Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

St Michael’s National School
Cloughjordan, Co. Tipperary
Uimhir rolla: 17543J

Date of inspection: 20 September 2012
1. Introduction

St Michael's NS is a mainstream, co-educational school situated in the town of Cloughjordan, Co. Tipperary. It is a Catholic school under the patronage of the Killaloe Diocese. The school has a staffing of four mainstream class teachers and one learning support teacher. A resource teacher who is based in Kildangan NS provides ten hours resource teaching time per week in this school. The school also has the services of two part-time special-needs assistants. The attendance of the majority of pupils is good.

This whole-school evaluation focused on the quality of teaching and learning in Irish, English, Mathematics and Science. 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 accommodation and resources in the school are of a high standard.
- A very good working relationship has been established between parents, staff, pupils and the board of management.
- The principal and staff are committed to the provision of a high quality educational experience for all the pupils.
- A committed and enthusiastic in-school management team discharges its duties in a professional manner.
- The quality of learning and teaching in Mathematics is very good.
- The school's provision for pupils with special education needs is of a good standard.

The following main recommendations are made:

- The parents' association should consider affiliating to the National Parents' Council.
- Intervention programmes such as differentiated reading programmes should be targeted at pupils in infant and junior classes to ensure that the literacy needs of each pupil at that level are appropriately met.
- The school should consider implementing a more structured approach to the teaching of writing in all classes.
- It is recommended that additional opportunities be provided for pupils to engage in planning their own fair tests and experiments in Science.

3. Quality of School Management

- The board of management provides committed and effective leadership to the school. The board is properly constituted and it meets regularly. Minutes of meetings are maintained and school accounts are certified on an annual basis. Some board members have attended training and it is envisaged that other members will also avail of training when it becomes available. The board engages in policy review and ratification on an on-
going basis. Some of the current priorities include the finalisation of the building project and the further development of amenities in the school yard.

- The principal and the deputy principal work collaboratively to ensure the provision of a quality educational experience for the pupils in the school. The in-school management team in the school works collaboratively with the teachers and staff in the creation of a supportive working environment in which all teachers share a sense of responsibility and commitment to the school.

- The board manages its resources very well. The school building has been extended and the accommodation is now of a very high standard. A wide range of supportive teaching and learning resources is utilised effectively to support teaching and learning.

- The management of relations and communication with the school community is of a very good standard. Parents are regularly informed of their children’s progress and good home-school communications systems are in place in the school. The parents’ association is highly supportive of the work of the school and commented particularly on the positive atmosphere evident in the school. Parents’ responses to the questionnaires distributed during the evaluation process indicate high to very high levels of satisfaction with the school. Parents support and participate in the life of the school in a planned and purposeful manner. It is recommended that consideration be given to the advantages of the parents’ association becoming affiliated to the National Parents’ Council.

- The management of pupils is of a very good standard. Common expectations of behaviour are applied consistently across the school. Pupils are facilitated to participate in a wide range of extracurricular activities. Pupils, in their responses to questionnaires issued, express very high satisfaction with the school. They would, however, welcome increased opportunities to engage in group work and to use computers. It is recommended that the school facilitate the setting up of a student council in order to ensure that the children’s voice is heard.

Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- The whole-school plan is well organised and contains a comprehensive range of curriculum plans and organisational policies which are of a good standard. It is envisioned that the school web site will be updated in the near future and that this could facilitate the effective communication of the relevant school policies to the wider school community. The school has developed a strategic plan for the next three years and it is the school’s intention to engage in reflective and systematic school self-evaluation processes which will have the explicit purpose of improving the quality of pupils’ experiences and standards of attainment in literacy and numeracy.

- All teachers prepare systematically for the delivery of a broad and balanced curriculum to the pupils. All teachers maintain monthly progress records. These reports could be utilised more effectively to monitor and evaluate the curriculum delivered and to ensure continuity and progression between class levels.

- Confirmation was provided that the board of management has formally adopted the Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-primary Schools without modification and that the school is compliant with the requirements of the Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools.
5. Quality of Teaching, Learning and Pupil Achievement

- The quality of teaching and learning is of a good to very good standard. Most of the lessons observed were based on clear teaching objectives. Classrooms were very well organised with supportive displays of illustrative materials and pupils’ work. The lessons were well-paced and concepts and skills were clearly developed. In most lessons observed, a wide range of teaching approaches and strategies was employed. It is evident that pupils’ learning is incrementally developed and individual support is provided for pupils experiencing difficulties. Support teachers work collaboratively with class teachers to provide well planned and differentiated learning experiences for pupils.

- Deantar iarraidh go bhfuil don Ghaeilge a chothú sna rangséimse agus a bheidh in ann na ndaltaí a pholnadh le feiceáil, agus a bheidh a chuid duine in ann a pholnadh le feiceáil. Deantar iarraidh go bhfuil a ghníomhaíochtaí san Ghaeilge a chriúint in ann na ndaltaí a pholnadh le feiceáil, agus a bheidh a ghníomhaíochtaí san Ghaeilge a chriúint in ann na ndaltaí a pholnadh le feiceáil.

