Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Meelin National School
Meelin, Newmarket, Co. Cork
Uimhir rolla: 17706L

Date of inspection: 15 September 2010
1. Introduction

Meelin National School is a three-teacher, co-educational primary school, which caters for pupils from junior infants to sixth class. It is situated in the North Cork village of Meelin and has a central role in the rural community it serves. The school has two shared learning-support/resource teachers, based in local schools. It is under the patronage of the Apostolic Administrator of the Diocese of Cloyne and has sixty-three pupils enrolled. Attendance levels are very good and are monitored carefully. The board of management was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the report; a response was not received from the board.

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 effective in discharging its duties. The board has upgraded the school building to a high standard thereby greatly enhancing the quality of the learning environment.

- The principal leads the school competently. She engages actively with staff, pupils, parents and the wider community.

- The teachers are dedicated, hard-working professionals. They work productively and in collaboration with all the school's partners to create a positive learning climate for the pupils.

- The excellent behaviour of the pupils is a key strength in the school. Many pupils are highly motivated and demonstrate positive learning dispositions.

- Pupils’ learning is enhanced through participation in the Green-Schools programme, and in cooking, musical and sporting activities.

- Effective links with the parents are maintained. The parents’ association provides considerable support for the school.

- The school benefits from the work of a highly committed ancillary staff.

The following **main recommendations** are made:

- More effective use should be made of the information arising from pupils’ assessments and from teachers’ monthly progress records to better inform systematic review of curricular policies and the provision of differentiated learning programmes.

- Greater use should be made of the communicative approach to teaching Irish and pupils should be given more opportunities to speak the language.

- The use of hands-on, print-rich and visual materials in the teaching of English, Irish and Mathematics should be extended.

- A more co-ordinated whole-school approach to catering for pupils with special educational needs should be implemented.
3. **Quality of School Management**

- The board of management is properly constituted and is effective in discharging its duties. The school accounts are maintained carefully and have been certified. The board has upgraded the school building to a high standard, thereby greatly enhancing the quality of the learning environment. The board is involved in policy development. To further develop its important role in promoting ongoing self-evaluation, it is recommended that curricular policies be reviewed on a more systematic basis.

- The board employs a secretary and cleaner on a part-time basis and their considerable contribution to the work of the school is acknowledged.

- The principal leads the school competently. She engages actively with staff, pupils, parents and the wider community and has successfully established a culture of shared decision making and mutual support within the school community. She displays a high commitment to the further development of curricular leadership. She is ably supported by a dedicated hard-working staff. Together, they work productively and in collaboration with all the school’s partners to create a positive learning climate for the pupils.

- The quality of the school building is impressive. The classrooms are bright, spacious and organised carefully. Excellent progress is in evidence in relation to the provision of information and communication technology resources. There is evidence of effective use of hands-on, visual and print-rich materials. However, there is need to extend their use in order to facilitate more active learning during the teaching of Irish, English and Mathematics.

- The excellent behaviour of the pupils is a key strength in the school. Interactions with staff and pupils and the outcomes of pupil questionnaires, conducted as part of this evaluation, point to a positive climate for learning. The classes are well organised and the teachers manage the pupils with care and skill. Many pupils are highly motivated and demonstrate positive learning dispositions.

4. **Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation**

- The quality of school planning is good. A wide range of both organisational and curricular policies, which are relevant to the school context, has been formulated. While the policies provide many sound guidelines for the development of effective practice and they are accessible to all partners, it is recommended that better arrangements be put in place to monitor and review their implementation. Specifically, it is advised that more effective use be made of the data arising from teachers’ monthly progress records and the results of pupils’ assessments to inform regular policy review. Such review should aim to identify priorities for action plans designed to promote improvement in pupils’ learning.

