Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Athenry Boys National School
Athenry, County Galway
Roll number: 17280D

Date of inspection: 11 February 2011
1. Introduction

Athenry Boys NS provides primary education for boys from second class to sixth class in the town of Athenry and the surrounding area. The school has five mainstream class teachers, a learning-support teacher, a resource teacher for pupils with special educational needs and a resource teacher for children of the Traveller community. A teacher based in a neighbouring school also provides learning-support and resource teaching and supplementary teaching for pupils with English as an additional language. There were 123 pupils enrolled in the school at the time of the evaluation. 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 and other teachers foster a positive, respectful atmosphere in the school.
- The principal provides good leadership and enables other staff members to lead aspects of the work of the school.
- The quality of pupil management is very good.
- The provision and management of school accommodation and resources are very good. The very good new school library deserves particular mention.
- The overall quality of teaching and learning is good.
- The teachers demonstrate a very good commitment to continuous professional development.
- The school provides a broad programme of extra-curricular activities and participates in a wide range of co-curricular initiatives that support the implementation of the Primary School Curriculum.

The following main recommendations are made:

- The school should resume the practice of issuing an annual written report on the progress of each pupil.
- Existing good practice in teaching and learning should be recorded in the school’s curricular policies, with a view to consolidating this practice and extending it to all classrooms.
- The results of standardised attainment tests should be collated electronically. This would facilitate recording and analysis of whole-school achievement.
- The school should adhere to Department of Education and Skills Circular 07/03 with regard to the assignment of special-education needs posts.
3. **Quality of School Management**

- The board of management is properly constituted and operates in accordance with the rules of the Department of Education and Skills and relevant legislation. The board is to be commended on the way in which the school building and grounds have been maintained and developed.

- The principal demonstrates a strong commitment to the work of the school and to the welfare of pupils. He manages the day-to-day operation of the school with efficiency and courtesy. There is appropriate delegation of responsibilities to the deputy principal and special-duties teachers, who contribute significantly to the work of the school. It is recommended that scheduled meetings of the in-school management team be held regularly. At the time of the evaluation, the principal was teaching in a special-education setting. It is recommended that the school adhere to Department Circular 07/03 with regard to the assignment of special-education needs posts.

- The overall quality of pupil management is very good. The school's new code of behaviour is based on the *Discipline for Learning* approach, with a strong emphasis on rewarding positive behaviour.

- There is evidence of good relations and communication between the school and parents and of good participation by parents in the work and development of the school. In questionnaires completed as part of this evaluation, parents indicated that they were very satisfied with the service provided by the school. In recent years, two parent-teacher meetings have taken place during the school year. The second meeting was used to provide oral end-of-year reports on pupil progress to parents, in place of issuing written end-of-year reports. It is recommended that the school resume the practice of issuing an annual written report on the progress of each pupil in accordance with Department circular 138/2006. A selection of appropriate reporting templates is available at [www.ncca.ie](http://www.ncca.ie).

- There is very good management and use of physical equipment and materials. Information and communication technology (ICT) is used effectively by teachers for illustrative purposes and for recording projects. There is scope for greater progression and continuity in the development of the pupils’ ability to use ICT. This is reflected in pupils’ responses to questionnaires administered as part of this evaluation. The school should now set out a programme for the development of the pupils’ skills and knowledge in ICT, to include simple, measurable targets to be achieved in each class.

4. **Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation**

- The school has good whole-school organisational policies that provide useful guidance to staff members. The quality of curricular planning is less consistent. Planning for Mathematics and certain aspects of English and Irish is very good. The school should amend whole-school plans for English, Irish and Geography as discussed at the post-evaluation meeting, with a view to ensuring breadth, balance, continuity and progression in the school programmes for these subjects. It is recommended that drafts of all policies being developed or revised be given to parents for comment prior to ratification by the board.
• The school has begun to engage in meaningful self-evaluation exercises that have resulted in changes to whole-school practices and policies.

• The quality of classroom planning and recording is good or very good in most cases. It is recommended that a common template be used for monthly progress records. It would be beneficial also if there was an opportunity for teachers to share good practice regarding classroom planning.

• 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 accordance with the Child Protection Guidelines for Primary Schools.

5. Quality of Teaching, Learning and Pupil Achievement

• The overall quality of teaching and learning is good. In several classrooms the practice observed was very good. This included skilful classroom management, purposeful teaching, effective use of resources and regular opportunities for pupils to work together in pairs and small groups.

