Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Scoil na mBuachaillí
Caisleán an Chomair, County Kilkenny
Uimhir rolla: 17253A

Date of inspection: 29 November 2010
1. Introduction

Scoil na mBuachailli is a three-teacher school catering for boys from second to sixth class. It is under the patronage of the Catholic Bishop of Ossory. There are seventy pupils enrolled and pupil attendance is 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:

- The board of management provides the school and its teachers with sustained support and is committed to the welfare of the pupils.
- An active parents’ association assists the work of the school.
- The teachers employ stimulating teaching methodologies and they encourage the pupils to become active participants in their learning.
- The pupils' individual talents and interests are nurtured and they exhibit positive attitudes to learning.
- The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in History is excellent.

The following main recommendations are made:

- The board is advised to review its policy on enrolment and its code of behaviour in order to comply with legislative requirements.
- The in-school management team should further develop its curriculum leadership role in the ongoing development, implementation and review of whole-school planning.
- The teachers should adopt an agreed approach to monthly progress records to allow for reflection on whole-school learning outcomes.
- A whole-school approach to the teaching of phonics should be agreed and implemented in both mainstream and special education settings.
- The school should review comprehensively its provision for pupils with special educational needs.

3. Quality of School Management

- The board of management attends effectively to a variety of organisational and administrative needs. It deals efficiently with school maintenance matters and cites among its priorities the continued improvement in pupil attainment. It is actively involved in the development of organisational and curricular policies. In order to comply with legislative requirements, the board is advised to review its policy on enrolment and its code of behaviour.
• The principal is held in very high regard by the school community. He demonstrates great commitment to his role and is assisted by a middle-management team comprising a deputy principal and one special-duties teacher. The team members are commended for their valuable contribution to the operation of the school. The regular review of duties attaching to posts is advised, with a prioritisation of curricular responsibilities.

• An appropriate range of resources is provided and used effectively to support teaching and learning. It is recommended that a formal policy on staff mobility be agreed so that all teachers are provided with the opportunity to experience a variety of teaching contexts, both in mainstream classes and in special education settings, throughout their careers.

• The parents’ association plays an active role in supporting the work of the school through the organisation of fundraising events and through policy development. The association extends an invitation to the broad parent body to share expertise with the pupils and the pupils have benefited from this initiative in the curricular areas of Science and History. Parent-teacher meetings are held annually and parents are issued with a written report on their child’s progress. The school newsletter provides useful information to parents on school activities.

• The teachers demonstrate a commitment to the pastoral care needs of pupils. There are good arrangements in place to support pupils where necessary. Relationships between the school staff and the pupils are both positive and affirmative. The pupils are invited to contribute their ideas on school improvements through the Pupils’ Idea Box.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

• In general, the quality of school planning and self-evaluation is satisfactory. While the staff has devoted considerable time and effort to the formulation of curricular plans, there is scope now for the further development of these plans. The very effective model used in devising the plan for History should be employed in the review of core curricular plans.

• All class teachers engage in long-term and short-term planning. Planning for differentiation should be extended through the school to ensure that the needs of all pupils are met consistently. It is further advised that teachers adopt an agreed approach to monthly progress records. These records should allow for reflection on learning outcomes, so that further planning can be focused on the development and extension of pupil learning.

• Self-evaluation practices have commenced with attention directed to attainment in Mathematics and in reading. The school is now advised to extend these self-evaluation practices and to identify and address priorities in other areas of the curriculum.

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, learning and pupil achievement is generally good. The teachers employ a range of methodologies which includes some group work. The pupils’ individual talents are developed through the provision of opportunities to work on areas of interest to them. The teachers successfully use a range of resources to support their work and the recent purchase of laptop computers contributes significantly to the quality of learning experiences. Pupil attainment is monitored in all classes and pupils from second to fifth class are tested annually on standardised tests in English reading and Mathematics. It is recommended that pupils in sixth class also be tested and that analysis of attainment on a whole-school basis is undertaken annually.

