1. Introduction

Saint Patrick's National School is a mainstream, co-educational primary school under the patronage of the Catholic Bishop of Elphin. There are 107 pupils and five full-time teachers; four permanent and one temporary. School attendance is very good overall. Provision for English, Irish, Mathematics and Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) was inspected during this whole-school evaluation. The board of management of the school was given an opportunity to comment on the findings and recommendations of the report; the board chose to accept the report without response.

2. Summary of Findings and Recommendations for Further Development

The following are the main strengths of the work of the school:

- This school is characterised by high standards of teaching and learning and good commitment from the broader community.
- The pupils are provided with a very good all-round education and teaching and learning in the four subjects inspected are of a high quality.
- The board of management is effective in supporting the work of the school. In-school management is commendable.
- The teaching principal and staff work in a highly dedicated and efficient manner.
- Pupils are very well behaved, eager to learn and enthusiastic.
- Co-curricular and extracurricular opportunities for pupils are praiseworthy.

The following main recommendations are made:

- Further consolidation of whole-school assessment approaches is recommended.
- Greater involvement of parents in the policy development and review process is recommended.

3. Quality of School Management

- The quality of school management is commendable overall. The board of management works effectively and earnestly. Minutes of meetings and accounts are maintained carefully. It is advised that school accounts be certified regularly. The board discusses and ratifies school policies on an ongoing basis. The chairperson provides valuable support through school visits and regular communication with the staff. It is suggested that further information might be provided to parents about the ongoing work of the board; perhaps via the school’s web site.
• The quality of in-school management is very good. The teaching principal works in a highly dedicated and efficient manner. He provides dynamic, enabling leadership and promotes a positive school climate where open communication and a culture of collaborative decision-making are fostered. Day-to-day management of the school is very good and rolls and registers are well maintained. The principal is ably supported by a deputy principal and a post-holder; they attend to their duties in a spirit of commitment and generosity. This spirit pervades throughout the staff as teachers volunteer to provide additional support to a wide repertoire of school initiatives. In particular, the school’s accomplishment in sports is outstanding.

• The school is modern and spacious and the grounds, including an all-weather pitch, are very suitable. Corridors celebrate the past and present pleasingly and, in the main, classrooms present extremely well. All classrooms have access to information and communications technology (ICT) with some having interactive whiteboards. However, in questionnaires administered as part of the evaluation, almost half of the pupils indicated that they did not get to use computers at school. Therefore, the school’s plan to acquire further laptops to facilitate pupils’ hands-on access to ICT will be a beneficial development when coupled with an e-learning plan.

• During the evaluation, the management of pupils was excellent. A happy atmosphere was evident and interactions between staff and pupils were positive and mutually respectful. In questionnaires, most pupils indicated that they feel safe at school and that they know the school rules.

• The board employs—part-time—a secretary, a classroom assistant and a caretaker. This very diligent team adds greatly to the day-to-day operation of the school.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

• The quality of school planning is good overall. Organisational planning is appropriate and implemented carefully. Further contribution by parents to the policy development process should be encouraged and there should be greater dissemination of existing policies. Curricular planning is effective overall. In its next steps, the school should review its assessment approaches.

• The principal and staff are very aware of the school’s strengths and any areas for development. They welcome suggestions for improvement. A detailed, annual action plan is executed successfully.

• As required, all teachers provide long and short-term planning and monthly progress reports. The quality of detail varies somewhat from teacher to teacher with some providing good detail in terms of differentiation and learning outcomes; whole-school agreement on the level of specificity would be beneficial.

• 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 and school staff; 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. At the time of this evaluation, school management indicated that parents have been informed that there is a child protection policy and that copies of the policy will issue to them shortly.
5. Quality of Teaching, Learning and Pupil Achievement

- There is good work underway in Irish and a very positive attitude to it. Various opportunities are provided to develop the pupils’ listening skills. Oral language lessons have very good structure and pace and new language input is very skillful, particularly in the senior classes. The standard of spoken Irish is good in the school and the pupils have a very satisfactory vocabulary. That is especially evident in the infant classes. Appropriate use is made of poetry and rhymes to reinforce the language. The majority of pupils read with accuracy and understanding. It would be worthwhile however to implement an appropriate phonological programme. A good range of reading materials is available to support the teaching of reading. It is recommended, also, that a graded reading scheme be utilised. Functional writing is undertaken most frequently throughout the school although certain aspects of free writing are undertaken with some classes. It is recommended that more free writing be practised from the early years on. It is recommended that the pupils’ achievements in the language be clearly recorded and passed on from teacher to teacher at the end of the year so as to ensure systematic progression from class to class.