Worthwhile efforts are made to nurture a favourable atmosphere towards Irish in the classrooms and attention is directed at promoting pupils’ listening, oral and communicative skills throughout the school. Emphasis is placed on the communicative approach through the use of a variety of methodologies during the lessons and through the provision of opportunities for pupils to use the language. Oral, reading and writing activities are integrated effectively. The pupils succeed creditably in their reading and most of them read with meaning and understanding. It is recommended that more real books be provided for the junior classes and different types of reading materials be made available for the senior classes to further enhance the very good work undertaken. Written work in Irish is well attended to and it is evident from the work samples observed that a creditable standard is reached particularly by the pupils in the senior classes.

- The quality of pupil attainment in English is of a good standard. In recent times the school has purchased a commercial programme to support the implementation of oral language in the school. While this is a positive measure, it will be important that the school reviews the implementation of the programme to ensure that it is being implemented consistently in all classes. The implementation of a discrete oral language programme should clearly identify the learning outcomes to be attained at each class level in order to ensure the improvement of all pupils’ oral language abilities. Overall the majority of pupils achieve good standards in reading. A phonological awareness programme is implemented. The formal reading lessons observed were of a good to very good standard. A class novel is used in middle and senior classes and this work is integrated effectively with other subject areas in some classes. A good range of books and reading materials is available throughout the school. Further investment in sets of differentiated readers will be necessary in the future to enable teachers to engage in a differentiated approach to the teaching of reading in infant and junior classes. The quality of the pupils’ writing ranges from satisfactory to good. The teachers should consider introducing a more structured approach to the teaching of writing which would provide additional opportunities for children to write in different genres.

- The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in Mathematics is of a very good standard. Mathematics-rich environments are in evidence in most classrooms. All
teachers are aware of the need to develop the pupils’ mathematical language. While teachers make good use of concrete materials in the teaching of Mathematics, it is recommended that even greater emphasis be placed on the use of concrete materials to develop and consolidate pupils’ mathematical knowledge particularly in the infant and junior classes. It is recommended that increased focus be placed on embedding pupils’ learning in authentic problem-solving contexts particularly through the use of oral problem-solving activities.

- Science lessons were observed across a range of curriculum strands. The lessons observed were well prepared and presented clearly. Overall, the teaching observed was very good. The teachers use a wide range of methodologies including, group and collaborative work, individual instruction, talk and discussion, demonstration, pupils undertaking experiments and some investigative work using concrete materials. While activity-based learning was observed in all classrooms, there should be a greater emphasis on children working scientifically. The development of a science investigation area in each classroom is recommended. In the majority of the lessons observed the emphasis on science skills was focused on observing, predicting, estimating, recording, sorting and classifying. Most of the lessons were teacher directed and as a consequence there was little opportunity for pupils to engage in planning their own fair tests and experiments. It is recommended, that an increased focus on the development of these skills would enhance the quality of teaching and learning in Science.

- The school has developed a very good system of record-keeping where individual pupil records are stored centrally. All data relating to individual pupils are stored in a single file. Standardised tests are administered annually to all pupils and the results of these tests are utilised to identify pupils who may be experiencing learning difficulties. A range of assessment modes is utilised systematically by all teachers to enable class teachers to make and record judgements about the progress individual pupils are making in attaining curriculum targets. It is recommended that assessment data be used in a more strategic way to target cohorts of pupils and to implement interventions where appropriate.

6. Quality of Supports for Pupils

- The quality of support provided was of a good standard. A learning support teacher and part-time resource teacher provide a wide range of support for pupils who are experiencing learning difficulties. Learning targets are devised based on the outcomes of diagnostic tests and reports from other professionals. Individual profile and learning programmes (IPLPs) and individual education plans (IEPs) are devised with the aid of computer software. Tasks and activities are selected to take account of pupils’ individual learning needs and to assist them in overcoming difficulties they are experiencing with particular elements of the curriculum. It is recommended that the outline of the IPLPs and IEPs plans be reorganised to mirror more closely the template provided in the Learning Support Guidelines.

- The support team systematically tracks the progress of individual pupils and administers appropriate diagnostic tests to assist in the identification of suitable learning targets. Parents are consulted in the formulation of individual education plans (IEPs) and pupils’ progress is communicated effectively to parents at regular intervals. A record of the work completed each day is maintained. It is evident that pupils are making progress and benefiting from the supports provided.

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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 Michael’s National School on behalf of the whole school community would like to thank the Inspector for the professional, courteous and thorough manner in which he carried out the W.S.E. The staff and the Board found the whole experience to be very positive and welcome the recommendations.

We are very pleased with the acknowledgements by the inspector of the high standard of education being achieved throughout the school especially in Maths, English and Irish.

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

~ Two of our staff are currently being trained in the First Steps in Writing Programme in order to further enhance the teaching of writing in all classes.

~ Also, it is envisaged that additional staff members will attend the First Steps training in Reading and Oral Language in the New Year when it becomes available.

~ A differentiated reading programme is in place in the Infant and Junior Classes ensuring that the literacy needs of each pupil are appropriately met.

~ A literacy hour has been introduced to First and Second Class and will be implemented in the Infant room in term three.