Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Scoil Náisiúnta Diarmada, Whitehall, Castlepollard, Co. Westmeath
Uimhir rolla: 18036U

Date of inspection: 19 January 2011
1. Introduction

Scoil Náisiúnta Diarmada is a four-teacher co-educational primary school under the patronage of the Catholic Bishop of Meath. There are 70 pupils enrolled in the school. 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 school is well maintained inside and outside. The board of management is very committed to continuing to improve the facilities and services available in the school.
- The principal displays very effective leadership skills. She is committed to providing a high-quality education for the pupils in her care.
- The quality of school planning is very good. Commendable efforts are made to include parents in the school planning and school self-evaluation process.
- A variety of effective teaching methods in used at each class level. The quality of teaching in some classrooms is highly commendable.
- Pupil achievement across the curriculum is good.
- The quality of teaching and learning in Irish is very good.
- Due attention is given to the development of pupils’ oral, reading and writing skills in English.
- Mathematics is well taught in the school. Pupils demonstrate good knowledge of the work covered.

The following main recommendations are made:

- It is recommended that the service for pupils with learning difficulties and special educational needs be reviewed to provide a more co-ordinated and effective service.
- It is recommended that more emphasis be placed on the strand Living Things in Science.

3. Quality of School Management

- The board of management is constituted in accordance with Department of Education and Skills regulations. The board meets at least once a term, more often if necessary. The board is to be commended for the manner in which it has systematically implemented a range of infrastructural improvements. For example, the recent achievements of the board include the development of the school playground and car park. The board’s current priorities include addressing heating and plumbing issues in the school. The treasurer provides a regular financial report to the board. School accounts are certified by an accountant annually.
• The principal, deputy principal and one special duties-teacher form the in-school management team. The principal demonstrates very good leadership skills. She is committed to providing a high-quality education for each pupil. She delegates tasks effectively and the deputy principal and special-duties teacher provide valuable assistance in the day-to-day operation of the school. The responsibilities attached to these posts are regularly reviewed to ensure that they reflect the needs of the school.

• Staff meetings are held regularly and these are used to discuss relevant curricular and organisational issues. The work of the special-needs assistant (SNA) and school secretary is commendable and makes a useful contribution to the smooth running of school.

• This school is equipped with a wide range of resources and teaching aids. Almost all classrooms are laid out in an attractive and stimulating manner. It is recommended that each room in which tuition takes place be developed as a print-rich environment and as a mathematics-rich environment to enhance the teaching and learning process.

• The parents’ association meets once every term. The officers of the parents’ association report that there is very good communication and co-operation between teachers and parents. Parents’ questionnaires indicate that there is a high level of satisfaction with the school. Parents’ views are regularly sought on a wide range of school matters, including whole-school planning.

• The pupils at each class level are very well behaved. Pupils’ questionnaires indicate a very positive attitude towards the school. Pupils are courteous to each other, to their teachers and to visitors to the school. Pupils at each class level are proud of their work and are articulate in talking about what they have learned. Pupils in the senior classes are encouraged to model good behaviour for the younger children. This approach works well.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

• The quality of school planning is very good. Commendable emphasis is placed on developing effective school self-evaluation processes. The use of data, for example test results, is purposeful. Results are analysed to identify which areas need to be prioritised to enhance pupils’ learning. The work done on the formulation and implementation of school policies, including the encouragement of parents’ involvement, is to be commended. To further enhance the planning process, it is recommended that more specific detail be included on the two-year cycle of work in the school’s Science programme. There is a need, for example, to include more detail on the topics to be covered at each class level for the strand Living Things.

• The quality of classroom planning throughout the school is very good overall. Each teacher regularly prepares long-term and short-term schemes of work. A monthly progress record is maintained of the work covered at each class level. There is a need, however, to ensure greater consistency in the quality of planning for pupils with learning difficulties and special educational needs.

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

- The overall quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in this school is good. The quality of teaching and learning is particularly praiseworthy at some class levels. The achievement of most pupils in the curricular areas observed as part of this evaluation is impressive. Commendable emphasis is placed on using a variety of effective teaching methods to maximise pupil achievement. For example, in some classes, pupils are given regular opportunities to engage in co-operative learning experiences.

