

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

**Whole School Evaluation
REPORT**

**St Michael's NS
Castletown Geoghegan, Co. Westmeath
Uimhir rolla: 17182D**

Date of inspection: 14 October 2010



1. Introduction

St Michael's NS is a rural four-teacher school in Castletown Geoghegan, county Westmeath. It has a current enrolment of eighty-two pupils. Under the patronage of the Bishop of Meath the school promotes a Catholic ethos which is exemplified in its caring, welcoming and inclusive atmosphere where all pupils are cherished equally. As a result of increasing enrolments a fourth mainstream teacher has been appointed this year. Attendance rates are good. 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 is commended for its work in maintaining the school building to such a good standard and for the provision of an attractive, stimulating and safe learning environment for pupils and staff.
- The principal combines his teaching, leadership and management roles effectively. He has developed productive partnerships in the immediate and wider community and has established very good relationships with pupils, parents and staff.
- The teachers are competent and diligent in their work. They are committed to ensuring that pupils receive a broad and balanced education and much effective practice in teaching and learning is in evidence throughout the school.
- Pupils work conscientiously and co-operatively with staff and one another and are well behaved, polite and courteous.
- The school plan is very well laid out with appropriate and carefully considered curricular plans and administrative policies. The quality of classroom planning and school self-evaluation is very good.

The following **main recommendations** are made:

- The board of management should devote time at each meeting to discussing the planning process and the teaching and learning activities of the school.
- The provision of work for different attainment groups should be prioritised to ensure that pupils are appropriately challenged in their learning.
- In-class learning support needs to be reviewed to ensure that it is addressing pupils' needs and that resources are used effectively.

3. Quality of School Management

- The board of management is clearly committed to the development of the school. It is to be commended for the modernisation and enhancement of school facilities and for the

maintenance of the school building to a high standard. Meetings are convened regularly and accounts are carefully maintained. It is recommended that in the future school accounts should be audited or certified annually in accordance with section 18(1) of the *Education Act* (1998). The board should involve itself to a greater extent in the key areas of teaching and learning and become more actively involved in school policy development. It is also recommended that the board ensures that it is fully compliant with the rules of procedure for boards of management with regard to its constitution.

- The quality of in-school management is good. The principal is fully committed to running an equitable and inclusive school. He exhibits strong interpersonal skills and has fostered positive relationships with members of the school community. He is ably assisted by the deputy principal and one special duties post-holder who carry out their responsibilities diligently and competently. It is recommended that the board formally reviews the duties of the post-holders on a regular basis to ensure that assigned duties continue to be aligned to the emerging needs of the school.
- The school is well resourced and classrooms provide stimulating learning environments. Provision for information and communication technology (ICT) is commendable. A wide range of resources including computer software is available to support literacy and numeracy in the learning-support setting. A spirit of collaboration and co-operation characterises the relationship that exists between all members of staff.
- The management of relationships with the school community is very good and parents are generous in supporting school events. Parents are kept well-informed about school activities. Questionnaire responses indicate that they feel welcome in the school and that the vast majority are happy with the school. It is recommended that the board supports and encourages the re-establishment of a parents' association that will subsume the current fund-raising committee.
- The overall management of pupils is very good. They are respectful and confident in their interactions with teachers and peers. Pupils' responses to the questionnaires indicate that the majority feel safe in their classrooms and in the playground. A range of co-curricular and extracurricular activities is provided to enhance their experience at school.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- The quality of school planning and school self-evaluation is very good. An extensive range of organisational and curricular policies that are relevant to the needs of the school has been devised. While most plans are signed and dated it is recommended that each plan be contemporaneously signed on the occasion of its ratification by the board. A detailed long-term plan of action and an extremely comprehensive yearly plan have been developed. These plans include priorities for teaching and learning, set challenging but achievable targets and include realistic timescales for implementation.
- All classroom teachers prepare good-quality long and short-term plans and provide detailed monthly reports of progress. Commendably, the school has adopted a common template and adapted it for its own use. Further provision for differentiating lesson content for the various classes and ability groups and more widespread use of curriculum objectives in planning is recommended.

