An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

SN Fearghail Naofa
Killeagh, Co. Cork
Uimhir rolla: 17297U

Date of inspection: 24 March 2011
1. Introduction

St. Fergal's is a mixed national school and is situated in the village of Killeagh in East Cork. The school is under the patronage of the Apostolic Administrator of Cashel and Emly. Since the last school report was written in 2002 there has been considerable housing development in the area.

Current enrolment is 156 and this constitutes an increase of 60 pupils. 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 of management and parents are very supportive of the school.
- The principal is competent and inclusive and gives clear direction to the school.
- The quality of teaching throughout the school is good.
- The school is well resourced in information and communication technology (ICT), and the interactive white board was used productively and creatively by teachers to complement the learning.
- Pupils are courteous and eager for challenge and are making good progress in literacy.
- Whole-school planning processes in the school are very good.

The following main recommendations are made:

- Staff is advised to record standardised test results electronically and to analyse them on a whole-school basis, to aid differentiation within the mainstream setting and to devise additional learning programmes for those in need of further support.
- The school should consider broadening its range of early intervention strategies.

3. Quality of School Management

- The board of management is very supportive of the school and fulfils its role in ratifying policies and in ensuring all statutory policies are in place. It is planned to put these policies on the school website in the near future. A financial report is submitted routinely and the board is reminded to have this report certified externally. There is a strong commitment to maintaining a comfortable learning environment for pupils and the current priority is to complete the school building extension.
- The principal is proactive and inclusive and gives clear direction to the school. The principal welcomes input from staff and draws on the teachers’ strengths regularly in
developing policies. She seeks to develop a positive and interactive school climate where children are happy and valued.

- Duties are carried out by the in-school management team with due diligence and commitment. Responsibilities assigned to date include curricular, organisational and pastoral duties which are reviewed regularly. Of late, the review of curricular policies has been assigned to one post-holder. Management is asked to review this practice and promote instructional leadership among all post-holders. Targets identified in the school’s action plan are addressed systemically at the in-school management (ISM) meetings. The setting of an agenda at these meetings is recommended, together with the recording of key decisions.

- The parents are very active in fundraising and in supporting school events. The planting and maintenance of window boxes by parents add to the aesthetic appearance of the school's environs. Their generous contributions to curricular initiatives is acknowledged and praised, and parents’ support of instrumental play in Music is worthy of particular mention. Parents’ involvement to date in policy development is limited and staff is encouraged to consult regularly with the parent body to ensure the widest possible perspective. Results from parent questionnaires indicate parents are very pleased with the standard of care and education provided by the teachers to their children.

- Resources both physical and personnel are managed efficiently. Staff meetings are held each term and they are very much policy driven. However, the circulation of an agenda in advance of meetings and the recording of key decisions are recommended. Staff is consulted regularly in the allocation of classes each year. Teachers commendably exchange classes in a number of curricular areas in accordance with particular strengths and interests. The school building, built in 1940, is well maintained. Due to rapid and continuing growth in pupil numbers, the school now requires additional classrooms and resource rooms. For a number of years now, the school’s general purpose hall has been utilised as a classroom. Entrance areas, corridors and classrooms are decorated attractively with displays of charts, pupils’ work and photographs. With the recent purchase of laptops, the school is well resourced in information and communication technology (ICT).

- In the course of the evaluation, pupils were courteous and eager to learn, they were respectful of staff and their peers. Pupils’ needs are well catered for through a variety of sporting and musical activities. The pupils’ contributions to local events and their entertaining input at the local day care centre are admirable. The results of pupil questionnaires point to a school where the pupils are content and pleased with their progress both socially and academically. The school is congratulated on its very high attendance rate.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- A comprehensive suite of curricular and organisational plans have been devised to guide the work of the school in an informed manner. The plans are devised initially by staff and are ratified subsequently by the board. Parents are consulted as to the contents of certain plans. However, a formal process of consultation would be beneficial to ensure the widest range of perspectives.

- The teachers plan conscientiously and these plans are informed by the whole-school planning process. Plans include useful lists of poetry and rhyme and an outline of mathematical language for each class unit. Certain key organisational policies are also maintained, in particular the child protection policies. Monthly reports are recorded as
required. Teachers are asked to consider alternative methods of recording and filing the monthly progress records to promote continuity and spiral learning throughout the school.

- The teachers have focussed on a number of management, planning and curriculum policies as part of the school’s self-evaluation processes. Action plans have been devised and are utilised effectively in the ongoing development of future planning and practice.

- 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

- Overall the quality of teaching throughout the school is good. An examination of scores attained in standardised tests indicates pupils are making steady progress in numeracy and, in literacy, good progress in accordance with age and ability. The practice of taking a class into a small staffroom for Mathematics is not conducive to sound practice and should be reviewed by staff.

- In some classes, the vocabulary in Irish is taught directly with the aid of concrete material, and poetry and verse are woven skilfully into the lessons. Effective use is made of repetition and choral recitation to consolidate sentence formation. The language is developed productively with pair-work and fluency is encouraged throughout the lessons. In certain classes, a greater emphasis on the teaching of poetry, on group work and on the use of complete sentences is advised. In certain classes, the pupils’ proficiency is developed through pre-prepared drama which the pupils learn and practise subsequently. The pupils compose their own narrative based on the phrases they have learned. This is very good practice and links conversation and writing productively. The further development of this good practice throughout the school is recommended. Functional writing was much in evidence in pupils’ copybooks. There is a need now to develop creative and narrative writing further.

