Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Scoil Íosagáin
Aghada, Rostellan
Co. Cork
Uimhir rolla: 17579H

Date of inspection: 27 October 2011
1. Introduction

Scoil Íosagáin, in Upper Aghada, east Cork caters for boys and girls in the environs of Aghada and of Whitegate and enrolment has increased considerably since 2002. Current enrolment is 247 and the school is commended for its high attendance rate. 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.
- This is a welcoming school where communication within the school community is very strong.
- The principal and staff are diligent and committed to the education and welfare of the pupils.
- The pupils are friendly, courteous and cooperative and the establishment of a student council is praiseworthy.
- Múintear an Ghaeilge ó bhéal go héifeachtach (Oral Irish language is taught effectively).
- Concrete material, the interactive whiteboard and Maths trails are used effectively during Mathematics lessons.

The following main recommendations are made:

- The results of standardised assessment tests should be monitored regularly to inform teaching and learning.
- A review of the organisation of support in special needs provision is recommended.
- A staff rotational system should be considered.
- The existing productive use of language experience charts could usefully be extended to all junior classes.
- In developing History further, teachers should consider making more use of the old roll books, timelines, local history trails and class museums.

3. Quality of School Management

- The board is properly constituted. Much time and effort over the past two years has gone into the school extension which is now complete. A report on finances is given at each
meeting and accounts are certified externally. The board is advised to compile a five-year plan for the school, taking into account local demographics and future needs.

- The parents and staff spoke highly of the contribution the principal has made to school life. His progressive vision is to equip pupils with the skills to live happily in society. In this he has the full and generous support of the parents and staff.

- The school is well served by a dedicated in-school management team (ISM). Post-holders have been assigned curricular and organisational responsibilities and these are addressed assiduously. Meetings of the ISM team are informal and it is now recommended that formal meetings are held, with key decisions recorded. The ISM team are advised to present the board of management with an annual short report on the execution of their duties.

- The staff works together in an atmosphere of mutual respect and cordiality and teachers devote much time and energy to all aspects of school life. School administration is addressed in a competent and welcoming manner by the school's secretary. The school is advised to develop a staff rotational system whereby teachers can broaden their professional experience throughout their career in the school. In this regard, teachers should be supported when they move from one context to another through a formal mentoring system which would also apply to new staff coming to the school.

- All classrooms have interactive whiteboards and in many classrooms class libraries are well stocked and very attractively laid out. The school has a very important resource in its roll books and storage for these important historical documents should be prioritised.

- There is a well established tradition of support for the school within the parents’ association. There is very good communication between the association and the school. However, parents’ involvement in policy development is limited. The board should consider a system whereby views of parents are sought before policies are finalised and ratified. Information from questionnaires indicates parents are very pleased with the quality of teaching and learning in the school and the supports that are provided to their children.

- The pupils in the school are friendly, courteous and eager to learn. Relations between staff and pupils are very positive and open. The establishment of a student council is praiseworthy. An extensive range of activities provides pupils with a well rounded education. Pupils indicate in questionnaire returns that they are happy in school, they feel supported by staff and they have positive self-perceptions of their learning.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- The school policies contain some very useful elements that inform classroom practice. It would be worthwhile devising templates that would help teachers strengthen links between whole-school planning and individual teacher’s planning. The school should also consider a more useful layout for the monthly progress records that would feed into the general overseeing of curriculum implementation.

- All teachers record informative long-term and short-term plans. In many cases, clear aims and objectives are documented. A number of teachers plan jointly at the junior level and, where possible, this practice is to be encouraged.

- The school is in the early stages of school self-evaluation. It is recommended that a more formal process be adopted with the development of a school action plan.
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 throughout the school is good. An examination of scores attained in standardised tests indicates pupils are making satisfactory progress. Teachers maintain a wide range of assessment data in folders. Assessment data is shared among teachers at the handover of classes each year and this is very good practice. Practice in assessment could now be developed further by analysing standardised test results on a whole-school basis, to identify trends and to inform teaching and learning.

Oral Irish language is taught effectively. The interactive white-board is utilised effectively to teach rhymes, poetry and song and to practise reading vocabulary. In some classrooms, Irish is utilised regularly for classroom management purposes. This good practice should be extended throughout the school. Pair-work is recommended in reading lessons to develop fluency in language based on the text. In certain classes, writing is promoted in a practical manner where verbs and vocabulary are linked systematically to create stories. Pupils are then encouraged to use these strategies in their own compositions.

The quality of teaching in English is good. Recitation and exploration of poetry are features in many classes and are utilised effectively during transition from one lesson to another. Productive use is made of language experience charts in discreet oral language exercises in some classes and this good practice could usefully be extended to all classes. Staff is advised to compile a core range of poetry and to agree a consistency in recitation.

The pupils’ skills in phonological awareness are taught systematically through the Jolly Phonics programme. Productive use is made of the interactive whiteboard, letter boards and flash cards in vocabulary development. Class libraries are laid out attractively in some classes and serve to promote pupils’ interests in reading for pleasure. A whole-school approach to developing extensive reading practices would be beneficial.

Teachers make regular reference to correct routines in developing good handwriting technique. Pupils are encouraged to write in a variety of genres and creative and
functional writing is undertaken regularly. The free writing copy is used extensively by pupils in a beneficial manner. Overall, a good standard of writing is in evidence in copybooks and writing is monitored regularly by teachers.

- In Mathematics, mental arithmetic is used productively at the beginning of lessons in some classes. A regular engagement in discussion is encouraged for the purposes of revision and consolidation. Active learning, group and pair-work are utilised productively in lessons. Concrete material, the interactive white-board and Maths trails are used efficiently during learning activity. Mathematical displays are created in many classes to reinforce pupils’ learning. Topics linked to everyday experience are used effectively to develop understanding of concepts. A greater emphasis on talk and discussion as a regular feature of classroom practice is recommended to promote problem-solving and increase pupils’ understanding. Pupils are afforded regular opportunities to record in copybooks. Consistency in presentation and correction should now be addressed.

- Lessons in History generate interest in the subject. Teachers make very good use of story and of practical items such as toys to stimulate interest in lessons. The examination of artefacts and group research work are features of approaches in History. In developing History further in the school, teachers should consider making more use of the old roll books, timelines, local history trails and class museums.

6. Quality of Support for Pupils

- The teachers record very good detail in their planning. Learning profiles are documented, priority learning needs are identified and in many cases, clear specific targets are recorded. A wide range of assessment procedures is utilised. Pupils’ educational needs are supported through effective use of concrete material, through graded readers and through worthwhile learning experiences in other curricular areas. Support in the main is provided through withdrawal either individually or in groups. A review of the organisation of support in special needs provision is recommended, whereby a greater emphasis is placed on in-class support. Greater co-ordination with class teachers is also recommended to ensure pupils are not missing out on key class work in literacy and in numeracy. The special needs assistants (SNAs) support pupils in an effective and caring manner. Staff is encouraged to convene regular formal meetings, to set agendas and to record key decisions.
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 welcomes the positive report and is proud of the whole school community.

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 whole school community is committed to continuous improvement. They welcome the recommendations and these have been implemented.