An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

St. Mary’s National School
Irishtown, Clonmel, County Tipperary
Uimhir rolla: 16728Q

Date of inspection: 1 October 2010
1. Introduction

St. Mary's National School is a fourteen-teacher school and provides education to boys from first class to sixth class. It is under the patronage of the Bishop of Waterford-Lismore. The attendance level of the 179 pupils enrolled is very 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:

- This is an open, welcoming and inclusive school which is committed to the individual welfare needs and holistic development of every pupil.
- The board of management is commended for maintaining the school building and grounds to a high standard.
- The principal manages the school very effectively.
- The quality of teaching and learning is good and the pupils benefit from a very broad and balanced education.
- There are very good supports for pupils with special educational needs.
- The management of pupils is excellent.
- Very good communication is evident within the school and between the school, parents and the wider school community.

The following main recommendations are made:

- It is recommended that a review of the approaches to the teaching and learning of English reading and writing be undertaken.
- There should be greater provision for problem solving, the use of resources and mental mathematics in the teaching of Mathematics at all class levels.
- Moltar clár léitheoireachta rianúil a leagadh amach don scoil agus ábhair léitheoireachta breise agus fíor leabhair Gaeilge a chur ar fáil i ngach seomra.
- It is recommended that the curriculum leadership roles of the in-school management team be developed and that they are given greater responsibility for the management of priority curriculum areas within the school.

3. Quality of School Management

- Relationships and communications between the board and the staff are very good. Policies and plans are devised by the staff and brought to the board for discussion and
ratification. The board should consider taking a more active role in the development and review of curricular policies.

- The board is urged to review the practice of dismissing pupils in first class at 12.45pm every Friday. This review should be dictated by the educational interests of the child (Circular 11/95).

- The principal demonstrates well-developed management and interpersonal skills. He facilitates very good lines of communication between the school and the wider school community. He is committed to the individual welfare needs and holistic development of all the pupils. The in-school management team carry out their duties diligently. The curriculum leadership aspect of their roles should be developed, with greater responsibility for the management of priority curriculum areas.

- The building and school grounds are maintained to a high standard. Provision for information and communications technology (ICT) is good. Purposeful learning environments are created in some mainstream and support classroom settings. A range of mathematics resources and library books has recently been purchased. Consideration should be given to extending the range of parallel reading material available at each class level.

- The management of pupils is excellent. Very respectful and positive relationships are evident between pupils and teachers. Almost all pupils surveyed feel safe in class and in the playground and the majority like coming to school.

- The management of relationships and communications within the school and between the school, parents and the wider school community is very good. Newsletters and the school’s website are used effectively to communicate pertinent information to parents. All parents surveyed are happy with the school overall. There is very good communication with feeder schools and effective procedures are in place for pupil transfer.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- The quality of whole-school planning is satisfactory. The curriculum plans are quite general in nature but will serve as a foundation for future whole-school planning. It is recommended that a phased review of the curriculum plans be undertaken to ensure they inform and impact on classroom programmes of learning.

- Some individual teachers’ classroom planning is of a very good quality in terms of setting out clear learning objectives and being based on the principles of the Primary School Curriculum (1999). A whole-school approach should be adopted in this regard.

- The school is commended on their analysis of outcomes of standardised tests, their awareness of emerging trends in literacy and numeracy, and their identification of areas for development each year. To build on this work, further action planning is required, with clear targets, timeframes for implementation and assigned roles and responsibilities.

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

- The quality of teaching and learning is good. The teachers are confident communicators; they explain concepts clearly and use ICT capably. Whole-class teaching, with extended provision for talk and discussion, is evident. There is good provision for pair and group activities in a number of classes; this should be extended. Most pupils are attentive and display appropriate levels of participation during lessons. In some classes there is greater need for differentiated learning objectives and tasks to cater for pupils at different ability levels.

