Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Saint Oran’s National School
Cockhill, Co.Donegal
Uimhir rolla: 16789N

Date of inspection: 20 October 2011
1. Introduction

St. Oran’s National school is a co-educational school located in Cockhill, which is on the outskirts of Buncrana town. It is under the patronage of the Catholic Bishop of Derry. The school caters for 220 pupils. Pupil attendance is good. The school participates in the School Completion Programme (SCP). Four subjects were evaluated as part of this evaluation: English, Irish, Mathematics and Visual Arts. The board of management 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 is operating very effectively.
- The principal provides commendable leadership. She has initiated very good processes of school self-review.
- There is a happy, caring and inclusive learning environment for the pupils.
- The teachers are highly committed to their pupils and innovative in their work.
- The quality of teaching and learning in Mathematics is very good.
- Home-school links are very effective.

The following main recommendations are made:

- It is recommended that the plan for Irish should be reviewed: a stronger focus is needed on the achievement of defined learning outcomes and on the development of communication skills.
- It is recommended that further differentiated teaching approaches should be implemented, aided by appropriate planning and, where possible, team-teaching.
- An integrated developmental programme in respect of information and communications technologies (ICT) should be implemented.

3. Quality of School Management

- The work of the board of management is very effective. It is properly constituted and meetings are convened regularly. Minutes are maintained carefully and accounts are audited annually. The board has facilitated the school planning process and has involved itself in the ratification and review of policies. It is recommended that the board lends its support to the teaching staff in their efforts to improve the pupils’ attainment in Irish and the development of ICT skills.
School leadership is very good. The administrative principal is deeply committed to and pro-active in leading school self-review processes. She has been very successful in promoting team work, fostering positive home-school relationships and establishing effective day-to-day routines. The deputy principal is very effective in her work. She and the special duties post holder attend to their assigned duties assiduously. They are supported positively by the other members of the school staff. It is recommended that responsibility for curriculum co-ordination in Irish, assessment and ICT be allocated amongst the staff.

School resources are managed well in the main but there is scope for some improvement. There are eight mainstream teachers and three support teachers, one of whom is shared with another two schools. All teachers work in a highly committed, energetic and innovative manner. Many have engaged in professional development pertinent to the needs of the school. A policy on staff rotation should be considered. External tutors provide tuition in areas of the curriculum during school hours for which a fee is levied on pupils. These practices should be discontinued.

The school building and grounds are very well presented and maintained. The school benefits significantly from the support of the caretaker and secretary. It is recommended that pupils’ active engagement with ICT resources be increased. Further stocks of supplementary reading materials should be sourced for English and Irish.

The management of relationships with the community is very effective and parents support the work of the school very successfully. The majority of parents surveyed as part of the evaluation indicated that teaching is good and that their children like school. Annual parent-teacher meetings are conducted. End-of-year reports give useful information to parents about their children’s performance.

The overall management of pupils is very good. In responses to questionnaires administered as part of the evaluation, the majority of pupils indicated that their lessons are interesting and that they feel safe and included at school. They believe themselves to be doing well at Mathematics and reading. However, a significant number indicated that they do not work in groups, use computers or have a say in how things are done in the school. Whilst it is highly commendable that pupils have some decision-making responsibility as part of the Green-Schools programme, the establishment of a pupil council would extend the pupils’ involvement in wider aspects of school life.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

The quality of the school planning and school self-evaluation process is good. A purposeful strategic three-year framework plan has been devised collaboratively. The current focus is on targeting literacy and numeracy to improve pupils’ attainment in standardised tests. It is recommended that further planning be undertaken for differentiated teaching to cater for the pupils’ varying abilities in English reading. Whole-school planning should outline team-teaching approaches for Irish, English and Mathematics. An integrated e-learning programme should be drawn up.

The quality of teachers’ individual planning is effective in some instances with scope for development in detail and progression in other cases. Monthly progress records are completed. However, the current recording format should be reconsidered so as to facilitate school self-evaluation processes further.

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

- Cé go léirítear dearcadh dearfach leith na Gaeilge, tá scóip chun forbartha i gcáilíocht an teagaisc, na foghlaíma agus measúnú ar dhul cinn na ndaltaí sa teanga. Tá caighdeán na Gaeilge labhartha sa scoil labhairt. Déantar an léamh agus an scriobh a nascadh leis an obair ó bhéal agus, don mhórchuid, tá scileanna léitheoireachta agus tuiscintí na ndaltaí sásúil. Áfach, tá gá le feabhas suntasach ina scileanna scribhneoireachta. Cé gur breathnaitheach dea-cheachtas i roinnt ranganna i rith na meastóireachta, moltar athbhreithniú a dhéanamh ar an bplean don Ghaeilge.