- All teachers provide both short and long-term classroom planning and record the monthly progress of work. Where particularly effective practice was observed, the learning intentions were clarified clearly in terms of the specific skills to be developed. In order to promote further progression and continuity in pupils’ learning it is recommended that this practice be adopted by all teachers.
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

- Chonachtas samplaí maithe de dhea-theagasc agus d’fhoghlaim na Gaeilge ag rangleibhéal ar leith. Baintear leas éifeachtach as raon d’áiseannach chun cabhrú leis na daltaí spríocheanga chinnte a fhoghlaim ar bhonn idirghniomhach, taitneamhach. B’fhíú na dea-chleachtais seo a chur i bhfeidhm i ngach ranga-rangsheomra agus úsáid níos mó a bhaint as an gcur chuige cumarsáideach mar is gá scileanna labhartha na ndaltaí sa Ghaeilge a fheabhsú. Luaitear ach go háirithe an tábhacht a bhaineann le breis deiseanna labhartha a thabhairt do na daltaí.

- Examples of good practice in the teaching and learning of Irish were observed at particular class levels in the school. A range of resources is deployed effectively to enable pupils acquire a targeted language input in an interactive, enjoyable manner. It is recommended that these good practices be adopted in all classrooms and that greater use be made of the communicative approach, as there is need to improve pupils’ language skills in Irish. In particular, it is advised that pupils be given more opportunities to speak Irish.

- A key strength in the provision for English is the good quality work which is undertaken in the development of pupils’ oral language skills. Effective practice noted in the teaching of reading included focused development of sight vocabulary and phonological awareness. At particular class levels, a greater emphasis on the direct teaching of key skills in a differentiated and targeted manner would greatly support pupils experiencing difficulties with reading and would raise standards further. Some very good samples of pupils’ writing were observed. However, it is evident that a key challenge for the school in the area of writing is to reduce the reliance on work-book activity and to provide pupils with more opportunities to write independently on a regular basis.

- The overall provision for mathematics is good. Throughout the school concepts are taught purposefully and there is clear evidence of a balanced approach to the teaching of the strands. Good practice in the explicit teaching of mathematics language was observed. Many pupils demonstrate high interest in Mathematics and good progress in the development of their knowledge and skills. It is recommended that the use of concrete materials and active-learning methodologies be extended. This will provide pupils with more opportunities to develop their problem-solving skills, share their understanding with others and cater further for their individual learning needs.

- The quality of teaching and learning in Social, Personal and Health Education is very good. A healthy-lunch policy is implemented thereby creating a health-promoting environment. Teachers make use of a range of effective methodologies including circle time, pair work, and storytelling. Well-structured lessons with high levels of pupil participation were observed. Pupils’ learning is further enhanced through participation in the Green-Schools programme and in cooking, musical and sporting activities.
• A range of suitable formal and informal assessment approaches is in use to monitor pupils’ progress. The good practice of administering standardised tests at each class level is well established and the results are recorded carefully. However, it is apparent that a more systematic approach to assessment for learning and to the analysis of assessment data is necessary. In particular, there is need to make more effective use of assessment data to identify trends in pupils’ achievement levels and to inform differentiated teaching and learning approaches.

6. Quality of Supports for Pupils

• The introduction of focused in-class support has significantly enhanced the quality of provision for pupils with special educational needs. Appropriately, school policy incorporates a staged approach to assessment, identification of pupils and programme planning. However, there is need to review practice regarding the implementation of this policy as it is not clear that suitable programmes are in place in all contexts. Where effective practice was observed, the range and quality of activities undertaken illustrated suitable development and progression in pupils’ learning. It is recommended that this good practice be adopted in all contexts. To promote consistent good practice and maximise pupils’ progress, it is recommended that a more co-ordinated whole-school approach to catering for pupils with special educational needs be implemented.

• This is a welcoming school and effective links with parents are maintained. The parents’ association provides considerable support for the school. The parents’ representatives report that they are satisfied with the education provided in the school. The school facilitates the communication of pupils’ progress through formal parent-teacher meetings and the issuing of school reports. To improve the quality of the reports, it is recommended that consideration be given to the use of the National Council and Curriculum Assessment report templates for reporting pupils’ progress and achievement.