Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

St. Rynagh’s NS
Banagher, County Offaly
Uimhir rolla: 18157J

Date of inspection: 25 November 2010
1. Introduction

St. Rynagh’s NS is a mainstream, co-educational primary school under the patronage of the Catholic Bishop of Ardagh and Clonmacnoise. It is situated in Banagher, Co. Offaly and its catchment area is the local community. Currently the school has one administrative principal, eleven mainstream class teachers, three full-time teachers in support roles and one part-time teacher for pupils for whom English is an additional language. The school also employs one special needs assistant, a secretary and caretaker. At the time of the evaluation there were 276 pupils on roll. 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:

- A positive atmosphere prevails within the school. The school staff is welcoming and open and pupils are well behaved and enthusiastic.

- The principal affords clear, committed leadership to the school community.

- Good quality, effective teaching was observed both in mainstream and special educational needs (SEN) settings.

- Pupils’ English writing is of a high standard and they are exposed to a broad range of writing genres throughout the school.

- Teachers have engaged very well with the drama curriculum and a broad range of dramatic strategies and conventions are successfully employed throughout the school.

The following main recommendations are made:

- Ba chóir cur chuige uile-scoile a chur i bhfeidhm maidir le teagasc na Gaeilge a chuirfeadh ar chumas na ndaltaí fíorchumarsáid a dhéanamh trí Ghaeilge. A whole-school approach to the teaching of Irish that would enable pupils to engage in meaningful conversations should be implemented.

- An increased emphasis should be placed on pupils’ abilities to successfully engage with real-life problem-solving in Mathematics.

- The school’s system of assessing pupils’ progress should be developed and data garnered through assessment should be utilised to inform teaching and learning.

3. Quality of School Management

- The board of management affords good governance to the school. Key duties, such as staff appointments, financial management, policy ratification and the maintenance of the
physical environment are fulfilled diligently. An agreed report of each board meeting should become a standard item on all board agendas and should be recorded in the minutes. The board should investigate other means of disseminating information about its work to the school community. The compilation and issuing of an annual report on its work should be considered in this context. The board should ensure that the structure of the school day reflects the requirements of Circular 11/95 Time in School.

- The principal affords effective leadership to the school community. He has a clear vision for the school and capably initiates and leads whole-school initiatives. All members of the in-school management team have clearly defined duties which are competently discharged. It is recommended that these duties be updated in order to ensure that they reflect current school priorities and that a system of regular review of assigned duties be established.

- A parents’ association has been recently re-established. The board and parents are commended for this initiative and for ensuring that the aims of the parents’ association include actively involving parents in the process of school policy formation and review and increasing parental involvement in school life. Parents are well-informed on school matters and very good use is made of the school’s website to disseminate important information, including pertinent school policies.

- In their responses to questionnaires completed as part of the evaluation, parents express a very high level of satisfaction with a broad range of issues associated with the school including discipline, facilities, their children’s progress and overall teaching within the school. Parent-teacher relationships are characterised as open and positive and both formal and informal arrangements are in place for parents to receive information on their child’s education from class teachers. The school should provide pupils’ standardised test results to parents in written format as required by Circular 0138/2006 Supporting Assessment in the Primary School.

- The management of pupils is very effective. Discipline, both within classes and throughout the school, is very good. The pupil-teacher relationship in all settings is warm and supportive. Pupils themselves, in their responses to questionnaires administered during the evaluation, report that they enjoy school and feel safe and secure within it. The school is encouraged to investigate means of affording pupils a voice in school affairs. Strategies such as a student council could be considered here.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- The school has a suite of good quality administrative policies which are contextualised to meet the needs of the school and are reflective of existing practice. An assessment policy should be devised and implemented. This policy should include assessment for learning and assessment of learning strategies pertinent to mainstream and special educational needs (SEN) settings as well as appropriate diagnostic assessment. The anti-bullying, special educational needs (SEN), English as an additional language (EAL) and record-keeping policies should be reviewed.

- The school is currently undertaking a systematic review of all existing curricular plans. This is commendable and in achieving it they are encouraged to include robust criteria that will enable them to evaluate pupils’ achievements in the various curricular areas. Many curricular plans clearly delineate appropriate objectives for each class level. This is good practice and could be extended to all plans.
• The drama plan is very good. It facilitates continuity and progression in Drama throughout the school by providing clear guidance on appropriate objectives for each class level and by outlining a core minimum programme for each class.

• The plan for Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) provides lucid guidance on appropriate content for each class level. The plan would benefit from the inclusion of a section on appropriate methodologies for SPHE and from clearly outlining the content and language to be used when dealing with sensitive issues in the Relationship and Sexuality Education Programme.

