Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

St. Finian’s NS
Garryhill, County Carlow
Uimhir rolla: 17096K

Date of inspection: 8 June 2011
1. **Introduction**

St. Finian's NS, Garryhill is a two-teacher school operating under the patronage of the Catholic Bishop of Kildare and Leighlin. There is a very welcoming atmosphere in the school and a strong sense of community is evident. The attendance of the thirty-one pupils 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 a well-run school with a strong sense of community and team work evident.
- The range of resources provided for the development of the pupils' literacy skills is very good.
- There is good awareness among staff members of areas for development in the school.
- The pupils' behaviour is excellent.
- The quality of teaching is good with lessons being well structured and resourced.
- The pupils engage purposefully in assigned tasks.

The following **main recommendations** are made:

- The focus of mathematics lessons requires attention. Further emphasis should be placed on the development of the pupils' oral and problem solving skills.
- Further attention to the development of the pupils' higher order thinking skills and editing skills in English is required.
- A better mix of approaches to the delivery of learning and resource support should be implemented.

3. **Quality of School Management**

- The quality of many aspects of the work of the board of management is very good. Board members and staff have worked strategically and to good effect to ensure sufficient enrolments to the school. Board members engage with the planning process. Board members are justifiably proud of the quality of the resources, accommodation and playground facilities provided for the pupils. Consideration now should be given to periodic analysis of standards achieved in the school.
- The principal and one other staff member work collaboratively to address the challenges facing the school. The school is well run, with routines and timetables followed
appropriately. There is a strong sense of teamwork among staff members. The teaching strengths of the individual staff members are utilised appropriately.

- The quality of the management of resources is very good. A wide range of materials and resources is provided. ICT facilities are very good and used appropriately. The quality of resources provided to support literacy teaching is excellent.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- Policies relating to the administration of the school have been developed appropriately and are implemented successfully. Curriculum plans are provided and these, for the most part, successfully underpin practice in classrooms. Teachers provide satisfactory plans and schemes of work for their classes.

- While implemented informally, the school’s self-evaluation process ensures good awareness among staff members of the areas which require development in the school. Appropriate plans have been drawn up to address these areas. New developments, such as the restructuring of learning-support and resource-support provision, should be subject to ongoing review.

- 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 overall teaching, learning and pupil achievement is good. Teachers work purposefully and structure their lessons to good effect. They receive full co-operation from the pupils who engage assiduously with assigned tasks. The pupils are taught to collaborate successfully. Written work, including project work, is monitored carefully. Good emphasis is placed on celebrating the pupils’ completed work.

- Tá múineadh na Gaeilge ar chaighdeán maith. Is soiléir go mbaineann na daltaí uilig sult agus taitneamh sa gceachtanna sa Ghaeilge. Forbraítear scileanna na ndaltaí ó bhéal go scilíúil trí úsáid as cluichí teanga, as drámaíocht agus as geaitsiocht. Tá leanúnachas maith le sonrú ó rang go rang san obair ó bhéal agus sriotóitear caighdeán sásúil. Léann na daltaí sinsearacha le cruinneas agus le tuiscint. Tógar formhór na tascanna scríbhneoireachta ón téacsleabhar. Moltar anois clár níos leithne a leanúint sna himeachtaí seo.

_The quality of teaching in Irish is good. It is evident that the pupils enjoy their lessons in Irish. The pupils’ oral skills are developed skilfully by means of language games, drama and mime. There is good continuity from class to class in this oral work and good standards are achieved. The senior pupils read with accuracy and understanding. Most of the writing tasks are derived from textbooks. A broader range of activities in this area is advised._
The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in English is good. Teachers demonstrate considerable skill in managing the development of pupil literacy skills across a range of classes. Lessons are interesting and engage the pupils effectively. Pupils read well and have a broad range of reading material to choose from. The pupils write well and take pride in presenting their material across a range of platforms. Further attention to the development of the pupils’ higher order thinking skills and editing skills should be incorporated into the teachers’ schemes of work.

The quality of aspects of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in Mathematics is good. Some areas, however, require attention. Lessons are generally well structured and paced. A good range of resources is provided, including ICTs, and these are used appropriately. Teachers should place significantly more emphasis on oral work and on problem solving. Individual teacher plans should reflect this change of emphasis.

The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in Science is good. Lessons have a clear focus and aspects of literacy are successfully integrated into assigned tasks. The range of resources utilised in lessons is impressive. The pupils are taught to develop a sense of enquiry and to test simple hypotheses. Key messages regarding healthy lifestyle choices are reinforced by the availability of fruit and vegetables for the pupils each day.

6. Quality of Support for Pupils

The quality of support for pupils is good. The efforts undertaken by the teachers to ensure a positive atmosphere in the school result in the pupils co-operating with all aspects of school life. Pupil questionnaires strongly endorse the work of the teachers in that regard. Commendable attention has been paid to providing attractive and stimulating play spaces and facilities in the yard. This results in all of the pupils playing together during recreation periods.

The quality of teaching for pupils with special educational needs is good. Most are progressing well. IEPs are developed following the implementation of diagnostic tests. However, the overall structure employed in the school requires attention. Currently there is an over reliance on withdrawing the pupils for support. The provision of in-class support for pupils is recommended as a priority for attention. This should be done in conjunction with the implementation of the school's policy on learning support. Given the greater need for development of the pupils’ mathematical skills, more support should be offered in this curriculum area.

Communication between the school and parents is very good. The teachers meet most of the parents each day. Parent questionnaires indicate very strong support for the school among the parent body. All parents reported the school as being well run and with a good reputation in the local community. The school's website is attractive and informative, though consideration could be given to publishing the school's policies on the site.

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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, staff and school community found the evaluation process to be affirming and helpful.

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

Future planning and policy will reflect the recommendations of the evaluation. Presently pupils’ mental arithmetic and problem solving skills in Mathematics and higher order thinking skills and editing skills in English are the focus of teacher planning. A broader range of approaches to delivering learning support have been introduced.