- In English, a wide range of rhyme and verse is used to good effect to develop pupils’ oral language development. Oral discussion also features regularly through selected reading activity. Pupils are afforded regular opportunities to express their thoughts, feelings and ideas through circle time and through Drama. A range of poetry is recited with confidence and expression. The Jolly Phonics programme is used productively and imaginatively to
develop the pupils’ skills. Effective use is made of the interactive white-board to complement the learning process. Indeed, the use of ICT in infants as an aid to the emergent reader and to subsequent letter formation is worthy of particular praise. A range of reading material that includes big books, text and the novel is exploited successfully to develop the pupils’ reading skills. Pair-work, selected reading strategies together with an emphasis on skill development are examples of effective teaching. Overall pupils read with confidence and expression. Libraries are well-stocked with a good balance of graded books, fiction and non-fiction material.

- In general, a good balance is achieved in functional and creative writing activities. Pupils have opportunities to write in a variety of genres across a number of curricular areas. Pupils write their own poetry and engagement in project work is a pleasurable and productive experience for pupils. Overall, a good standard of writing is achieved in copybooks and written work is monitored systematically by teachers with positive developmental comments. Notwithstanding this good practice, teachers are advised to give further attention to free writing activity together with an increased emphasis on developing good writing routines in promoting good standards of penmanship.

- An emphasis on the language of Mathematics, on practical experience, on group-work, on pair-work and on co-operative tasks were observed in many lessons and this work was well organised. There was good consolidation of learning through discussion, through mental arithmetic exercises and through the practical application of concepts. Concrete material and the interactive white board were utilised effectively to complement the learning and to develop pupils’ understanding. Pupils displayed good skills in problem-solving. A good standard of recording was in evidence in pupils’ copybooks.

- Pupils’ work in the Visual Arts is celebrated regularly. A good balance is achieved across all strands of the Visual Arts’ curriculum. The work of the artist is exploited successfully in making art and in looking and responding activity. There was evidence of linkage to a variety of other curricular areas. Technique and skill development are referred to consistently by teachers. Helpful stimuli were provided at the beginning of lessons to encourage creativity and imagination. The use of ICT was used to good effect. Talk and discussion featured regularly and pupils were afforded opportunities frequently to manipulate and investigate materials at the beginning of lessons. The maintenance of art portfolios in a number of classes is good practice and provides a useful mechanism in assessing pupils’ development and progression.

- The teachers use a variety of assessment modes that include teacher-devised tasks and standardised testing, among others, in assessing pupils’ learning. Staff is advised to record standardised test results electronically and to analyse them on a whole-school basis to aid differentiation within the mainstream setting and to devise additional learning programmes for those in need of further support.

6. Quality of Support for Pupils

- The teachers in the special educational needs’ (SEN) setting demonstrate a clear commitment to addressing the needs of the children in their care. The process of devising individual educational plans is inclusive. There was evidence in many cases of specific target setting matched to the identified needs of the pupil. Targets are reviewed twice a year and together with further assessment inform further intervention. Individual support provided to pupils is good. An efficient filing system is in place with a file on each individual child maintained. Support in the main is through withdrawal, either in groups or individually. There is evidence of some in-class support through a ten week shared
reading programme. Staff is advised to establish a greater balance between withdrawal and in-class interventions. The practice of deploying resource teachers to teach reading and Mathematics to specific classes should be reviewed. Staff is advised to explore and develop further early intervention strategies.

- A variety of practices is exercised in short-term planning processes in the area of special needs education. A shorter timeframe needs to be identified in teachers planning that will facilitate the identification of planned activity together with a system of recording the progress of pupils. In conjunction with established interventions in literacy and in numeracy, a variety of complementary programmes such as gardening, typing and cookery have been introduced to assist pupils’ learning and development. The special needs assistants are attentive to and supportive of pupils in classrooms and during recreation periods. The work environment for the SEN team is inadequate, with five teachers operating out of one classroom. Additional learning support/resource rooms are needed and the board has applied for funding to provide more suitable accommodation.

Published, January 2012
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, staff and wider school community found the Whole School Evaluation to be a positive and informative process and wish to thank the reporting inspectors for their positive comments and feedback and their kindness and courteous towards the pupils and staff.

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

In order to alleviate the limited work space for the SEN team, a room has been refurbished and is now operating as a multi-sensory room which will be of huge benefit to children with special needs.

The results of all standardised tests are now recorded electronically and analysed collectively by the whole staff.

At the end of each financial year, the financial report is to be audited externally to facilitate a more formal process of consultation with parents regarding policy making, parents will be circulated regarding key issues involved in all policies and their views and opinions ascertained.

The parents association will also see their meetings as a forum to discuss same.

We are in the process of introducing literacy & numeracy hours throughout the school to enable the children to experience small group station teaching in the areas of phonics, writing, spelling, reading & oral language in addition to mathematical facts. Concepts reasoning and problem solving.