- Tá cáilíocht na foghlama agus an teagaisc sa Ghaeilge sa scoil seo an-mhaith. Leagann na hoidí béim inmholta ar fhobarairt scileanna labhartha na ndaltaí. Tugtar deiseanna ríalta do dhaltái focalg agus frásaí nua a cheachtadh trí obair éifeachtach i mbeirteanna agus in grúpaí. Tá beagnach gach dalta liofa agus muinineach agus tá siad in ann ceisteanna a fheargairt ar thopacai éagsúla. Tá caighdeáin léithéireachta na ndaltaí ó rang a d'fhág ar aghaidh le moladh. Taispeánann an chuid is mó de na ndaltaí tuiscint chruiann ar an méd atá léite acu. Bainneann fiúntas leis an obair scriofa a dhéanann na daltaí sa Ghaeilge. Leagtar béim chuí ar scribhneoireacht fheidhmiúil agus scribhneoireacht chruathaitheach.

- The quality of the learning and teaching of Irish in this school is very good. Teachers place commendable emphasis on developing pupils’ speaking skills. Pupils are given regular opportunities to practise new words and phrases through effective paired work and group work. Almost all pupils are articulate and confident and they are able to answer questions on a variety of topics. The reading standards of pupils from second class onwards are to be commended. Most pupils demonstrate an accurate understanding of what they have read. Pupils’ written work in Irish is good, with functional and creative writing being given due attention.

- The quality of learning and teaching in English is good at each class level in this school. Pupils are given regular opportunities to discuss and talk about a wide variety of issues. This has resulted in articulate and persuasive debates that successfully develop pupils’ higher-order thinking skills. A love of poetry is commendably fostered at each class level, with pupils demonstrating good ability in the recitation of a wide selection of poems. The teaching of reading is given due attention. The school has assembled a creditable collection of fiction and non-fiction books to encourage pupils to read for pleasure. Samples of pupils’ writing in a variety of genres are on display in almost all classrooms. The quality of written work is very good. This work is very neatly presented and a high standard of handwriting is evident in each classroom.

- The quality of the teaching and learning of Mathematics is good. Some pupils have achieved very high standards in Mathematics. The school has invested in a wide variety of mathematical resources and teaching aids. These are purposefully used during lessons and activities to enhance pupil learning. While each mainstream classroom has been developed as a mathematics-rich environment, there is a need to further develop a mathematics-rich environment in the learning-support and resource rooms. Pupils’ knowledge of number facts (tables) is particularly praiseworthy. Appropriate emphasis is placed on developing pupils’ problem-solving skills. Pupils’ written work in Mathematics is clearly and neatly presented.
• The overall quality of the teaching and learning of Science is good, with some aspects of this work being highly commendable. Well-organised experiments and group work form a regular part of the school's programme in Science. Pupils are given worthwhile opportunities to engage in talk and discussion on scientific topics. The strand Materials and Change is particularly well covered. It is recommended that more emphasis be placed on the study of Living Things throughout the year. There is a science or discovery area on display in each classroom.

6. Quality of Supports for Pupils

• There are many very positive aspects to the support provided for pupils with learning difficulties and special educational needs. This work is highly commended. There is scope for development in a number of areas of the service, however. One of the school’s main priorities should be to review the learning-support and resource service in its entirety. This review should ensure that the service is more effectively co-ordinated on a whole-school basis.

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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 B.O.M. of Scoil Dhíarmada accepts the findings of the W.S.E. and would like to take this opportunity to thank the Department of Education Inspector for the courteous and professional manner in which he conducted the W.S.E. The B.O.M is pleased that the report acknowledges the dedication and commitment of the staff, Board members, parents’ association, parents and children. All of whom contribute to the smooth running of 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.

In accordance with the recommendations the BOM and staff have begun to implement the following:

1. The school plan for science is currently being reviewed, with more detail being added to the living things strand.
2. The Inspectorate highly commended the work of the Learning Support team, while highlighting the need for a more co-ordinated service to this end. A staff meeting now takes place at least once a term which involves the L.S. team and all class teachers and the school has applied to the PDST for support in this area.