An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

St. Kieran’s National School
Broughall, Kilcormac, Co. Offaly
Roll Number: 17753U

Date of inspection: 21 September 2011
1. Introduction

St. Kieran’s NS is a mainstream, co-educational primary school under the patronage of the Catholic bishop of Meath. It is located in Broughall, a small community outside Kilcormac, Co. Offaly. At the time of the evaluation, there were 27 pupils on roll. 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 school is a stimulating learning environment.
- The management of pupils is commendable.
- Very good quality information is provided to parents.
- The system of assessing, recording and tracking pupil progress is very effective.
- Teachers place a commendable emphasis on active learning methodologies and on project work.

The following main recommendations are made:

- Pupils’ oral language competencies should be developed through the implementation of a whole-school approach to oral language.
- In English, teachers should ensure that pupils are reading at an ability-appropriate level in both mainstream and support settings.
- Ba chóir athbhreithniú a dhéanamh ar mhúineadh na Gaeilge sa scoil agus béim a chur ar chumas cumarsáide na ndaltaí a fheabhsú. The teaching of Irish in the school should be reviewed and pupils’ ability to communicate in Irish should be emphasised.
- Teachers should engage in frequent consolidation of learning and revision of topics covered.

3. Quality of School Management

- The board of management provides good governance to the school. Meetings are regularly held and consider a broad range of appropriate issues. The board recently discussed standardised testing and assessment of pupils’ needs at its meeting. This is good practice which should be further developed. The certified school accounts record a loss for the last school year. The board is now advised to devise a budget for all subsequent school years that will enable it to operate within its available income. It should also ensure that an agreed report on each meeting is recorded in the minutes and that its contents are disseminated to the school community.
- The principal displays a high level of commitment to the school. She leads many initiatives within the school and nurtures a collaborative relationship with her teaching
colleagues. The deputy principal is recently appointed. She has specific assigned duties, which are open to review, and supports the principal in all areas of school life.

• The quality of information provision to parents is very good. Initiatives, such as curriculum meetings for parents, are commended and both informal and formal mechanisms exist to inform parents about their children’s progress. The vast majority of parents, in their responses to the questionnaire administered during this evaluation, express a high degree of satisfaction with a range of school-related issues, including its management, discipline within it, its facilities and the information they receive.

• The school is very well resourced. All classrooms have a good supply of materials to support teaching and learning. These resources are well organised and accessible.

• The parents’ association supports the school through fundraising, resource provision and involvement in various areas of school life. It should consider affiliating to the National Parents’ Council – Primary.

• The management of pupils is very good. Pupils are actively involved in school life and participate in a broad range of local and national educational initiatives. Discipline within the school is good and pupils, in their questionnaire returns, affirm that they get on well together, behave well and feel safe in school.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

• School planning is informed by a three-year strategic plan framework and specific action plans. This is very good practice and could form the basis for the development of a school improvement plan.

• There is scope to broaden the involvement of parents and board of management in the process of school planning. It is recommended, therefore, that both bodies regularly discuss policy review and development at meetings.

• Very good quality administrative policies are in place. A data protection policy should be devised.

• Curricular plans are of a high standard. They provide relevant guidance to staff and facilitate continuity and progression in pupils’ learning. In future policy development, sections on the communicative approach in Irish and on problem solving in Mathematics should be included.

• All teachers plan adequately for their work. Good quality long-term plans are available. Short-term plans are informed by curriculum objectives. However, they should provide greater clarity in relation to lesson content and learning activities. More specific planning for language acquisition and skill development in English and Irish is also recommended.

• 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

- All teachers display competent teaching and classroom management capabilities. They have created a stimulating learning environment throughout the school and place a commendable emphasis on active learning methodologies and on the use of information and communication technologies (ICT).

- Baineann deacrachtai le múineadh na Gaeilge agus moltar don scoil athbhreithniú a dhéanamh ar a cur chuige i leith an achair curaclai seo. B'fhiú go háirithe bém a chur ar chumas cumarsáide na ndaltaí a fheabhsú ioras go mbeadh ar a gcumas an Ghaeilge a úsáid go nádúrtha. Chuige seo, moltar an Ghaeilge a mhúineadh trí Ghaeilge amháin agus na ceachtanna a bhunú ar an gcur chuige cumarsáideach. Chabhróidh sé freisin an Ghaeilge a úsáid go neamhfhoirmiúil mórthimpeall na scoile. Iarrtar ar an bhfoireann taírbhe na dtéacsleabhar éagsúil atá in úsáid sa scoil don Ghaeilge a mheas go criticiúil.

- There are difficulties with the teaching of Irish and the school is advised to review its approach to this curricular area. A particular emphasis should be placed on enhancing pupils’ communicative ability so that they are able to speak Irish naturally. In order to achieve this, Irish lessons should be taught through Irish and should be based on the communicative approach. It would also be beneficial to use Irish informally around the school. The staff is asked to critically evaluate the value of the textbooks currently used in the school for Irish.

- There is scope for development in the teaching of English. Considerable efforts are made to promote a positive culture of reading and writing throughout the school and a good emphasis is placed on writing processes and on writing genres. In reading, it is important that these lessons have a clear learning intent that involves the extension and development of pupils’ oral competencies. A greater range of poetry should be included in the programme and opportunities for meaningful links between oral, reading and writing should be capitalised on.

- The quality of teaching and learning in Mathematics is good. Lessons contain a valuable blend of discussion and practical exploration. Effective use is made of mathematical equipment and ICT and pupils’ computational abilities are good. An increased emphasis on problem solving is recommended. Teachers should consider delivering the same curriculum strand to all classes in their room during maths lessons.

- The teaching of Drama is characterised by very good practice. A safe environment is created through use of a drama contract and pupils participate confidently in all activities. Lessons are well structured and employ a range of dramatic strategies and conventions. Important opportunities are provided to pupils to reflect on their learning.

- The quality of teaching and learning in History is fair. Aspects of good practice observed include high levels of pupil participation and a strong emphasis on active learning methodologies. Valuable project work is undertaken and opportunities to work as historians are provided. However, pupils experience difficulties discussing their learning. Teachers are therefore advised to place a greater emphasis on the consolidation of learning and on frequent revision of topics covered.
Assessment practices at a whole-school level are highly commendable. The recording of test results enables teachers to compare individual pupils’ attainments in all standardised tests and to track their performance each year. Very good use is made of other assessment instruments, including the *Drumcondra English Profiles*, in both mainstream and learning-support settings.

6. **Quality of Support for Pupils**

- Good quality support is afforded to pupils with special educational needs. The special educational needs policy is informed by the principles of the *Continuum of Support – Guidelines for Schools* (Department of Education and Science 2007) and there is evidence of support being provided at the various stages of this continuum. Teaching is clear and focused and pupils are making good progress in their learning. In order to further enhance provision, it is recommended that a greater emphasis be placed on in-class support. It is also advised that the literacy programme implemented in learning support be broadened to include oral and written areas.

- A part-time resource teacher provides support for a pupil with low incidence special educational needs. The programme reflects identified pupil needs and contains appropriate targets on social skills and self awareness. However there is scope to broaden and enrich it so that learning activities are sufficiently challenging.

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