Whole School Evaluation REPORT

St Brendan’s NS
Rathcoole, Mallow Co. Cork
Uimhir rolla: 17362F

Date of inspection: 21 September 2011
1. Introduction

St Brendan’s school is a five-teacher co-educational primary school under the patronage of the Catholic Bishop of Kerry. It is situated 8 km north-east of Millstreet, Co. Cork. Enrolment in the school has increased in line with the construction of housing developments in the area. Attendance levels are commendable. The school building was extended and refurbished in recent years and facilities are of a very high standard. 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.

The whole-school evaluation focussed on the quality of teaching and learning in Irish, English, Mathematics and Drama.

2. Summary of Findings and Recommendations for Further Development

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

- This dedicated board of management is highly supportive of the work of the school.
- The school building provides a safe and attractive learning environment for pupils.
- The diligence and commitment of the principal is highly commendable. In her leadership role, the principal is supported by a dedicated staff team.
- The standards of attainment in literacy and numeracy are very good.
- The management of pupils is very effective and positive relationships are cultivated between teachers and pupils. Pupils are very well behaved and engage enthusiastically in learning activities.
- Parents are very supportive of the work of the school and indicate high levels of satisfaction with the quality of education on offer.

The following main recommendations are made:

- It is recommended that further emphasis is placed on the development of pupils’ oral language in Irish and English.
- It is recommended that special education provision be reviewed in light of recent and impending changes to the resource allocation in the school.
- It is recommended that pupils are facilitated to partake in all activities that are conducted during the school day.
- It is recommended that the parents’ association review their functioning procedures in accordance with the best practice guidelines published by the National Parents Council (NPC).
3. Quality of School Management

- The quality of work of the board of management is very good and they are commended particularly for their proactive role in the development and maintenance of the school building and facilities. The board adopts a range of effective functioning procedures. All members have attended training for their respective roles. In reviewing curriculum implementation, it is recommended that the board ensures that all activities delivered during the school day are made available to all pupils.

- The principal of the school is highly committed to her managerial role and she fulfils a broad range of duties in an effective manner. She leads and manages the whole-school planning process competently. She is ably supported by a dedicated teaching staff. An enthusiastic and capable deputy principal has been recently appointed in the school. Part-time staff are employed to carry out secretarial and caretaking duties.

- The issuing of newsletters promotes regular communication with the wider school community. In general, parents are supportive of the work of the school and have expressed high levels of satisfaction with the education being provided. It is recommended that the parents’ association review its functioning procedures in accordance with best practice guidelines issued by the NPC.

- The management of pupils in this school is very good. Pupils are well behaved, enthusiastic and participate keenly in all learning activities. Formalising opportunities to incorporate the pupils’ perspective into school discourse on the operation of the school is advised.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- A broad and comprehensive range of administrative and curriculum policies have been formulated. Clear procedures have been established to ensure that plans are subjected to ongoing review and development in accordance with the emerging needs of the school. Extending current structures to facilitate greater parental involvement in the development and review of school policies is advised.

- All teachers plan conscientiously and a whole-school approach to classroom planning has been established. Further emphasis on content objectives in teacher planning would serve to enhance the impact of planning on the quality of teaching and learning. A review of the approach to maintaining monthly progress records is advised.

- Teachers are commended for their work to date in reviewing the quality of curriculum implementation in the school. It is recommended that this work be further developed to incorporate a formal and systematic approach to self evaluation.

- 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 and learning is commendable. Carefully structured lessons were observed and a variety of effective methodologies were employed in classrooms. Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is used competently in some settings to enhance curriculum delivery.

- Pupils’ progress is assessed regularly using a variety of approaches. Assessment data guides the teaching and learning programme and informs decisions regarding pupils’ referral to learning support. However, there is scope for a deeper analysis of assessment data to inform greater differentiation in learning programmes. The development of a whole-school plan on assessment is recommended. Pupils are provided with regular opportunities to work in groups on a range of collaborative and co-operative learning activities.

- A positive attitude towards Irish is fostered among pupils. Skills of listening and understanding are well developed and a range of poetry rhymes and songs are taught purposefully. Story is skilfully used in some classrooms to promote pupils’ language experience. It is advised that this good practice be extended throughout the school. While vocabulary and phrases are taught systematically, it is recommended that pupils are provided with greater opportunities to use the language in communicative contexts. It is advised also that the teaching of reading and writing be reviewed to provide a broader literary experience for pupils. In this context, the range of Irish reading material needs to be extended.

- All teachers work conscientiously to develop pupils’ oral skills in English. In some settings, emphasis is placed on the development of identified oral language skills through discrete provision. It is recommended that a whole-school approach to developing discrete oral skills be adopted. In general, pupils’ appreciation of poetry is actively nurtured. A structured approach to phonological awareness impacts positively on pupils’ literacy development and the school adopts a multi-dimensional approach to spelling, which incorporates a variety of contexts. Pupils read a good variety of texts and reading attainment is very good. Well-presented samples of pupils’ writing in a variety of genres were noted.

- In general, the overall quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in Mathematics is very good. Mathematical activities are underpinned by purposeful use of concrete manipulatives and appropriate emphasis is placed on the development of mathematical language. Pupils demonstrate a good understanding of key mathematical concepts. Problem solving strategies are well developed in the senior classes. In some settings greater attention to developing mental strategies and procedures is advised.
• Story is used to good effect to provide a fictional lens through which a number of the elements of drama are developed. Teachers display a competence in the use of a variety of drama strategies particularly in developing pupils’ understanding of role and character. In the middle and senior classes, consideration should be given to using factual reports from history or current affairs as a stimulus for dramatic activity. This would contribute to pupils’ understanding of a broad range of national and international topics.

6. Quality of Support for Pupils

• Supplementary teaching is provided to pupils in a positive and supportive environment. A wide range of learning support resources are available and are used appropriately. Detailed education plans are prepared. Further work on refining and focusing some of the learning targets in these plans for each instructional term is advised. Records detailing pupils’ progress should be maintained. While initial work on early intervention and in-class support has been initiated, further development of these models of support is required. Due to recent changes in resource hour allocations, it is advised that the current clustering arrangements be re-examined with a view to achieving the most streamlined and efficient delivery of service within established constraints.

• The service of a full-time special needs assistant (SNA) makes a valuable contribution to the inclusion of children with special needs in the school. A whole-school policy detailing the role of the SNA would further enhance provision in this area.

Published, April 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 and staff of St. Brendan’s N.S. welcome the findings of our recent W.S.E. We wish to thank the Inspectorate for their professional, thorough & courteous approach. We are very happy with the recognition of the high quality of teaching & learning in our school. The Board would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the hard work & dedication of all members of our school community. Rath Dé oraibh go Léir.

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 notes that Circular 7/12 resolves the anomalies surrounding the clustering arrangements regarding Special Needs provision.