• The quality of teaching and learning in English is good. Oral-language development is very good in most cases. The development of a very good school library, the use of buddy reading and the formation of book clubs for pupils in fourth class are among the initiatives undertaken to promote the habit of reading for pleasure among the pupils. The quality of provision for English writing was very good in some classrooms but there is scope in others for pupils to be given a wider range of writing opportunities and for better presentation of written work. Pupils in some classes can recite a very good repertoire of poems. The staff should now agree and implement whole-school approaches to English writing, the use of poetry and the selection and use of class novels.

• Tá caighdeán an teagaisc agus na foghlama sa Ghaeilge go maith. Spreagann na múinteoirí na daltaí chun cainte go sciliúil. Cothaítear líofacht, cruinneas agus saibhreas cainte i measc na ndaltaí i bhformhór na ranganna. Tá na daltaí sa chuid is mó de na ranganna ábalta cnuasach álaimh rann agus dánta a aithris. Moltar go ndéanfaí e seo i ngach rang. Ceanglaítear imeachtaí sa léitheoireacht agus sa scríbhneoireacht go cliste le hábhar na gceachtanna comhrá. Moltar go gcaithfí níos mó ama ar thor bairt na scríbhneoireachta pearsanta.

• The quality of teaching and learning in Irish is good. The teachers elicit talk from the pupils skillfully. There is effective development of the pupils’ fluency, accuracy and vocabulary in most classes. Pupils in most classes are able to recite a lovely repertoire of poetry and verse. It is recommended that this be done in all classes. Reading and writing activities are linked effectively to topics in conversation lessons. It is recommended that more time be spent on developing personal writing.

• The overall quality of teaching in Mathematics is good. This is reflected in pupil achievement in standardised attainment tests. Very good practice was observed in some classes. This included effective use of mathematical equipment and displays, careful teaching and revision of mathematical language, regular opportunities for pupils to discuss concepts and ask questions, and the development of good habits regarding
written work in Mathematics. It is recommended that this practice be implemented in all classrooms.

- The quality of teaching and learning in Geography is good. There is effective development of the pupils’ sense of place and space, their ability to use maps and globes, and their graphical skills. The school also undertakes very good work in the strand *Environmental awareness and care*. It is recommended that the school place a greater emphasis on the development of geographical investigation skills. It is recommended also that the school agree and implement practical, hands-on ways of teaching the strand unit *Weather, climate and atmosphere*.

- It is recommended that the results of standardised attainment tests in English and Mathematics be collated electronically. This would facilitate recording and analysis of whole-school achievement on an ongoing basis. A useful template and tutorial for this task is available at [www.ppds.ie](http://www.ppds.ie) under the heading ‘DEIS’.

6. Quality of Support for Pupils

- The quality of support for pupils is good. Class teachers generally differentiate their programmes and lessons effectively in accordance with the range of pupil ability.

- The individual learning programmes prepared for pupils are in accordance with these pupils’ needs as identified in relevant assessments. Programmes and activities are tailored to accommodate the pupils’ interests and to address their personal and social needs. The programmes generally contain clear learning targets as well as useful descriptions of the strategies that will be used to achieve them.

- The supplementary teaching observed varied from good to very good. There was effective use of suitable approaches, activities, resources and assessment instruments.

- It is recommended that the school agree and implement a policy regarding the provision of in-class support, setting out the rationale for in-class support, criteria for identifying situations in which in-class support would be appropriate and guidance on the form that such support might take.

*Published, October 2011*
Appendix

SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

Submitted by the Board of Management
Area 1 Observations on the content of the inspection report

The B.O.M and staff of Athenry Boys National School would like to acknowledge the courteous and professional manner in which the W.S.E. was carried out by both Inspectors in the school.

The B.O.M is pleased that the report acknowledges the professionalism and dedication of the Principal and staff, the central role of teaching and learning and the respect in which the school is held in the local community.

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 B.O.M of Athenry Boys National School welcomes the positive findings and have already begun to implement the recommendations as outlined in the report.

At a staff meeting an end of year Report Form was drafted and issued to all parents at the end of June 2011.

The school has now adhered to the Department of Education guidelines with regard to the assignment of Special Education Needs posts.

The school has now invested in a laptop trolley with ten laptops at present. Each class is timetabled and a programme for the development of the pupils’ skills and knowledge in I.C.T has been developed.

The other recommendations are in the process of being addressed.