• Objectives for each class level under the three strands of oral, reading and writing are very succinctly outlined in the English plan. Greater guidance could be provided on whole-school approaches and methodologies pertinent to each of the three strands.

• The Irish plan contains a beneficial structure for the systematic treatment of language idioms throughout the school. A similar approach to the four main strands of the Irish curriculum and greater guidance on the communicative approach would enhance this plan.

• There is potential to enhance the quality of the mathematics plan through articulating an agreed whole-school approach to teaching the key skills and concepts of Mathematics, the language of Mathematics and specific approaches outlined in the curriculum such as estimation, problem solving and using technology.

• The quality of teacher planning in mainstream and special educational needs (SEN) settings would be enhanced if curriculum objectives were used to inform short-term plans and monthly progress records. Short-term plans should be prepared for all pupils or groups in receipt of learning-support or resource teaching.

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

• Overall the quality of teaching is good. Teachers display well developed teaching skills and a positive, affirming atmosphere prevails in all classes. Classroom routines are capably and confidently managed. Pupils themselves, in their completed questionnaires, report that their lessons are interesting, that concepts are clearly explained and that their work is regularly monitored.

• Learning activities in English and Mathematics in mainstream classes should be differentiated in order to meet the learning needs of all pupils. Standardised tests in Mathematics and English are administered annually to all pupils from first to sixth class. The staff should consider administering a non-reading intelligence test to all pupils once during their school life and comparing their attainments in this test with their attainments in English and mathematics standardised tests. A means of tracking individual pupil
performances in standardised tests as they progress through the school should be devised.

- Cé go bhfachtachas roinnt cleachtas éifeachtach i dteagasc na Gaeilge, tá scóp chun cáilíocht na foghlama sa Ghaeilge a fheabhsú. Moltar an cur chuíge cumarsáideach a chur i bhfeidhm ar bhonn uile scoile. Chabhroídh sé freisin Gaeilge neamhfoirmiúil a úsáid níos minice mórthimpeall na scoile. D’fhéadfaí freisin eispéiris na ndaltaí i scribhneoireacht na Gaeilge a leathnú agus taithi sa bhreis a thabhairt dóibh ar chineálacha éagsúla téacsannna a scriobh.

While some effective practice was evident in the teaching of Irish, there is scope to improve the quality of learning in Irish. The communicative approach should be implemented on a whole-school basis. A greater use of informal Irish throughout the school is also recommended. Pupils’ experiences in Irish writing could be broadened through exposure to a wider range of writing genres.

- The quality of teaching and learning in English is good. Pupils’ reading skills are well developed. A whole-school approach to the teaching of phonics is successfully implemented at infant level and as the pupils progress through the school most pupils read confidently and with understanding. In order to enhance pupils’ engagement in personal reading, the staff should consider further developing reading areas in mainstream classes and decreasing the emphasis on the school’s central library. Very effective practice is evident in English writing. Younger pupils’ skills as emergent writers are carefully nurtured and pupils at middle and senior levels receive varied opportunities to write in different genres. The quality of handwriting throughout the school is consistently good. Teachers are advised to ensure that discrete oral languages lessons, focused on specific curriculum objectives, are an integral part of mainstream and SEN English programmes.

- Good practice is evident in the teaching of Mathematics. Lessons are well-presented and organised. Effective use is made of concrete resources to enhance teaching and learning and pupils receive beneficial opportunities to work collaboratively. Some very good examples of teaching the subject-specific language of Mathematics were observed during the evaluation. This good practice could be replicated across the school. The area of problem-solving should be prioritised in the future development of Mathematics within the school. Specifically, pupils should be enabled to apply their skills in mathematical operations to successfully solve real-life mathematical problems.

- The quality of teaching and learning in Drama is very good. A supportive atmosphere is created for Drama in all classes and a good range of dramatic strategies and conventions was observed throughout the school.

- SPHE is capably taught. An appropriate emphasis is placed on active learning methodologies and pupils participate willingly in SPHE lessons. Talk and discussion is skilfully used to mediate learning in SPHE. Teachers display impressive questioning skills and confidently lead mature discussions on very relevant topics.

6. Quality of Supports for Pupils

- Pupils in receipt of learning-support and resource teaching receive good quality instruction in a very supportive environment. Very effective provision is made for EAL pupils. Lessons are structured around specific objectives and are well paced.
Further development of mainstream class teachers’ role in relation to provision for SEN and EAL pupils is recommended.
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 Saint Rynaghs N.S. welcomes the W.S.E. report as a valuable contribution to the school continuing to be an effective 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.

An effective teacher continually reviews their work and an effective school continually reviews its work. The W.S.E has helped us use our strengths to work on the W.S.E recommendations along with our own recommendations to further increase the effectiveness of our school.