Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

St. Felim’s National School
Cavan, Co. Cavan
Uimhir rolla: 17326B

Date of inspection: 9 May 2011
1. **Introduction**

St. Felim’s National School, under the patronage of the Catholic Bishop of Kilmore, is situated in Cavan town. It caters for boys from second to sixth class and also accommodates two co-educational classes for pupils with specific speech and language disorder. The school which currently has 189 pupils participates in Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS), the action plan of the Department of Education and Skills to support educational inclusion. While strategies have been implemented to promote good pupil attendance, there remains a significant number of pupils whose attendance is poor. It is recommended that additional strategies be developed and implemented consistently to address this issue. The board of management 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 reflective principal provides very effective leadership.
- The diligent staff embrace change in a positive way.
- The board of management supports the school in a competent manner.
- Positive pupil behaviour is in evidence within an inclusive, affirming learning culture.
- The quality of school planning and self-review is very good.
- Provision for pupils with special educational needs (SEN) is of a very high quality.
- The quality of teaching and learning in physical education is very good.
- Information and communication technology (ICT) is used effectively as a teaching and learning tool.
- The quality of pupils’ independent writing skills in English is praiseworthy.

The following **main recommendations** are made:

- Additional strategies should be developed and implemented consistently to improve the attendance of a significant number of pupils.
- Team-teaching initiatives should be further developed so that pupils’ literacy and numeracy skills are enhanced through the provision of structured, differentiated programmes.
- Closer alignment between curricular duties and evolving school priorities together with formal in-school management meetings would strengthen curriculum leadership.
3. Quality of School Management

- The board of management fulfils its duties very effectively. Members share their individual skills purposefully to support the development of the school and engage proactively in policy formulation and review.

- The recently appointed principal provides very effective leadership. He works collaboratively to cultivate an affirming progressive learning environment. His educational vision is reflected in his sustained emphasis on improving pupils’ learning outcomes together with a strong commitment to meeting their pastoral needs. The deputy principal provides valuable support to the principal and contributes significantly to school management and development.

- Members of the in-school management team fulfil their duties with commendable conscientiousness. Closer alignment between curricular duties and evolving school priorities together with formal in-school management meetings would enhance the impact of curriculum planning. The diligent staff embrace change in a positive way to facilitate school development.

- The management of pupils is very good with the consistent implementation of the school's carefully planned code of behaviour. Pupils behaved courteously and cooperatively during the period of evaluation. Analysis of pupil questionnaires, distributed during the evaluation, indicates positive pupil attitudes towards school.

- The quality of the management of resources is good. School facilities are clean, attractive and well maintained.

- An industrious work ethic and commitment to the caring ethos of the school is evident among teaching and ancillary staff.

- Satisfactory arrangements are in place to promote communication within the school community. Parental feedback indicates high levels of satisfaction with the educational provision for their children. The hardworking parents association support the school through a range of valuable initiatives. Creditable links have been established with other schools and agencies within the local community.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- The quality of the school planning and school self-evaluation process is very good. A suitable range of curricular and organisational policies has been developed collaboratively which reflect this school's context. Clearly delineated action plans support the implementation of appropriate programmes. Systematic analysis of assessment data ensures evidence-based school review regarding the attainment of targets identified. Data is also used purposefully to prioritise future targets.

- An effective whole-school approach to classroom planning has been adopted. While monthly progress reports are maintained further consideration should be given to maximising their use within the school self-review process.

- 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 in this school is good. While positive learning outcomes are evident for some pupils in each class the learning attainments for a significant number of pupils show scope for development. A suitable range of teaching methodologies was effectively employed in the lessons observed and it is evident that collaborative group work has been successfully established throughout the school. The innovative and regular use of ICT to support teaching and learning is commended. An extensive range of assessment strategies is effectively used by staff to inform teaching and monitor learning.