- While a positive attitude is displayed towards the Irish language, there is scope for development in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment of pupils' progress in the language. The standard of spoken Irish is weak in the school. Reading and writing are linked with oral work and, for the most part, the pupils' reading and comprehension skills are satisfactory. However their writing skills require significant improvement. While good practice was observed in some classrooms during the evaluation, it is recommended that the plan for Irish be reviewed.

- Provision for English is good overall. While some effective practices in oral work, reading and writing were observed during the evaluation, there is scope for more differentiated approaches to cater for the pupils' varying abilities in reading in most classrooms. Many pupils display a competent command of language in their expression of a variety of themes and opinions. Pre-reading is well developed and as pupils progress, they are given many opportunities to read from a variety of texts; however, further differentiated reading approaches are recommended. In most classrooms, there are effective creative practices with regard to developing writing skills; however there is scope for a greater emphasis on vocabulary development and more challenging activities for the higher ability pupils.

- Progress in Mathematics is very good. Discretionary time is used to maximise the time for Mathematics and this is having a very positive outcome on pupils' learning. Whole-school approaches to oral work, estimation, problem solving and the memorisation of mathematical facts are very consistent. In the majority of classrooms, activities are differentiated appropriately to suit the needs of the pupils. However, this requires improvement in a small number of classrooms. Overall pupils are very enthusiastic about Mathematics and demonstrate very good competency in tables and mental computation. Written work is presented very neatly and corrected appropriately. In many classrooms, pupils engage in very effective assessment for learning activities.

- Work in the Visual Arts is commendable. There are good opportunities for pupils to engage in a range of creative activities and to develop a good range of skills. A variety of effective stimuli, including ICT, the work of major artists and classical music, are used to stimulate the pupils' creativity. Pupils engage actively in art lessons and display a sense of achievement and enjoyment of the activities undertaken.

- Overall, the quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in most areas is good. However, there is scope for improvement in Irish. While there are instances of differentiation in many classrooms, there is need for a more consistent whole-school
approach to this important aspect of teaching and learning. Assessment for learning practices should be used more consistently throughout the school. Standardised tests in English reading and Mathematics are administered. In the future, there should be more use of assessment data at classroom level, particularly in differentiating for pupils’ learning needs.

6. Quality of Support for Pupils

- The overall provision for pupils with special educational needs is very good. The support teachers have significant expertise in the area of *Reading Recovery* and general special needs. The special education coordinator organises tests, both standardised and diagnostic, and liaises very well with the special education team and school staff. Teaching approaches are very successful and they include in-class, group and individual support. Two full-time and two part-time special needs assistants work capably and positively in support of pupils with specific care needs.

- A visiting School Completion Programme (SCP) coordinator gives valuable support to the school. Various school activities are subsidised through SCP. Going forward, the activities supported by the SCP should complement the school’s targeted areas for development more closely.

- The school is working towards the achievement of its third green flag. The school provides a breakfast club and a lunch club supported by the Department of Social Protection.

*Published March 2012*
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, staff and the whole school community of St. Oran’s National School wish to extend a sincere thank you to the Department of Education and Skills Inspectors for the courteous, constructive and professional manner in which they carried out the Whole School Evaluation. The commitment, support and advice of the inspectors throughout the entire W.S.E. process are very much appreciated and valued by the Board of Management and staff. We are pleased the WSE report affirms the positive work being done in our school by the staff, Board of Management, Parents’ Association and the pupils. It is a great encouragement to all those involved.

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 of Management of St Oran’s N.S. welcomes the advice and recommendations contained in the WSE report. The Board wishes to acknowledge the following points.

1. The Board acknowledged the importance of Professional Development for teachers and had engaged the services of a facilitator to work with the teachers. The Cuiditheoir had been engaged to work with the staff in reviewing the school plan for Irish, further defining learning outcomes and developing communication skills in Irish.
2. The Cuiditheoir had also been engaged to recommend differentiated teaching approaches and to help the staff engage with school self evaluation.
3. The Board wishes to acknowledge the ongoing efforts of the Parents’ Association to raise much needed funds for school improvements. The Parents’ Association have identified the purchase of computers as a main priority this year. As a result the infrastructure will be in place to put an integrated developmental programme in respect of ICT in place.
4. The Board acknowledges the need to purchase much needed resources for literacy (both English and Irish) and steps have been put in place to prioritise spending in this area.