- Ar an iomlán tá caighdeán maith le feiscint i múin eadh na Gaeilge. Labhraíonn formhór na n-oidí i nGaeilge go leanúnach le linn na hoibre agus moltar freisin an timpeallacht spreagúil ranga a chothaitear. Muintear ábhar cinnte idir fhoclóir, fhrásai agus struchtúir. Tá foclóir breá ar eolas ag cuid de na daltaí agus éiríonn leo abairtí simplí a chumadh agus a fhreagairt bunaithe ar na téamaí idir lámha. Dírithe an t-áirde chuí ar scileanna na léitheoireachta a fhórbaí aghus tá caighdeán maith sroichte ag formhór de na daltaí. Déantar cúram breá ar scileanna scríbhneoireachta a fhórbaí le linn tascanna feidhmíutála. Chun barr feabhas a bhaint amach, d’fhéadfaí tuilleadh béime a chur ar saor-scríbhneoireachta agus ar próiseas na scríbhneoireachta.

- The overall quality of teaching in Irish is good. Most teachers use Irish throughout lessons and the stimulating print-rich environments created are praised. Specific content is taught, including vocabulary, language phrases and structures. Some pupils possess a good vocabulary and they succeed in composing simple sentences and in asking and answering questions based on the topics being addressed. Appropriate emphasis is placed on the development of skills in reading and most pupils read to a good standard. Due care is paid to the development of skills in writing through functional writing tasks. In order to further improve standards, renewed emphasis on free writing and on the writing process is advised.

- Satisfactory standards are achieved by the pupils in English. Oral language opportunities are explored very effectively and extension of oral competence is successfully prioritised. Due attention is given to the advancement of reading strategies and the introduction of the class novel provides stimulating material for the pupils. It is now advised that the school adopt a whole-school approach to the teaching of phonics, including an intensive programme for all junior pupils and a standard approach in both mainstream and special education settings. The pupils’ questionnaire results indicate that most pupils consider that they are doing well at reading. The pupils are encouraged to write to a high standard in a variety of genres, with particular achievement noted in creative writing. It is advised that the very high quality handwriting observed in some instances be extended throughout the school.

- The quality of teaching and learning in Mathematics is good. Pupil achievement has been targeted through the implementation of a range of whole-school interventions which include discrete timetabling of mental mathematics, daily revision routines and whole-school problem solving. Consequently, pupil attainment has improved. Results from the pupils’ questionnaire indicate that the majority of pupils consider that they are doing well at Mathematics. It is advised that the school continue to prioritise attainment in Mathematics, ensure the consistent use of calculators, and place a greater emphasis on the relevance of Mathematics in the local environment.

- The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in History is excellent. History is taught in a motivating and imaginative manner. Learning is skills-based and active and is
supported by an extensive range of high quality resources. Local history is taught very effectively and the pupils display an obvious enthusiasm for learning and an impressive knowledge of their local environment. The development of the school museum and its use in supporting teaching and learning is a significant feature of success in the provision for History.

6. Quality of Support for Pupils

- The quality of provision for pupils with special educational needs (SEN) is not satisfactory. Presently, provision for pupils with SEN is provided by a team of shared and part-time teachers. The pupils are withdrawn individually and in small groups for supplementary teaching, with some pupils receiving support from more than one teacher. Some satisfactory teaching methods are used. In order to ensure that provision for pupils is of a consistent and appropriate standard, it is recommended that an in-depth review be undertaken. The staged approach to assessment, identification and programme planning should be implemented. A review of the selection criteria for support and an emphasis on early intervention strategies for pupils in second class is recommended. It is advised that the teachers use a common template in drawing up individual profile and learning programmes (IPLPs) and education plans (EPs). Specific learning targets should be outlined for all pupils. Purposeful consultation with parents is recommended. The team should meet regularly to ensure the implementation of well-structured, collaborative provision for pupils with SEN.

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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 of the Boys’ National School, Castlecomer duly acknowledges the work of the inspectorate, Department of Education and Skills, in carrying out a Whole School Evaluation in our school in November 2010. We wish to compliment the inspector appointed. We are sure that our school has considerably benefited from the WSE process.

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 following areas of recommendation have already been addressed:

- An updated Enrolment Policy has been ratified by the BOM;
- Special Education recommendations have been initiated and are under ongoing review.

The Board of Management is working closely with the principal and staff in relation to all recommendations taking effect without delay.