drumlish village and its rural environs. The school receives additional funding because of its participation in Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS), a programme of the Department of Education and Skills that aims to alleviate educational disadvantage. Following recent rapid development in Drumlish village, there are now 165 pupils enrolled in the school. This enrolment level is expected to remain stable in the coming years. Attendance levels are good and specific targets and initiatives are in place to encourage high attendance. 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 demonstrates a high level of commitment to the school.
- The school fosters good relations with parents and the local community.
- The principal and in-school management team provide strong leadership for the school community.
- All staff members carry out their duties very conscientiously.
- DEIS targets have been outlined with clarity and are focused on outcomes for pupils.
- Overall, the quality of teaching and learning and pupil achievement is good.
- High-quality teaching approaches and interventions are implemented for pupils with special educational needs and pupils with English as an additional language.

The following main recommendations are made:

- It is recommended that a co-ordinated approach, involving classroom and support teachers, be implemented to improve the listening skills of pupils in some junior classes.
- It is recommended that the school’s enrolment policy be revised so that it records the school’s observance of recent equality legislation with greater clarity.
- It is recommended that the school adhere to Department circular 07/03 with regard to the assignment of special-education posts.

3. Quality of School Management

- The board of management is correctly constituted and very supportive of the school. Meetings are convened regularly and conducted according to the correct procedures. Financial accounts are certified by an independent accountant. Board members draw on
their personal expertise to support the school in regard to safety and community relations. The board discusses and ratifies all school policies.

- The school principal was appointed one year ago. She articulates a very inclusive and caring vision for the school and her leadership is very effective and collaborative. She delegates a range of pastoral, curricular and administrative duties. The members of the in-school management team discharge their duties very conscientiously.

- The quality of the management of resources is very good. The school building has been recently extended and is well maintained. The school employs a secretary, a cleaner and two special-needs assistants, all of whom contribute to the smooth running of the school. A good range of educational resources has been provided.

- Funding from DEIS and various government Departments and agencies is used to provide valuable supports for pupils, including school lunches and after-school clubs. A rural co-ordinator is allocated to the school on a shared basis.

- While the school has no parents’ association, there is a high level of parent-teacher co-operation in the Cairde na Scoile organisation. Cairde na Scoile provides support for school events and is involved in policy development. Home-school communication is managed effectively. In response to an Inspectorate questionnaire, administered as part of this evaluation, most parents expressed satisfaction with the school.

- Relations with the local community are very good, as evidenced by shared use of an astro-turf pitch and the adjoining community hall.

- The management of pupils is generally very good. In response to the Inspectorate survey almost all pupils report that they like coming to school and that they feel safe at school. While the atmosphere in most classrooms is very co-operative, it is recommended that there be a co-ordinated approach, involving classroom and support teachers, to improving the listening skills of pupils in some junior classes.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- The quality of school planning and school self-evaluation is good. All required policies are in place, providing guidance for the smooth running of the school and for curriculum implementation. Many of these policies were ratified at a recent board meeting. It is recommended that a three-year planning calendar be devised to enable a more feasible pace of policy review.

- Valuable analysis of standardised test results has been undertaken and this is evidence of good engagement with the school self-evaluation process. Commendably specific, measurable, time-bound targets have been outlined in the current DEIS plan, as well as strategies for implementation and review.

- The quality of classroom planning is generally very good. Lesson objectives and teaching methodologies are outlined with clarity. Good practice observed included the specific differentiation of lesson content for pupils with additional educational needs. This should be extended throughout the school.
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

- Overall, the quality of teaching and learning and pupil achievement is good. Appropriate methodologies and resources are used during lessons. A very high number of pupils reported that their lessons were interesting and that they enjoyed their lessons and learning.

- The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in Irish is good. Pupils are given structured listening opportunities and there is praiseworthy emphasis on the use of Irish as a classroom and school-management language. The communicative approach is employed to encourage pupils to speak. It would be worthwhile to extend this good practice throughout the school, as well as paired conversation, role-play and other activities. Most pupils read with understanding and correct pronunciation. Writing skills are developed incrementally but the range of writing genres could be broadened. Benefit and pleasure are derived from poetry.

- The quality of teaching and learning in English is good. Oral language is developed purposefully at all levels. Reading is promoted effectively through careful matching of reading material to pupils’ abilities, shared reading, in-class support and the ‘drop everything and read’ (DEAR) initiative. A whole-school exploration of a novel has been facilitated effectively by the DEIS rural co-ordinator and class teachers. Results of standardised reading tests indicate that most pupils are progressing well in relation to their ability levels.

- Writing skills are developed appropriately at all levels. Pupils are encouraged to write in a wide variety of genres and they improve their creative writing through drafting and editing. While handwriting is generally presented neatly, it is recommended that the development of cursive writing be promoted uniformly. Poetry is explored enjoyably.

- The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in Mathematics is very good. Analysis of the results of standardised tests has assisted with the identification of specific targets for improvement. Discovery-learning methods and use of concrete materials assist with acquisition of skills and understanding of new concepts. Mathematical language is used consistently and there is commendable emphasis on the recall of...
number facts (tables). Problem-solving is addressed effectively in most classrooms through the regular use of appropriate strategies and opportunities for pupils to compose and solve problems. In-class supports for Mathematics are very effective and the promotion of mathematical games is very enjoyable for pupils.

- The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in Drama is very good. All pupils have been involved in agreeing suitable drama contracts, which create an atmosphere of confidence, participation and safety during role play. Techniques such as still images, thought tracking, hot seating and conscience alley enable pupils to explore cross-curricular scenarios for empathy and understanding through the fictional lens.

6. Quality of Support for Pupils

- While school policies and practices facilitate the inclusion of pupils with special educational needs, it is recommended that the school’s enrolment policy be revised so that it records the school’s observance of recent equality legislation with greater clarity.

- Very good assessment systems are implemented for the early identification and support of pupils with special educational needs. Targets in the learning programmes prepared for individual pupils are very specific and there is collaboration between support teachers, class teachers and parents in the review of the programmes.

- High-quality interventions are implemented for pupils with special educational needs and pupils with English as an additional language (EAL). Support is provided through a combination of in-class and withdrawal models. Planning and recording practices are very effective. There is evidence that pupils receiving support teaching are making creditable and sustainable progress.

- At the time of the evaluation, the principal was fulfilling the role of language teacher for pupils with EAL. It is recommended that the school adhere to Department circular 07/03 with regard to the assignment of special-education posts.

- Standardised attainment tests, screening tests and diagnostic assessments are administered appropriately. Results are analysed for the purposes of resource allocation and programme planning. Classroom assessment practices are effective and teachers maintain a range of records that assist with the communication of pupil progress to parents. Most parents report satisfaction with the quality of information disseminated in reports and at parent-teacher meetings.

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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 NS would like to thank the Department of Education Inspector for his courtesy, professionalism and guidance throughout the WSE process.

The Board is very happy with the content and findings of the report as it reflects the high standards of teaching and learning in the school.

It affirms the dedication and commitment of the principal and all the staff.

It also recognises the effective development of a healthy and collaborative relationship between the school, parents, the board of management and the local community.

We are affirmed by and very proud of our safe and positive learning environment which was reflected in the responses to the questionnaires of pupils and parents.

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 has reviewed the recommendations made in the report and has formulated and implemented the following:

A co-ordinated approach to the development of listening skills has been implemented in some of the junior classes.

The school's enrolment policy has been revised so that it records the school's observance of recent equality legislation with greater clarity.

The Board have implemented the relevant amendments in relation to the allocation of special-duties posts outlined in Department Circular 07/03.