Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Coill Dubh NS
Coill Dubh, Naas, Co. Kildare
Uimhir rolla: 18096P

Date of inspection: 23 March 2011
1. Introduction

Coill Dubh NS is a rural school in Coill Dubh village, County Kildare. It has a current enrolment of 134 pupils and has been allocated five mainstream and two support teachers by the Department. Under the patronage of the Bishop of Kildare and Leighlin the school promotes a Catholic ethos and its vision is evidenced in its welcoming, safe and happy atmosphere. Attendance rates are very good. 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

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<th>The following are the main strengths of the work of the school:</th>
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<td>• The school is a happy and caring community in which positive and mutually supportive relationships are evident.</td>
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<td>• A safe, comfortable and attractive environment has been provided for pupils and staff.</td>
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<td>• Pupils work conscientiously and co-operatively with staff and one another and are well behaved, respectful, polite and courteous.</td>
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<td>• The teachers demonstrate an openness to improvement and change and an interest in the holistic development of pupils.</td>
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<th>The following main recommendations are made:</th>
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<td>• The correct redeployment of additional teaching resources to learning-support and resource duties should be implemented as a matter of priority.</td>
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<td>• The range of assessment strategies currently in use should be extended and the data gathered should be used to inform differentiation in teaching and learning.</td>
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<td>• In order to ensure continuity and progression in pupils’ learning, a review of whole-school curricular plans, classroom planning and systems for recording monthly progress of learning should be undertaken.</td>
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3. Quality of School Management

• The board of management works diligently in the interest of the school. It is to be commended for the manner in which the school building is maintained. Finances are carefully managed and accounts are audited annually. The board is advised that additional teaching resources provided under the general allocation model cannot be used for mainstream class teaching. Such resources must be deployed to ensure that pupils receive their correct allocation of supports and that the needs of all pupils under the general allocation model are being met.
Since his appointment, the principal has developed procedures to ensure meaningful communication with parents and has established the school as a focal point in the community. Duties assigned to the in-school management team reflect the current priorities of the school. In order to maintain the trajectory of school improvement, an annual review of these duties and an increased focus on curriculum leadership is recommended.

Resources are good throughout the school and are used to support the teaching, learning and recreation of pupils.

Parents are encouraged to become actively involved in the work of the school and a parents’ association has been recently established. Questionnaire responses indicate that parents feel welcome and that the vast majority are happy with the school. Opportunities to consult staff about their children’s progress are readily available and the school has established very good procedures around its formal parent-teacher meetings.

The management of pupils is very good. They are treated with respect and their holistic development is nurtured. They are attentive, responsive, eager and motivated in their learning. Opportunities are provided for participation in relevant decision-making through the Green School’s committee and the student council.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

The quality of organisational and administrative planning is good. Plans meet legislative requirements, are generally contextualised to the needs of the school and provide some guidance on the school’s operation. Plans have been devised for all aspects of the curriculum. However, it is recommended that these plans be adapted as a matter of priority to include guidance on the division of content reflecting the multi-grade and split-class nature of mainstream classes in order to ensure progression and development in pupils’ learning. Plans should also include an exploration of teaching methodologies, differentiation strategies and assessment techniques and should be reviewed on a cyclical basis.

The school is advised to document action plans which outline whole-school planning priorities and which prioritise improvements in pupils’ learning experiences.

All teachers provide classroom planning. In some cases, teachers should ensure compliance with Rule 126 for National Schools. In almost all cases, the delineation of learning activities needs to accompany the curriculum objectives in order to ensure clarity of purpose and to ensure progression and development in pupils’ learning. Information on differentiation, assessment and methodologies should be included in all plans. This should impact positively on the quality of monthly progress records.

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 quality of overall teaching, learning and pupil achievement is good. Teachers display a range of classroom management skills that communicate high expectations to pupils in regard to their behaviour and participation. Teacher-pupil interactions are caring and positive and pupils’ responses to questionnaires indicate that most enjoy their learning experiences and find their lessons interesting. In general, lessons observed were well-paced and well-structured. Written work is well monitored by most teachers, but further guidance on presentation is advised in some classes. While effective use was made of a range of activities, including collaborative tasks in pairs or small groups, a wider range of methodologies should be planned for and introduced across the school. Programmes of work should be suitably differentiated to enable all pupils to participate fully and to maximise progress across the curriculum.

- A range of assessment records is maintained and the school has developed a very good system for recording individual pupil performance in standardised tests. This data, combined with evidence from other assessment techniques, should be used more effectively to inform teaching and learning on an ongoing basis. The development of a systematic method of assessing pupils’ progress across all curricular areas is also recommended.