- A positive attitude towards Irish is evident in the school. There is a variation in the quality of teaching and learning throughout the school but overall it is satisfactory. The majority of pupils can construct simple sentences independently in a variety of contexts. Senior pupils' appropriate use of verbs is praiseworthy. Drama is used as an effective communicative strategy. It is recommended that this good practice be extended throughout the school. Suitable activities are organised to develop pupils' listening skills. The majority of pupils read simple texts with understanding although there remains scope to develop some aspects of their reading and independent writing skills.

- The quality of teaching and learning in some aspects of English is good. A cohesive whole-school implementation of the First Steps programme in language, reading and writing is proving successful. The spectrum of pupils' learning outcomes ranges from poor to very good. The development of their oral language skills would be further enhanced by sustained emphasis on specific language content and systematic monitoring of learning outcomes. Novels and supplementary readers are used purposefully throughout the school. However, it is recommended that a more extensive range of reading material, aligned to pupils' instructional levels, be used to underpin differentiated programmes. The quality of pupils' independent writing skills in a variety of genres is praiseworthy.

- The quality of teaching in Mathematics is good overall with some excellent practice and learning outcomes noted. While many pupils are achieving appropriate standards there remains a need to improve the learning outcomes of a significant cohort of pupils. Effective differentiated team-teaching has been successfully established in some classes. It is recommended that this assessment-based practice be extended further so that pupils receive regular opportunities to consolidate their application of concepts and skills in a variety of structured contexts.
• The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in Physical Education (PE) is very good. Pupils demonstrate noteworthy skills in a range of strands. Teachers’ enthusiasm for PE together with their competent skills base contributes to the effectiveness of the lessons. Pupils receive appropriate opportunities to participate in a range of co-curricular and extra-curricular sporting activities.

6. Quality of Support for Pupils

• The very good quality of provision for pupils with special educational needs reflects the school’s inclusive and affirming ethos. Support for pupils from the travelling community is provided in an integrated manner. The quality of support for newcomer pupils is good. Further development of pupils’ cognitive language will enhance provision.

• The special education support team is commended for the ongoing analysis of assessment data at whole-school and individual pupil level to inform the design and review of programmes. Informative individual education plans (IEPs) have been devised to support the implementation of appropriate programmes for pupils. In some instances, however, targets should be delineated more specifically and pupils’ progress monitored more carefully.

• Lessons are well structured and teachers employ a suitable range of strategies and resources that effectively address pupils’ prioritised needs. Some laudable examples of structured intervention programmes have been put in place to develop specific skills. Further development of team-teaching models to enhance pupils’ learning outcomes is now recommended. The development of pupils’ social skills is undertaken in a competent manner and should now be extended.

• Provision for pupils with specific speech and language disorder is very good. Teachers work collaboratively with speech therapists to ensure the incremental development of pupils’ receptive and expressive language skills. Pupils are actively engaged in a broad range of learning activities commensurate with their abilities. The integration of pupils with their peers is carefully managed.

• An arrangement is currently in place whereby a teacher allocated to this school supports pupils with special needs in a local post-primary school.

• The home-school-community liaison programme has successfully developed some supportive linkages between the home, the school and selected community agencies. A more targeted approach should now be developed to optimise the benefits of the home-school visit. Parental involvement in the education of their children has been fruitfully initiated through programmes such as ‘Maths for Fun’ and a variety of courses which provide opportunities for the development of parents’ own skills. The wide range of activities organised through the School Completion Programme (SCP) complements the schools’ pastoral care programme for pupils with identified needs.

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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 St. Felim’s N.S. would like to thank the inspectors for making the inspection an affirming, positive experience. We are pleased that the main strengths of the work of the school were identified and that the commitment and dedication of all members of the school community was affirmed. We would like to thank both inspectors for the courteous and professional manner in which they carried out the inspection.

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 Board of Management acknowledges the recommendations made in the report. The Board in consultation with the Principal and staff, has prioritised implementation of the recommendations as part of our action plan. Additional strategies have been developed including a new Computerised Student Management System and more active attendance tracking strategies. Team teaching and numeracy and literacy initiatives are being prioritised. In-school management structures are being formulated to strengthen curriculum leadership in our school. This work is in progress.