An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Scoil Naomh Colmcille
Durrow, Tullamore, County Offaly
Uimhir rolla: 17508H

Date of inspection: 22 November 2010
1. Introduction

Scoil Colmcille is a rural, eight-teacher school in Durrow, County Offaly. It has a current enrolment of 215 pupils. Under the patronage of the Bishop of Meath, the school promotes a Catholic ethos which is exemplified in its caring, welcoming and inclusive atmosphere. Attendance rates are very good. 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 is commended for the high standard of maintenance of the building and recreation areas.
- Management and staff work together effectively to provide a happy, safe, caring and inclusive learning environment for the pupils.
- The school enjoys and values the support and co-operation of parents and the local community
- Pupils are well behaved and courteous and they work co-operatively with teachers and one another

The following main recommendations are made:

- A review of school planning is recommended. Curricular policies should be revised and contextualised to the needs and circumstances of the school so that they provide effective guidance for teaching and learning. Organisational policies should be further developed in accordance with legislative and other requirements and key policies should be communicated effectively to parents.
- Curriculum leadership which focuses on systematic improvement in teaching and learning in the school should be prioritised. This should include developing whole-school approaches to the use of active methodologies, the analysis of assessment data to inform differentiation and the implementation of systems to ensure progression and continuity as pupils advance through the school.
- The duties attached to the school’s middle management posts should be revised with a view to ensuring that they address the current needs of the school and that they include an appropriate combination of curricular, pastoral and organisational responsibilities.
- An annual written report on the educational progress of each pupil in the school should be issued to parents.
3. Quality of School Management

- The board of management is properly constituted. It meets regularly and an agreed report of these meetings is issued. Accounts are presented at each meeting and are certified annually. The board is to be commended for the modernisation and enhancement of school facilities and for the maintenance of the school building and recreational areas to a very high standard. The board supports and encourages the professional development of staff. While it reviews and ratifies school policies it is recommended that the board should become more actively involved in policy development and in the key areas of teaching and learning. All policies should be signed and dated by the chairperson on ratification by the board and a review date should be included. Relevant policies should be made easily available to parents via the school’s website.

- The principal enjoys the confidence and support of the teaching staff, the board of management and the parents. He is a visible presence throughout the school and works hard to create a happy, positive and welcoming atmosphere. He demonstrates a commitment to the Irish language and regularly uses it as a working language in the school.

- The in-school management team comprises three post-holders. While each individual team member shows dedication and diligence in carrying out the various responsibilities that are presently allocated, an immediate review of these posts is recommended in order to address the current needs of the school. An annual review is necessary in the future to ensure that assigned duties continue to be aligned to the school’s emerging needs. Post-holders should enter into contracts with the board and post-holders should have an appropriate balance of curricular, organisational and pastoral duties in accordance with Department guidelines as stated in Circular 07/2003.

- The school is well resourced and classrooms provide clean, bright, stimulating and well-ordered learning environments. Provision for information and communication technology (ICT) is commendable.

- An active parents’ association supports the work of the school through fundraising activities and through the organisation of various social events for the school community. Parents are kept well-informed about school activities through newsletters issued by the parents’ association and by the school. It is recommended that key policies and procedures are communicated effectively to all parents. It is further recommended that an annual written report on the progress of each pupil in the school be issued to parents.

- The quality of pupil management is very good. Pupils show good attitudes to learning, are attentive and co-operative and questionnaire responses indicate that the majority like coming to school.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- While policies are available in a variety of organisational and administrative areas, the overall quality of school planning is fair. Certain policies that are required by legislation or by the Department of Education and Skills (DES) are absent. Curricular policies have been developed for each subject area. It is recommended that these be revised so that they provide effective guidance for teachers on content and methodologies and ensure continuity and progression in the pupils’ learning as they move from class to class. The inclusion in relevant school policies of an inventory of educational resources, and information on availability and access, would be useful for all teachers.
• The school is at an early stage of engagement in school self-evaluation and an action plan has been developed for the current school year. The school is advised to clearly define the targets to be achieved, to list specific actions to achieve those targets and to create a reasonable timescale for their realisation.

• All teachers provide long and short-term planning covering all curricular areas. A range of templates is in use. Monthly progress is recorded in a variety of formats. In their current form, these approaches do not provide evidence that learning outcomes are being planned for or achieved. It is recommended that a common approach to planning which is closely aligned to the curriculum and which facilitates the recording of learning outcomes be introduced.

Child protection policy and procedures

• 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 good. Teachers provide orderly, attractive learning environments. The quality of teacher-pupil interaction is good and pupils’ responses to questionnaires indicate that most enjoy their learning experiences and find their lessons interesting. Lessons observed were generally well structured and well managed. In some subjects a good variety of methodologies was used and there was a good balance between whole-class teaching and opportunities for pupils to work in pairs and small groups. In other cases, however, there was scope for more pupil participation in practical, interactive tasks. Illustrative materials were used well to reinforce pupils’ understanding. While interactive whiteboards were used in almost all lessons, more judicious use of this technology is advised in some cases. It is recommended that teachers provide for greater breadth and balance in the programmes taught in some subject areas and that continuity and progression in the pupils’ learning as they move up through the school is ensured. Provision of a programme to challenge more-able pupils and the greater use of structured play as a vehicle for learning and for language development in the infant classes are also recommended.

• A range of screening and standardised tests is administered and all teachers have access to the relevant data for their classes. Results of standardised tests are communicated to parents of pupils in first and fourth classes. It is recommended that records of pupil achievement in standardised tests be used to provide a profile of whole-school achievement in English and Mathematics and also to track the progress of individual pupils as they move through the school.