- Provision for English is of a high quality overall. Oral language development is well attended and most pupils are confident and accurate in their language use. Poetry is taught effectively throughout the school. The use of a relevant phonics programme, clear teaching approaches and various reading initiatives has helped most pupils to develop good reading skills. The introduction of reading folders in the junior classes and further use of class novels elsewhere should be explored. The teachers provide worthwhile opportunities for pupils to write in a variety of genres, including write-a-book initiatives, and the standard of pupils’ work is generally good. However, there is need to place greater emphasis on vocabulary enrichment, presentation and handwriting in some classes. Classroom teachers have augmented their teaching skills in English to good effect attending various training courses. It is now advised that further expertise be acquired in the area of dyslexia.

- The overall provision for Mathematics is very good. The pupils display a very positive attitude towards the subject and engage enthusiastically in learning activities using mathematical language well. New concepts are introduced very effectively with good emphasis on the social importance and relevance of mathematics. The use of guided discovery and concrete materials is effective. The majority of pupils display good numeracy, prediction and estimation skills. While work is presented very neatly in some classrooms, there is less focus on this aspect in others. Whole-school agreement on presentation and monitoring of work would be beneficial.
• Provision for Social, Personal and Health Education is satisfactory. All three strands are covered and supplemented by support materials such as Stay Safe and Walk Tall. In all classrooms, the core concepts of interdependence and inclusiveness are emphasised successfully. Although highly appropriate methodologies are used throughout the school, the skilful use of role-play with the middle classes deserves particular mention. While the quality of teaching observed during the evaluation was good, it is important that the school maintains a structured and progressive approach in implementing the subject. Whole-school agreement on the use of portfolios and assessment is needed. An external tutor facilitates provision for Relationships and Sexuality Education in the senior classes.

• While the overall quality of assessment is satisfactory, there is scope for development in certain areas. Appropriately, a school file is maintained for each pupil. In the classroom, teachers are committed to continuous assessment and, in the majority of instances, copybooks and workbooks are monitored regularly. Teachers use checklists to record pupils’ progress in certain areas. In some classrooms, teachers also maintain very useful pupil profiles; such an approach should be considered on a whole-school basis. While in certain classrooms pupils’ engage in self-assessment, a more systematic, whole-school approach to self-assessment and peer assessment is needed. Early literacy tests and standardised testing in Mathematics and English reading are administered appropriately and pupils’ overall attainment is very good. Parents are informed of their children’s attainment in such tests at parent-teacher meetings; ideally they should also be informed in writing. The teachers should now consider the use of standardised spelling tests.

• Teaching and learning are of a high standard overall. Teachers implement an integrated and effective curriculum and utilise innovative and resource-rich methodologies. They display particular skill in developing the aesthetic and affective domains of learning. Some teachers prove particularly skilful at story-telling and utilise this very effectively across the curriculum. Lessons observed during the evaluation were well structured and purposeful. Pupils presented as happy and motivated to learn. They worked well collaboratively and the use of grouped seating in some classrooms facilitated this.

6. Quality of Support for Pupils

• Support for pupils with additional and special educational needs is very effective. Specific support is provided by two teachers, one fulltime with another providing part-time hours, in literacy and numeracy. Planning for work and recording of progress are detailed and appropriate and diagnostic testing is purposeful and thorough. Teaching, as observed during the evaluation, was of a high quality; well paced, active and purposeful. There was very good use of resources including ICT. In-class support is provided in the infant classes and this should be extended to other classrooms, particularly where class sizes are largest.

• Co-curricular and extracurricular opportunities for pupils are praiseworthy. These include science education, digital storytelling, choir and drama performance, sporting involvements, local, national and international, historical re-enactments and wide-ranging project-work.

• The school has an open-door policy towards parents. The board and staff are very appreciative of ongoing parental support. There is no parents' association although the board states that it would be positively disposed towards its formation. In responses to questionnaires, all parents indicated that they were happy with the school overall. Aspects that they rated highly include the running of the school, welcome for parents, arrangements for parent-teacher meetings, the quality of teaching, discipline standards in the school and the provision of a safe environment.
• Very close and beneficial school-community links are established; the school provides good support to community initiatives and, in turn, draws educational assistance from it regularly. The school has a good reputation in the community.

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