1. Introduction

Davidstown Primary School is a co-educational, rural school on the outskirts of Enniscorthy under the patronage of the Bishop of Ferns. The attendance of the 74 pupils enrolled is very good. The board of management was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the evaluation, and the response of the board will be found in the appendix to this report.

2. Summary of Findings and Recommendations for Further Development

The following are the main strengths of the work of the school:

- The dedication of the board and its role in the improvement of the school building is commendable.
- The diligent, hardworking principal organises the school in a capable manner. The commitment of all staff to the welfare of pupils is laudable.
- Parents are very supportive of the work of the school.
- The school has a very good range of resources, including ICT, to support teaching and learning.
- The school is praised for its adoption of a multi-strategy approach to the promotion of the pupils' reading competence.
- The school building and grounds are maintained to a high standard and provide an attractive learning environment.

The following main recommendations are made:

- To guide its future development, the school should engage in collaborative, whole-school strategic planning. School priorities should be agreed and strategic and action planning approaches should be utilised.
- The school should adopt an agreed, systematic approach to the development of the pupils' numeracy and literacy skills. Further promotion of opportunities for teachers to share good practice and expertise should form part of this process.
- Whole-school approaches to assessment should be augmented and the results of assessment used to guide specific provision for pupils' varying ability levels.

3. Quality of School Management

- The properly constituted and dedicated board of management is commended for its role in the improvement of the school building and grounds. Board members carry out their duties diligently. To optimise the work of the board, matters pertaining to teaching, learning and pupil achievement should be considered more formally on a regular basis. To this end, the formulation of a school strategic plan is recommended. It is further advised that school accounts be certified externally on an annual basis and that the draft Health and Safety statement be reviewed and formally ratified.
• The diligent, hardworking principal organises the school in a capable manner. He is ably assisted by the in-school management team who carry out assigned duties conscientiously. In their questionnaire responses, almost all parents indicate that they are happy with the school and its facilities and most believe it is well run. In promoting improvement, the curriculum leadership role of the principal and the in-school management team should be strengthened. This will include monitoring and tracking the implementation and impact of agreed whole-school approaches to teaching and learning. As part of this process, the duties of the management team should be reviewed regularly to ensure their ongoing responsiveness to the school’s evolving needs.

• The school and grounds are maintained to a high standard and provide an attractive learning environment. The support of ancillary staff in the smooth operation of the school is praised. The school has a very good range of resources to support teaching and learning. ICT is used effectively and almost all pupils indicate that they use computers regularly. The planned development of a school website and involvement in the digital awards programme is laudable.

• Regular communication with parents is maintained through newsletters and more recently text-a-parent. Parents are very supportive of the work of the school and are involved in activities including sports day, the book fair and fundraising. In their responses, most parents feel welcome and almost all affirm that they are happy with the school and their child’s achievement. Parents’ responses reflect a desire for greater communication regarding the work of the board and the parents’ association and for opportunities to contribute their views on school policies. Annual parent-teacher meetings are held and written reports are issued. The inclusion in these reports of the pupils’ results in standardised tests is recommended.

• Teachers are positive and supportive in their interactions with pupils and demonstrate commitment to their welfare. Pupils generally are very well behaved. In their responses almost all pupils rate highly their relationships with teachers. It is now timely to review the school’s code of behaviour to reflect existing approaches to promoting good behaviour and pertinent national guidelines.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

• Curriculum plans and organisational policies have been devised and a small number of self-evaluation approaches are in evidence. There is scope for development in the school’s overall planning and self-evaluation processes. School plans should provide clearer guidance for teaching and learning. A formal approach to action planning should be undertaken to ensure ongoing improvement in identified areas.

• Individual teacher planning is of a good quality overall. To promote continuity and progression in the development of pupils’ learning, further emphasis on skill development and specific provision for differentiation is advised.