- Múinteoir an Ghaeilge go sásúil sa scoil. I roinnt ranganna, ní bhíonn go leor deiseanna ag na daltaí cumarsáide a dhéanamh trí Ghaeilge. I ranganna eile, baintear dea-úsáid as acmhainní, cliucháin, rainín agus fíolócht chun foclóir agus teanga na ndaltaí a náirtiú. Moltar an dea-chlaíochtais atá sa scoil a scáipeadh. Úsáidtear tábhachtachthar don thríomh choir chun an léitheoireachta a mhúineadh agus léann na ndaltaí len a mhinín ar an iomlán. Moltar anois clár léitheoireachta rianúil a leagadh amach don scoil agus ábhair léitheoireachta breise agus fior leabhair Gaeilge a chruthú i ngach seomra. Ba chóir éagsúil ná dho cainteacha scribhneoireachta a sholáthar do na daltaí.

*Irish is taught to a satisfactory standard in the school. In some classes, insufficient opportunities are given to pupils to communicate in Irish. In other classes competent use is made of resources, language games, poetry and rhymes to teach and reinforce the pupils' vocabulary. This good practice should be extended. Textbooks are the main resource for the teaching of reading and in general, the pupils read these with confidence. A systematic approach to the teaching of reading should now be devised and extra reading material and ‘real’ books supplied in every classroom. In addition, greater variety in writing tasks should be provided for the pupils.*

- The pupils' oral language skills in English are developed successfully and they engage competently and articulately in discussions. Functional writing skills are taught consistently in all classes. There is limited evidence of progression in creative writing skills. A whole-school approach to the writing process is required and the teaching of writing genres should be developed systematically. Some pupils are attaining very good standards in reading. A phonological awareness programme is implemented consistently in junior and middle classes and libraries are well organised in most classrooms. In every class there are a number of pupils who have difficulties in reading. The provision of differentiated reading programmes, the grouping of pupils for reading lessons and the systematic approach to the teaching of specific reading skills at each class level is recommended. In addition, models of in-class support should ensure such support is targeted to pupils most in need.

- The overall standard of Mathematics is good. Some very effective lessons were observed, involving clear objectives and differentiated tasks. Most pupils can competently perform number operations and are positively disposed to Mathematics. A few pupils who attain good levels of computation do not achieve at a commensurate level in problem solving. The structure of most lessons did not include appropriate attention to mental mathematics or utilise a range of relevant resources and manipulatives. Greater attention to problem solving, the use of resources and mental Mathematics is recommended.

- The quality of teaching and learning in Drama is good. A range of suitable drama strategies is employed competently. The pupils have appropriate learning opportunities to explore and make drama, and reflect on the process. An exemplary lesson where ICT
was used as a tool for peer- and self-evaluation during the teaching of Drama was observed. Drama is successfully integrated with language teaching and History and the pupils demonstrate confidence and empathy during lessons.

- In general, appropriate assessment practices are evident. All teachers monitor the pupils’ written work. Some very good examples of positive, formative feedback are provided to pupils. Most teachers use a variety of assessment modes. To develop assessment practice further, the outcomes of assessment should be utilised to plan differentiated programmes of learning for individuals or groups of pupils.

6. **Quality of Supports for Pupils**

- Pupils with special educational needs (SEN) are well supported. Communication between support teachers, mainstream teachers, parents and the principal is very effective. The special needs assistants diligently carry out their duties. The overall quality of SEN teaching is very good. Presently, support is provided primarily on a withdrawal basis, complemented by an increasing level of in-class support. Some classes have high levels of pupil withdrawal by a number of different SEN personnel; this continues to be a challenge for the school.

- Teaching of English as an Additional Language (EAL) is characterised by well-structured lessons and varied teaching methodologies. Tailored programmes for individuals and groups are provided. It is recommended that additional resources be acquired to support the creation of purposeful learning environments. There should also be closer correlation between oral language themes in mainstream classes and those in the EAL setting.

- Pupils from disadvantaged, minority and other groups are supported effectively, in keeping with the school’s ethos of inclusion. The board, staff and Parents’ Association ensure that every pupil is enabled to engage in all curricular activities. The school participates in the School Completion Programme (SCP), which reportedly provides important support to the school through various organised programmes to promote and improve school attendance amongst a targeted group of pupils.

*Published February 2011*
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 accepts the report of the inspectors and thanks the inspectors for their professionalism and courtesy while the WSE was being carried out.

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

Any recommendations made in the report have already been, or are in the process of being, implemented.