An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Dysart National School
Dysart, Co. Westmeath
Uimhír rolla: 17290G

Date of inspection: 3 October 2011
1. Introduction

Dysart NS is a two-teacher primary school under the patronage of the Catholic Bishop of Meath. There are forty one pupils enrolled in the school. Pupils' attendance is very good and enrolment trends are relatively stable. 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:

- The board of management works very conscientiously to support the work of the school and to provide an educationally-stimulating learning environment for the pupils.
- Communication and relationships between the school, the parents and the wider community are managed very successfully.
- The management of pupils is very good and a very positive atmosphere is noted in the school.
- The quality of the work of the in-school management team, as exemplified by the principal and special duties teacher, is very good.
- All teaching and ancillary staff members discharge their duties conscientiously and effectively.
- The quality of overall teaching, learning and pupil achievement is commendable.
- Supports for pupils with special educational needs are very effective.

The following main recommendations are made:

- To further the self-evaluation process, it is recommended that assessment information be used to develop and review specific and measurable targets annually.
- It is recommended that whole-school approaches be agreed to improve pupils’ speed and accuracy in recalling mental mathematics.

3. Quality of School Management

- The quality of the work of the board of management is very good. The present and previous boards are commended on their roles in providing and maintaining a very stimulating environment for the pupils. The board discharges its statutory and planning duties conscientiously. Individual board members undertake important roles in relation to the safety and development of the school premises. While financial statements are
provided to the board regularly, it is recommended that these be certified on annual basis.

- The quality of the work of the in-school management team is very good. While the principal is newly appointed from outside the staff, she acknowledges the help and guidance of her predecessor and other staff members in ensuring a smooth transition of school leadership. She articulates a realistic vision for the school in relation to pupil welfare and educational standards. The principal is ably assisted by the special-duties teacher who fulfils her assigned duties very competently. In reviewing in-school management duties, it is recommended that prioritised aspects of curricular responsibility be delegated among the staff.

- The management of resources is very effective. The school building was recently constructed on a green-field site with funding from the Department’s devolved grant. Very high levels of educational resources have been acquired to promote teaching and learning. The school’s special needs assistant, part-time secretary and cleaner contribute significantly to the smooth running of the school.

- Communication and relationships between the school, the parents and the wider community are managed very successfully. The school building is regularly used by community organisations in the evenings. The parents’ association supports the work of the school through fundraising, assistance with school events and initiatives to encourage and support pupils’ reading skills.

- The quality of home-school partnership is very good. Almost all parents report satisfaction with the school, its welcome for parents and with the quality of information provided to them in school reports and at the parent-teacher meetings.

- The management of pupils is very good. During the evaluation, a very positive atmosphere was noted in the school and the pupils’ behaviour was exemplary. In response to the Inspectorate survey the majority of pupils stated that they liked coming to school and most pupils commented positively on their safe surroundings and fair treatment. The school could explore mechanisms to give pupils a greater say in how things are done in the school.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- The quality of the school planning and school self-evaluation process is commendable. The school plan reflects the particular context of the school and a system of continuous review has been promoted. While parents have been consulted in the review of some administrative policies, it is recommended that this consultation be facilitated for all future reviews.

- School self-evaluation has been initiated through the tracking of pupils’ results and the provision of some additional teaching supports. It is recommended that specific and measurable targets be set and reviewed annually to direct and assess the effectiveness of educational interventions.

- The implementation and impact of school planning and self-evaluation are very successful. The school plan guides the organisational operation of the school and its curricular plans impact positively on teachers’ planning. Classroom plans and monthly reports are comprehensive and very effective.
• 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 commendable. All teachers demonstrate very good classroom management skills and lessons are presented through use of a wide variety of appropriate teaching methodologies. In their responses to the questionnaires, most pupils state that their teachers explain topics clearly and that lessons are interesting. Teachers use resources, including information and communications technology (ICT), very effectively to engage pupils in their learning. Lesson content is differentiated appropriately for specific pupils according to their needs.