• 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 overall is of an appropriate standard with some very good practice evident. Features of effective practice include well structured lessons, high levels of pupil engagement and the use of active-learning approaches to consolidate pupils' understanding, knowledge and skills. Further promotion of opportunities for teachers to share good practice and expertise is recommended. In their questionnaire responses, all pupils verify that teacher explanations are clear and most enjoy their lessons and learning. While some fine examples of the pupils' work are displayed, the classroom environments should be further developed to support the pupils' engagement in learning. A number of suitable assessment approaches are used. Pupils confirm that their work is monitored closely and constructive feedback provided. The pupils' overall achievement varies from fair to good. To support improvement in the pupils' learning outcomes and achievement, the implementation of a consistent, whole-school approach to tracking individual pupil progress is recommended. Assessment outcomes should be used to guide the school's approach to differentiation.


Teachers make great efforts to promote positive attitudes to Irish among the pupils. A range of strategies and resources is used effectively to illustrate lesson content and some good teaching examples are evident. While pupils have an appropriate vocabulary range and a majority display suitable understanding, there is scope for development in their communicative abilities. It is recommended that attention be placed on the stages of lessons and that discrete vocabulary and language structures be taught incrementally. Regular opportunities for the pupils' engagement in real-life communication should be provided. The school plan should include additional guidance to support this process. Reading is based primarily on the workbooks and pupils read with significant effort. Good examples of writing are evident. To assist language acquisition, a more natural linkage of language skills is recommended.

- A variety of competent practice is evident in the teaching of English and the school is lauded for its adoption of a multi-strategy approach to the promotion of the pupils' reading competence. A positive attitude to reading is fostered and pupils read their texts with interest and understanding. To enhance their reading competence, the teaching of specific reading skills and use of differentiated reading groups should be extended. Pupils are encouraged and facilitated to contribute during talk and discussion and they generally display confidence during these activities. It is recommended that further emphasis be placed on the development of pupils' active listening skills. This will enhance the development of appropriate listener-speaker relationships. Some good examples of the pupils' writing in a range of genres are evident. The adoption of an incremental approach to the development of their independent writing skills should now be considered.

- The school has identified teaching and learning in Mathematics as a current priority. Examples of good practice observed include due emphasis on oral mathematical activities, problem-solving approaches and well-managed opportunities for pupils to explore
concepts. While pupils demonstrate generally appropriate understanding during lessons, there is need to extend these good practices on a whole-school basis in order to promote improvement in the quality of pupils’ learning experiences and outcomes. Specifically, clarification on agreed whole-school approaches to problem-solving and regular monitoring and tracking of pupils’ progress are recommended.

- The quality of teaching and learning generally in Music is good. Lessons comprise enthusiastic singing with movement, listening and responding, composition and some development of literacy skills. The school choir sings a wide range of songs and participates in activities including the Hallelujah concert. The quality of pupils’ singing is highly praiseworthy. Pupils demonstrate some knowledge and understanding of musical concepts, literacy, and listening and responding to music. An external tutor supports the implementation of the performing strand. In reviewing provision for Music, clarity regarding the spiral development of literacy skills is advised.

6. Quality of Support for Pupils

- The current role of the principal in a special education post is noted. Competent practice is evident in the teaching of pupils with special educational needs. The pupils experience learning in an encouraging and supportive environment. Lessons are well-structured and pupils engage positively in tasks. Individual programmes have been devised for all pupils.

- In the main, support is provided to pupils on a withdrawal basis and to parallel groups for Mathematics in the middle classes. In light of the school’s current priorities, a review of provision for SEN is recommended. This should include the use of a comprehensive range of diagnostic tools, a review of the criteria for identifying and discontinuing support for pupils, clarification on the staged approach and greater parental involvement in the formulation and review of their child’s learning targets. Formal collaborative planning opportunities for mainstream and support staff in the delivery of targeted support teaching should form part of this process.

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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 school’s board of management and staff wish to thank the DES inspector for her courtesy and professionalism during the WSE. The board is encouraged by the report’s recognition of the commitment and dedication of the principal, staff, board and parent association to 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 board of management and staff intend examining and implementing the various recommendations contained in the report, as a part of the school’s on-going process of self-evaluation and planning.