- Enjoyable lessons are organised in Irish in which a range of resources is used to increase the pupils’ vocabulary. During the evaluation efforts were made to immerse the pupils in Irish during the lesson in every class. Pair work was used to practice vocabulary and language structures. On the whole, however, the standard of teaching and learning in the four strands is fair. Lack of progress and continuity was observed as pupils move from class to class. In the middle and senior classes pupils’ fluency and self-confidence were not as strong as one would expect. It is recommended that a structured programme be laid out for every class level. It would also be worthwhile to arrive at a whole-school understanding of strategies to further develop the pupils’ speaking skills.

- The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in English is satisfactory. Many pupils read confidently and with good use of expression. The school has a well-stocked and well-run library. Parental support for reading is encouraged. Pupils edit and redraft their writing. They have experience of writing in a variety of genres and samples of writing and project work are displayed. The development and implementation of a whole-school approach to handwriting is recommended. Pupils enjoy writing their own poetry and further emphasis on learning poetry by heart is advised. The provision of discrete oral language time in all classes, alongside the development of a structured programme of oral language across the school, is also recommended.
• The overall quality of teaching and learning in Mathematics is good. Hands-on experience with concrete materials ensures a good level of interest and participation in lessons. In many lessons observed, pupils collaborated in activities to consolidate their understanding of mathematical concepts. They display good problem-solving strategies. A whole-school approach to the teaching of mathematical language is recommended. A greater focus on mental mathematics is advised in most classrooms.

• The physical education curriculum is implemented to a high standard. Lessons are well structured and include appropriate emphasis on safe participation, skills' development, active pupil engagement and teamwork. Talk and discussion should be further used to enhance pupils’ understanding and appreciation of the various physical activities in which they engage. Pupils participate in a range of external sporting initiatives and competitions. The benefits of using incidental Irish to a greater degree during lessons should be further explored.

6. Quality of Support for Pupils

• One learning-support/resource teacher is currently endeavouring to cater for pupils with high-incidence and low-incidence special educational needs. Good collaboration is evident in the development of pupils’ individual plans and planning is shared well among teachers. While the overall quality of individual plans is good, there is scope to enhance the clarity of some learning targets and to devise a more systematic approach to the recording of pupil progress. Pupils engage purposefully in a good variety of learning activities which are focussed on addressing their identified needs and their self-confidence is successfully fostered. While some effective early intervention strategies are implemented, a more formal and structured implementation of the staged approach is recommended, particularly at stage one. The use of in-class support needs to be reviewed to ensure that it is meeting pupils’ needs effectively. The work of the special needs assistants is purposeful and appropriate. The correct deployment of the second allocated learning-support/resource teacher will ensure more comprehensive provision for pupils with special educational needs.

• The school is advised to expedite the development of a policy to inform its practice in relation to pupils affected by educational disadvantage. A policy on intercultural education should also be developed.
Appendix

SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

Submitted by the Board of Management
Area 1  Observations on the content of the inspection report

We welcome much of our recent Whole School Evaluation report. It is gratifying to have the work of the school so positively affirmed by an outside authority.

The evaluation’s findings largely match the priorities we have set ourselves, including:

- **Gaeilge.** We are putting together a whole-school strategy on teaching Irish, and have appointed a member of the school management team to oversee its planning and implementation.

- **Planning and reporting documents.** We have been working hard for the past few years to make these as useable and meaningful as possible. They should be ready for the 2011-12 academic year. As the report recommends, they will include more detailed descriptions of our differentiation strategies. They will also highlight the actual learning activities more clearly.

- **Handwriting.** We are evaluating different programmes so that we can introduce a standard cursive format from junior infants to sixth class in September 2012.

We were delighted that our assessment practices and individual student tracking were so warmly praised at our post-evaluation meeting. It was disappointing, therefore, that when we read the report it seemed not to fully reflect the positivity of the inspector’s feedback about them.

We were also unhappy that the report described our teaching of English as “satisfactory”. We believe English to be one of the school’s main strengths, with high and consistently improving standards. An analysis of our standardised testing in literacy shows that our pupils perform ahead of national averages across the spectrum of abilities.

We do not believe that this discrepancy warrants a review of the entire inspection, but we do wish to note our belief that we teach English extremely well.

The school has addressed or begun to address all of the other recommendations of the Whole School Evaluation. We found the evaluation to be an extremely worthwhile and informative process, and would like to thank the inspection team for their professionalism and positivity in the way they assessed our school.