• Tá cáiliocht an teagaisc agus na foghlama agus gnóthachtáil na ndaltaí go maith sa Ghaeilge. Tugtar deiseanna éisteachta inmholta do na ndaltaí trí chaint an mhúinteora agus úsáid na ndlúthdhioscaí. Baintear dea-úsáid as achmhairní, cluichí cainte agus rainn chun foclóir na ndaltaí a shaibhriú. Go rialta, b'fhéidir duit na cumarsáide ag ag na ndaltaí a bhfocalrú nua a chleachtaidh i mbeirteanna agus i ngrúpaí. Cloistear Gaeilge neamhfoirmiúil ar chaighdeán inmholta uathu. Léann tromlach na ndaltaí go muinineach a fhocloir nua a chleachtadh i mbeirteanna agus i ng rúpaí. Cloistear Gaeilge neamhfoirmiúil ar chaighdeán inmholta uathu. Léann tromlach na ndaltaí go muinineach ach b'hfiú b'éim sa bhreis a leagan ar fhuaimniú agus tuiscint le daltaí áirithe a ranganna sinsearacha. Scriobhann na ndaltaí go maith sna seánraí éagsúla. Baineann na ndaltaí tairbhe agus taitneamh as raon filiochta a aithris.

• The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in Irish is good. Pupils afforded praiseworthy listening opportunities through use of CDs and teacher talk. Resources, language games and rhymes are used effectively to enrich pupils’ vocabulary. Pupils regularly have opportunities to communicate to practice new vocabulary in pairs and groups. They speak informal Irish of a praiseworthy standard. Most pupils read confidently but it would be worthwhile to emphasise diction and comprehension for specific pupils in the senior classes. Pupils write well in various genres. Pupils gain benefit and pleasure from reciting a range of poetry.

• The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in English is very good. Oral language skills are fostered purposefully and most pupils contribute confidently to class discussion. Teachers promote reading skills through phonological awareness approaches, reinforcement of relevant sight vocabulary and use of graded reading material. While overall reading standards are very good further exploration of a range of comprehension strategies would benefit some pupils. Writing skills are developed effectively and pupils engage purposefully with the writing process through drafting and editing their own work. They write in a variety of genres and the school promotes a neat cursive handwriting style. Teachers and pupils explore poetry effectively for enjoyment and understanding.

• The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in Mathematics is good. All strands of the curriculum are addressed equitably. Teaching approaches include very effective practice in relation to discovery learning, resource use, mathematical games and consistent use of agreed mathematical language. Comendable interventions are implemented to differentiate content for pupils with special educational needs. While many pupils engage with mathematical facts and recall mental mathematics successfully,
it is recommended that that a whole-school approach be agreed to improve pupils' speed and accuracy. Problem-solving strategies are taught incrementally and most pupils employ these strategies logically.

• The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in Science is very good. Teachers place commendable emphasis on developing pupils' skills through investigation, and designing and making. While all strands of the curriculum are addressed, the use of a two-year cycle for coverage of strand objectives would assist with the continuity and progression. Most pupils' responses to Inspectorate tasks indicate very good understanding of scientific concepts and procedures. The school's successful involvement in the Green Schools' and the Discover Primary Science programmes affirms and celebrates pupils' work in Science.

• The quality of assessment is commendable. All teachers maintain a range of observational and teacher-designed assessment information for a number of curriculum areas. Pupils' work is monitored consistently. Teachers use assessment for learning (AfL) techniques very effectively. Screening, diagnostic and standardised testing is undertaken regularly to provide teachers and parents with specific information on pupils' progress and learning needs.

6. Quality of Support for Pupils

• Pupils with special educational needs are afforded equitable access to the school and they participate in learning appropriate to their needs. Observational and assessment data are used very effectively to ensure early intervention and provision of appropriate supports.

• The quality of teaching approaches and interventions for pupils with special educational needs are very successful. Support teachers plan pupils' work conscientiously in consultation with classroom teachers. Targets in the individual profile and learning programmes (IPLPs) and the individual education plans (IEPs) are devised and reviewed collaboratively.

• Support teaching is very effective, involving use of appropriate methodologies and resources through the withdrawal and in-class models. The quality of outcomes and progression of pupils with special educational needs is commendable in relation to their ability levels.

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