• Sonraíodh dea-chleachtas i dteagasc na Gaeilge i gcead de na seomrai ranga. Ar an iomlán, áfach, tá caighdeán an teagaisc agus na foghlaíma measartha... I rith na meastóireachtachta, bhí na dtalai á thumadh sa Ghaeilge le linn an cheachta i mbeagnach gach rang. Lean na hoidí céimeanna cuí sa tréimhsé réamhchumarsáide den teagasc. Baineadh úsáid sciliúil as obair bheire i mbeagnach gach rang chun foclóir
Good practice in the teaching of Irish was observed in some classrooms. Overall, however, the standard of teaching and learning is fair. During the evaluation pupils were immersed in Irish during the lessons in almost every class. Generally, the teachers followed appropriate steps in the pre-communicative phase of the teaching. Skilful use was made of pair work in almost every class to practise vocabulary and language structures. The pupils were able to recite a range of suitable poetry from memory. Even though a few of the teachers succeeded in encouraging continuous conversation from pupils, lack of progress and continuity was observed as pupils move from class to class. In the middle and senior classes pupils did not have a store of words and their fluency and self-confidence were not as strong as one would expect. It is recommended that the staff lays out a structured programme for every class level. It is also recommended that strategies are implemented to ensure that every teacher is able to speak Irish confidently and reasonably accurately in order to give good example to pupils.

The quality of teaching and learning in English is good. A range of activities is provided for the development of word-attack skills and attention is paid to the development of phonological awareness. More emphasis on developing onset and rime is recommended, however. Commendably, in most classes pupils are grouped according to their levels of reading ability. Dictionary skills are well developed in the senior classes and opportunities for focussed reading are provided. Class libraries are well stocked. Pupils engage in a variety of writing activities, both functional and creative, and some good preparatory work for writing was observed. While some commercial schemes are used for oral language development it is recommended that every teacher uses the curriculum as a basis for their oral language programme and that each class timetable includes dedicated time for discrete oral language. Poetry is used well and pupils enjoy reciting poems and rhymes as well as writing their own poetry. Further work on responding to poetry is recommended.

The quality of teaching and learning in Mathematics is good. In a majority of classrooms opportunities were provided for pupils to develop their understanding through working with suitable materials in pairs or small groups. It is recommended, however, that the school invest in a wider variety of materials to support learning in Mathematics. When questioned, pupils generally demonstrated a good understanding of relevant concepts and an ability to perform age-appropriate number operations.

The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in Drama is good. Elements of drama are explored through a range of activities at each class level. Most classes have signed drama contracts on display. Drama activities are managed well in most classrooms and a variety of drama strategies and conventions are used. Opportunities are provided to explore feelings and to develop a sense of empathy. Some reference is made to the Drama curriculum in a few classroom plans and some of the lessons observed were based on the curriculum. It is recommended that this good practice be developed in order to ensure progression and development in the subject as pupils advance through the school. As reflecting on drama is an integral part of the process, it is
recommended that opportunities are provided for pupils to engage in post-drama
discussion to clarify and consolidate the learning.

6. Quality of Supports for Pupils

- Support teaching for pupils with special educational needs is provided on both a
withdrawal and in-class support basis. Both teachers demonstrate good levels of
commitment to the pupils and have established positive and caring relationships with
them. Learning environments are attractive and stimulating and good use is made of a
range of resources to enhance learning. There is evidence of good communication
between the class teachers and the support team. Two special-needs assistants cater for
the specific care needs of assigned pupils.

- Individualised programmes of work have been prepared and in some cases these are
shared with parents and other relevant personnel. It is recommended that specific,
measurable learning targets be identified in all individual and group learning programmes
and that planning and recording of work in all cases be presented in an accessible
manner. It is further recommended that the school’s learning support policy be revised
with a view to providing more guidance for all regarding the use of in-class support to
ensure that it is meeting pupils’ needs effectively.

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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, Parents Association, staff and children of Scoil Cholmchille, Durrow wish to thank the DES Inspectorate for the WSE report provided.

We are pleased that the report acknowledges the spirit of co-operation that permeates the school community, the safe, happy, caring and inclusive learning environment, the well-maintained and cheerful building and classrooms and above all the well–behaved and courteous children who attend Scoil Naomh Colmcille.

We are pleased that the Inspectorate acknowledges that the Principal enjoys the confidence and support of the entire school community and works hard to create a positive and welcoming atmosphere in the school.

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 policies referred to as missing, namely; Induction of New Teachers, Sexual Harassment, Gender Equality, Celebrating Inter-culturalism, Records Management and Post-holder Review have been added to our administration portfolio.

An action plan to examine the remaining recommendations is in place and progress will be monitored and reviewed by Staff and Board of Management at regular intervals.

While every teacher has always had fortnightly, monthly and yearly schemes in place, clarification has been sought from the Inspectors as to their preferred format for monthly reporting.

Following a review of our reporting procedures we had considered that an oral report to parents was in the best interest of the children. As a result of the recommendations of the Inspectorate annual report cards will now be issued for each pupil.

Results of standardised tests will now be used to provide a profile of whole-school achievement in English and Mathematics. To date we have tracked the progress of children at each class level as they moved through the school. We will further develop this now by maintaining individual pupil tracker cards.

A booklet containing key policies has been provided to all new parents this year and will be done so on an ongoing basis.