An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Whitechurch NS
Ballinameela, Cappagh
County Waterford
Uimhir rolla: 18108T

Date of inspection: 4 April 2011
1. Introduction

Whitechurch NS is a co-educational, rural primary school under the patronage of the Catholic Bishop of Waterford and Lismore. There are 109 pupils enrolled and attendance rates are 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 board of management discharges its duties effectively and strongly supports the work of the school.
- The principal provides solid leadership and cultivates the support of the school community.
- The staff of the school is hardworking and dedicated to meeting the needs of the pupils.
- The school benefits from the enthusiasm and support of parents and the parents’ association.
- An appropriate range of teaching and learning resources, including ICT, is used effectively in curriculum delivery.
- The quality of overall teaching, learning and pupil achievement in the school is commendable.
- Effective support is provided for pupils with special educational needs.

The following **main recommendations** are made:

- It is recommended that both the enrolment policy and the code of behaviour be reviewed to ensure that they are in line with relevant legislation and national guidelines.
- A greater emphasis should be placed on the development of creative and independent writing skills in both Irish and English throughout the school.
- It is recommended that a long-term plan be devised to ensure the ongoing review of aspects of the school plan. In so doing, explicit targets for school improvement in specific areas of provision should be agreed and implemented.

3. Quality of School Management

- The board of management discharges its duties effectively and strongly supports the work of the school. It uses available resources to maintain the building and grounds to a high standard and to equip the school with suitable materials for teaching and learning. It is advised that the school's enrolment policy be reviewed to ensure that it complies with relevant equality legislation. It is also recommended that the school’s code of behaviour
be reviewed to include the provisions of the Education Welfare Act (2000) regarding expulsion.

- The principal discharges his duties competently. He provides solid leadership and cultivates the support of the school community. The other members of the in-school management team perform their responsibilities conscientiously and their duties are reviewed regularly to ensure that they reflect the changing priorities of the school. It is advised that more formal structures for in-school management team meetings be established to ensure ongoing school improvement through the monitoring and advancement of the school’s long-term plan. In their questionnaire responses, all parents reported that they consider that the school is well run.

- School accommodation is of a very good standard. A range of appropriate teaching and learning resources is employed effectively. Very good provision has been made in the area of ICT and it is used productively in curriculum delivery.

- The parents, together with the parents’ association, provide valuable support to the school. Communication between home and school is very good and the parent questionnaires confirm that parents are happy with and feel welcome in the school. It is now timely that additional opportunities be provided for parents to collaborate in the development and review of pertinent aspects of the school plan.

- The pupils are managed effectively and are cooperative, mannerly and courteous. Responses to the questionnaires administered to pupils demonstrate that they are happy in their school and enjoy coming to school.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- The staff has completed a significant amount of work on the school plan. Clear and useful guidance is provided in relation to the school’s organisational practices. The content of some curricular plans could be expanded and further developed to ensure continuity and progression in programmes of learning through the school.

- The school has begun to engage in the process of self-evaluation. To develop this practice further, a long-term plan should be devised to ensure the ongoing review of aspects of the school plan. In so doing, explicit targets for school improvement in specific areas of provision should be agreed and implemented, based on the outcomes of this review and on available data on pupil achievement.

- All teachers engage in satisfactory classroom planning for their work, which is influenced by the content of the school plan.

- 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 commendable. The teachers use a range of appropriate teaching methodologies, and learning resources are used effectively in a variety of subject areas.

- Good quality assessment strategies operate within the school. At classroom level, a range of assessment tools is used by most teachers to monitor the pupils' progress. Standardised test results in both literacy and numeracy are utilised effectively for the purpose of monitoring individual pupil attainment. The further analysis of these results would be useful to identify areas in need of additional attention. Specific and measurable targets could be established to tackle these areas as part of the school's self-evaluation process.

- The quality of teaching and learning is good in Irish. New vocabulary is taught thoroughly in some classes and the communicative approach is used effectively to encourage the pupils to speak. Good use is made of pair work, role play and language games. This good practice should be disseminated throughout the school to develop the pupils' fluency. The teaching of reading is good and the majority of pupils read with understanding. It would be beneficial to use a wider variety of reading material. There is a good emphasis on functional writing and a good standard is noted in the pupils' work. It is recommended that a greater emphasis be placed on creative writing.

- The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in English is praiseworthy. Oral language skills are developed purposefully in all classes and most pupils articulate their views well. Due attention is given to the development of reading skills and the majority of pupils read competently. Proficient use is made of novels in some classrooms. Consideration should now be given to the further use of novels in place of class readers in middle and senior classes. The pupils have opportunities to write in various genres. A greater emphasis on creative and independent writing throughout the school, along with a consistent approach to process writing, will help to improve this area of practice further.

- The school's provision for Mathematics is effective. Lessons are well structured and the pupils are provided with opportunities to engage actively in the learning process through good-quality questioning and the purposeful use of appropriate resources. While most pupils display a good understanding of number facts, the area of mental mathematics should be developed on a whole-school basis. The recent whole-school focus on problem solving should be expanded and specific measurable targets put in place to determine the impact of schoolwide interventions.

- The quality of teaching, learning and pupil engagement in Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) is very good throughout the school. The positive school and classroom climate is very conducive to the development of the pupils’ self-confidence and their understanding of self, others and the wider world. A variety of appropriate methodologies and approaches is used effectively to promote positive behaviour and nurture the pupils’
self-esteem. The Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) policy should be reviewed to ensure that it reflects current practice in the school.

6. Quality of Support for Pupils

- Effective support is provided for pupils with special educational needs. Lessons are well structured with a wide range of teaching strategies and learning resources used successfully. To further develop this area of provision, the use of team-teaching and in-class models of support should be expanded, along with a clearer operation of the staged approach to support as outlined in Circular 02/05. Some effective prevention and early intervention programmes have been devised and their continued development is recommended.

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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 Board of Management, staff and parent body welcome the findings of the WSE and would like to thank the inspector for her courtesy and professionalism shown throughout the WSE in April 2011. We are pleased with the strengths identified and welcome the recommendations.

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 school’s Enrolment Policy and Code of Behaviour have been amended ensuring that they are in line with relevant legislation
- As part of our continuous curriculum development the writing process in both English and Irish will be further developed throughout the school.
- Review of aspects of the school plan will continue.