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. The board is advised to formally record that these child protection procedures have been brought to the attention of management, school staff and parents. Evidence was provided that a copy of the procedures has been provided to all staff (including all new staff). The board is advised to formally record that it 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 overall quality of teaching and learning is very good. In the infant classes active exploration is encouraged and opportunities are provided for pupils to take part in an appropriate range of play activities. A variety of teaching approaches is employed in all classrooms and lessons are well paced and well delivered. A positive learning atmosphere is created throughout, high expectations are set for behaviour and engagement and pupils respond well to this. Good use is made of a range of learning activities with pupils engaging confidently in collaborative tasks in pairs or small groups. The standard of presentation of written work throughout the school is good. Questionnaire responses indicate that most pupils find their lessons interesting and that teachers explain things clearly to them. In order to support and challenge the diversity of learning needs it is recommended that teaching should incorporate differentiated approaches to a greater degree.
- Suitable screening tests are administered to senior-infant pupils and standardised tests are used from first to sixth class. Currently, assessment data are used primarily to identify pupils who may need to attend for learning support. It is recommended that test results be analysed further to identify pupils in need of differentiated programmes of work in the classrooms. It is also recommended that standardised tests be fully administered by classroom teachers.
- Déantar iarracht mhacánta caighdeán maith Gaeilge agus dearcadh dearfach i leith na teanga a chothú. Léirítear na ceachtanna go beoga anamúil le cabhair acmhainní thairbhígh. Usáidtear póstaer éagsúla agus ceistiú fiúntach chun an sprioc-teanga agus feidhmeanna teanga a mhúineadh agus chun na daltaí a spreagadh chun labhartha in a n-aonair agus i mbeirteanna. Baineann na daltaí sult agus taitneamh as an bhfoghlaim sna ranganna Gaeilge. Tugtar aird do shnáith na héisteachta agus baintear úsáid as cluichí chun an tuiscint a threisiú. Cuirtear béim ar chruinneas sa léitheoireacht agus léann formhór na ndaltaí go líofa. Baintear feidhm chuí as an scéalaíocht chun spéis a chothú agus déanann na daltaí plé fiúntach ar ábhar na léitheoireachta. Aithrisíonn siad rainn oiriúnacha go soiléir, taitneamhach agus canann siad stór amhrán go muiníneach. Déantar dea-chúram de ghnéithe éagsúla na scríbhneoireachta ach d'fhéadfaí caighdeán na scríbhneoireachta a árdú a thuilleadh.
- *An honest effort is made to foster good standards and a positive attitude towards Irish. Lively, animated lessons which are supported by attractive resources are presented. Various posters and effective questioning are used to teach the targeted language and language functions and to encourage the pupils to speak by themselves and in pairs. The pupils enjoy their learning in Irish classes. Attention is paid to the listening strand and games are used to reinforce understanding. Emphasis is placed on accuracy in reading and the majority of pupils read fluently. Proper use is made of stories to foster interest and the pupils can discuss their reading. They recite suitable verses clearly and pleasantly and they sing a range of songs with confidence. Good care is taken with the various aspects of writing but the standard of writing could be raised further.*

- The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in English is very good. Creative and stimulating lessons enable the systematic development of pupils' oral, reading and writing abilities. Good questioning strategies are used, teachers model language precisely and dictionaries and the internet are consulted regularly for research. Phonological awareness is developed in an effective, integrated manner. Proficient use is made of large-format books to promote oral language development and to consolidate emergent reading skills. In all classes pupils' emotional and imaginative response to language is effectively and thoughtfully enriched. Pupils show an interest in books and enjoy reading. Many read with commendable fluency and discuss reading material in an age-appropriate manner. Independent writing skills are fostered through various genres and through effective group and cooperative work settings and there are some excellent examples of independent writing on display. Pupils enjoy a rich and varied repertoire of poetry and rhymes appropriate to their age.
- The quality of teaching and learning in Mathematics is very good. An appropriate programme is taught to the pupils through well-structured lessons. Purposeful practical activities are undertaken to enable discovery learning and concepts are appropriately reinforced. Oral discussion emphasises relevant mathematical language and provides opportunities for pupils to clarify their thinking. Emphasis is placed on developing pupils' use of estimation strategies. The continued provision of differentiated learning activities in Mathematics is recommended in order to improve pupils' performance and to continue to challenge the more-able pupils.
- The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) is very good. All classrooms host displays of SPHE-specific illustrative materials and pupils' work. Teachers cultivate positive relationships and provide a range of experiences to foster pupils' self-esteem and self-confidence. Pupils are encouraged to see themselves as unique individuals, to voice their opinions and to contribute to group and class discussions. A variety of active learning approaches is used and pupils have opportunities to work collaboratively in pairs and small groups. Most parents in their responses to the questionnaires expressed satisfaction with the way in which the school fosters their children's social and personal development. Similarly positive results emerged from the pupils' questionnaires with most pupils concluding that their school was a good place to be. Efforts by the school to implement an anti-bullying policy were validated by a significant majority of pupils and parents.

6. Quality of Supports for Pupils

- Support teaching for pupils with learning difficulties and those with low-incidence special educational needs is provided on both a withdrawal and in-class support basis. Both teachers demonstrate high levels of commitment to the pupils and have established positive and caring relationships with them. The school employs two special-needs assistants who cater for the specific care needs of assigned pupils.
- Early intervention procedures are effective for pupils with learning difficulties. It is recommended that provision at the first stage of the continuum of supports becomes formalised and documented before external support is provided. Appropriate individual educational plans (IEPs) are formulated in consultation with all partners and class teachers have copies of the relevant plans. In the area of learning support these IEPs should be accompanied by written short-term planning and regularly documented records of pupils' progress as recommended in the *Learning-Support Guidelines*. The current model of in-class support needs to be reviewed immediately to ensure that it is meeting pupils' needs effectively.

- Teachers are sensitive to any instances of disadvantage and endeavour to be as supportive as possible of pupils who may need additional support.

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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, parents, staff and children of St. Michael's N.S., wish to acknowledge the work of the Inspectorate and the professional manner in which the Whole School Evaluation was conducted in the school. We accept the thorough and comprehensive report. Everybody is delighted with the positive tone of the report as an affirmation of the hard work and dedication of the Board, parents, staff and children. The whole process was challenging, enriching and rewarding for all involved in the school as much good practice was noted. We accept the constructive comments and recommendations of the report.

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

- Accounts have been audited in accordance with Section 18(1) of the Education Act and will continue to be audited annually.
- The Board is now fully compliant with the rules of procedure for Boards of Management as a new Board Member has been elected.
- The fund-raising committee has been disbanded and a new vibrant Parents Association has been formed.
- The Board now devotes space and time to include teaching and learning at their meetings.
- A review of the duties of the post-holders has been formally undertaken by the Board.
- The recommendations with regard to planning and teaching and learning have been addressed and will continue to be implemented in the relevant areas.