1. Introduction

Scoil Náisúnta Bhaile an Mhóinín, also known as Castlefrench NS, is a small rural school under the patronage of the Catholic Bishop of Elphin. The school has two class teachers and a resource teacher who is shared with another local school. Two part-time support teachers also visit the school. There are 36 pupils enrolled. The school building and grounds are well maintained and a new classroom is being added to the school at present. 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 principal provides very good leadership for the school in both organisational and curricular matters.
- The overall quality of teaching and learning is very good.
- The teachers demonstrate a praiseworthy commitment to their own professional development.
- The quality of support for pupils with special educational needs is very good.
- The board of management is commendably proactive in developing the school and its resources.
- The quality of communication with parents and the wider community is very good.

The following main recommendations are made:

- It is recommended that the school record existing good practice in its curricular policies, in order to ensure continuity in the pupils’ learning, even in the event of changes to the teaching staff.
- It is recommended that the school nominate a member of staff to deputise for the designated liaison person (DLP) in her absence, in accordance with the Department’s Child Protection Guidelines for Primary Schools.
- It is recommended that the results of standardised attainment tests be collated electronically to facilitate recording and analysis of whole-school data as well as ongoing profiles of individual pupils.

3. Quality of School Management

- The board of management is properly constituted and operates in accordance with relevant legislation and the rules of the Department of Education and Skills. The board members are well informed and proactive in the development of the school and its resources. Financial accounts are certified annually.
• The principal provides very good leadership for the school in both organisational and curricular matters. She has availed of relevant professional-development opportunities that have enhanced her capacity to lead and manage the school. There is evidence of a very effective working relationship between the principal and the special-duties teacher. The responsibilities of the special-duties teacher are recorded clearly in a contract. There is an appropriate balance of curricular, organisational and pastoral responsibilities and it is evident that these are fulfilled effectively.

• The quality of relations and communication within the school community is very good. Parents are very active in the work of the school. They assist with fundraising and with the organisation and management of the school's extra-curricular programme. There is an annual parent-teacher meeting and an end-of-year written report, which includes relevant information on the pupil's achievement in standardised attainment tests. The school website, pupils' homework journals and a text-messaging service are among the ways in which parents are kept informed of developments in the school.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

• The whole-school planning process is managed in a professional manner and in accordance with Department guidelines. There is evidence of commendable transparency in the process, which involves consultation with parents prior to ratification of policies. The school has a three-year strategic plan for the development and review of its policies and procedures.

• The school's organisational policies are generally very good. The curricular policies that have been revised recently are good. Other curricular policies, however, are more generic and less useful in guiding practice. It is recommended, therefore, that the school record existing good practice in its curricular policies, in order to ensure continuity in the pupils’ learning, even in the event of changes to the teaching staff.

• It is recommended that the school set simple, measurable targets for the development of the pupils' knowledge, skills and attitudes in the area of information and communications technology (ICT), with a view to ensuring progression and continuity. The school may find the ICT framework available at www.ncca.ie useful.

• The quality of the classroom planning done by individual teachers is good.

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. At present the role of deputy DLP is assigned to a person who is not a staff member. It is recommended that the school nominate a member of staff as deputy DLP, in accordance with the Guidelines.
5. Quality of Teaching, Learning and Pupil Achievement

- The overall quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement is very good. There is evidence of a high level of commitment and professionalism from all of the teachers observed. The class teachers show great skill in the differentiation of programmes and lessons for the different class groups in each classroom. There are regular opportunities for pupils to work in pairs and small groups.

- It is recommended that the results of standardised attainment tests be collated electronically to facilitate recording and analysis of whole-school data as well as ongoing profiles of individual pupils. A useful template and tutorial for this task is available at www.ppds.ie under the heading DEIS.


- In Irish lessons, good practice that was in accordance with the Primary School Curriculum was observed. The teachers made creative use of a range of illustrative materials and other resources. Suitable activities were organised and the pupils participated actively in the lessons. It was evident that pupils had an extensive passive vocabulary in Irish. They spoke with confidence and competence during the lessons. It was evident from questioning the pupils that they need more experience of speaking Irish for communicative purposes. It is recommended that the school agree practice and policy regarding the use of Irish outside of the Irish lesson, as discussed at the post-evaluation meeting. There is good development of Irish reading and writing.

- Provision for the pupils’ oral-language development in English is good. The provision of a print-rich environment in each classroom supports the teaching of literacy. There is effective development of phonological awareness and word-recognition skills. There is also appropriate use of authentic reading materials. The teachers were advised regarding the use of large-format books, the provision and use of class novels from a range of genres and the presentation of class libraries. The teaching of English writing is very good in both classrooms. In the junior room there is skilful differentiation of writing tasks for the different class groups. In the senior room, the pupils are enabled to write confidently in a wide range of forms and genres. The school has participated in the Write a Book project, the INTO handwriting competition and other similar initiatives. The pupils have developed very good habits with regard to the presentation of their work.

- The quality of the teaching and learning observed in Mathematics was very good. In both classrooms, there was effective use of mathematical equipment and materials to develop relevant concepts and skills. There was also very good use of suitable task cards and work sheets to structure practical activities. There is an appropriate emphasis on mental arithmetic and on the learning of number facts (tables).

- There is evidence of good work in the teaching and learning of Science, especially in the strand energy and forces. Very good work has been done also in the section designing and making. This is supported by the school’s participation in the K’Nex Challenge. There is evidence of scope for development in the strand unit plants and animals. Opportunities
for pupils to plan, conduct and evaluate open-ended investigations would be particularly beneficial.

6. Quality of Support for Pupils

- The overall quality of support for pupils is very good. There is very good differentiation of programmes and lessons by mainstream class teachers to cater for the learning needs of individual pupils. Supplementary teaching for pupils with low-incidence special educational needs (SEN) is provided by a resource teacher who is based in this school and by another part-time teacher.

- The individual education plans (IEPs) prepared for pupils with low-incidence SEN are broad, balanced and in accordance with pupils’ assessed needs. The short-term planning and progress records completed for these pupils are also very good. The teachers and special-needs assistant show great skill and understanding in the implementation of the planned programmes.

- Supplementary teaching for pupils with difficulties in literacy and numeracy is provided by a learning-support teacher who is based in a neighbouring school. There was commendable variety in the learning activities observed. The teaching was purposeful and well structured.

- Staff members have availed of relevant professional development in the areas of autistic-spectrum disorders, behaviour management and occupational therapy. They are to be commended for the way in which they have applied their learning in their work with pupils.

Published, June 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 and Staff welcome the positive findings of the W.S.E. report which acknowledges and affirms the work ethos and professionalism which is evident in the school. The Board of Management would like to thank the Inspector involved for the professional and courteous manner in which the WSE was 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.

1. In accordance with the Department's Child Protection Guidelines for Primary Schools, a member of staff has been nominated as Deputy Designated Liaison Person (DDLP).
2. Results of Standardised Attainment Tests are now electronically collated to facilitate recording and analysis of Whole School data as well as on going profiles of individual pupils.