An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Queen of the Universe NS
Bagenalstown, County Carlow
Uimhir rolla: 18183K

Date of inspection: 11 November 2010
1. **Introduction**

Queen of the Universe NS is a vertical primary school under the patronage of the Catholic Bishop of Kildare and Leighlin. The school is co-educational up to first class and all girls from second to sixth class. There are 248 pupils on the roll. Attendance levels are satisfactory. 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 is strongly supportive of the work of the school and members have a clear understanding of the school's main priorities.
- The principal has played a key role in ensuring a strong sense of collegiality, effective teamwork and care for pupils in the school.
- Teachers work diligently and purposefully and achieve a high standard of planning at whole school and individual teacher levels.
- Lessons are well paced and directed and the learning environment in each of the classes is warm, rich and welcoming.

The following **main recommendations** are made:

- The roles and responsibilities assigned to members of the In-School Management (ISM) team should drive curriculum leadership.
- The link between assessment at class and whole-school levels and differentiation requires attention.
- Further efforts are required to ensure the pupils’ oral language abilities in Gaeilge are developed.
- A structured approach to oral work in Mathematics should ensure regular review of previously taught concepts.
- The pupils should receive 30 minutes recreation time in the school yard each day.

3. **Quality of School Management**

- The Board of Management operates effectively. Individual members are highly committed to the school and bring a range of experiences and expertise to their work. Its main priority is the holistic development of the pupil. Appropriate structures and resources are provided to the teachers and pupils in that regard. Consideration should now be given to regular analysis of standards achieved in literacy and numeracy in the school.
- The principal and ISM team are highly commended for the creation of a strong sense of teamwork among staff. All staff work hard to ensure that the pupils’ experiences of
learning are positive. In questionnaires, every pupil and almost every parent rated Queen of the Universe NS as being a good school. Excellent communications with parents and the wider community are features of good practice. The current focus of work for members of the ISM team is on co-ordination and provision of resources for curriculum areas. It is recommended that assigned duties are reviewed as a means of developing curriculum leadership.

- The board of management and staff are highly commended for the provision and use of a wide range of excellent resources in the school. Interactive technologies are used very effectively in most instances. Consideration should be given, however, to ensuring that the focus of the pupils’ work remains on the relevant subject area rather than on the technology being used. This pertains in particular to the teaching of Irish.

- Pupils are well managed, appropriately motivated and co-operate fully with teachers in lessons. At lunchtime, pupils currently receive 15 minutes recreation time in the schoolyard. It is recommended that structures be put in place to ensure 30 minutes daily of active recreation time in the schoolyard.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- The process used in developing school policies is commended. Formal and informal opportunities are taken to address issues of concern. A review of the minutes of board, staff and ISM meetings indicates that teachers, board members and parents have participated in the process.

- This is a well managed school. Administrative policies underpin effective practice in that regard. Comprehensive plans have been developed for curriculum areas. It is recommended that further consideration be given as to how best to implement aspects of these plans, particularly as they relate to differentiation. Agreed strategies for addressing the issue are not always reflected on a day to day basis in classes.

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 planning for Irish is good. Initiatives such as Lá Gaeilge are positive. Pupils can recite a range of poems and rhymes. Most of the pupils appear to enjoy their lessons. The results of pupil self assessments indicate, however, that many find Irish
difficult. The school plan for Gaeilge provides appropriate direction for vocabulary development among the pupils. It is recommended that further attention is given to its implementation. In doing so, particular emphasis should be placed on the development of the pupils’ oral language abilities, which in turn may be used to address the development of reading skills.

- There is a high standard of provision for English. This includes commendable attention to planning with some very good examples of co-operative learning opportunities. Resources, such as the interactive white board and teacher-designed booklets are used judiciously to support teaching and learning. A print-rich environment, incorporating fine displays of pupils’ work in a variety of genres is evident in all classroom and corridor areas. There is a high standard pertaining to all written work which is monitored and affirmed consistently. Pupils’ oral and phonological skills are suitably developed and they communicate with confidence. Poetry and story are used well to enhance learning opportunities throughout. Pupils, in general, read competently. It is recommended that significant focus be placed on providing differentiated reading programmes to support those pupils experiencing difficulties and the more able pupils.

- The quality of teaching in Mathematics ranges from satisfactory to excellent. Where practice is particularly strong, lessons commence with very good oral work, a range of methodologies, including maths trails and group work, is used to good effect and very good efforts are made to develop the pupils’ problem solving abilities. It is evident that most of the pupils are being taught effectively to think and strategise mathematically. Excellent linkage to other curriculum areas is also evident. It is recommended that these practices be extended to all classrooms. Further attention is also required in some classes to the provision of a structured and suitably differentiated approach to oral mathematical activities that results in frequent review of previously taught concepts. All teachers monitor assigned work and the manner in which teachers encourage pupils to achieve is highly commendable. Of particular note are the supportive comments written by teachers in pupils’ copies.

- There is a good standard of teaching and learning in History. Planning and preparation is consistently prioritised. Age-appropriate timelines and projects are tastefully displayed in designated history corners. The History programme is thoughtfully integrated across the curriculum. Talk and discussion are regular features of lessons. Pupils can empathise with and discuss characters from the past. They display creditable knowledge of a wide range of previously studied themes and topics. To enhance this good work, consideration should be given to how best reflect the commendable guidelines for each class level outlined in the school plan, particularly in relation to local history, thus avoiding over-dependence on textbooks.

- The overall quality of teaching in this school is very good. Most lessons observed were of a high standard. Some of the assessment practices used in the school are excellent. These include use of pupil self assessment folders and thorough analysis of standardised tests to inform teaching. In many classes, very high standards are achieved in literacy and numeracy. It is recommended that the link between assessment results and the provision of a more differentiated approach be investigated.

6. Quality of Support for Pupils

- Commendable practice is evident within the special educational needs (SEN) setting. Detailed planning, complemented by regular assessment strategies, results in pupils making very good progress. Support is provided mainly on a withdrawal basis. The SEN team communicates both formally and informally with class teachers. Individual profiles
and learning programme (IPLP) targets are appropriate. Parents are involved in setting these targets. It is advised that parents be provided with a copy of their child’s IPLP. In order to enhance the co-ordination of SEN provision, it is recommended that this area of responsibility be allocated to a member of the in-school management team. Support for newcomer families is apparent through the provision of important school notices in the relevant international languages. An inclusive culture permeates all interactions involving pupils availing of special education. This practice clearly articulates the school’s commitment to its mission statement.

- Home school links are very strong. Parents, in questionnaires, strongly endorse the work of the school. There are frequent newsletters issued, these providing parents and the community in general with updates from the school. Including updates from the board of management in these newsletters is very good practice.

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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, Parents’ Council and the whole school community of Queen of the Universe N.S. wish to thank the Department of Education and Skills Inspectorate for the courteous, constructive and professional manner in which its inspectors carried out our Whole School Evaluation.

We are pleased that the report acknowledges the dedication, diligence and commitment of our Board of Management, our Principal and all our staff.

We welcome that the report commends our school’s high academic standards, expectations and achievements and that it acknowledges the collegiality and teamwork amongst staff and the very good relationships between staff, pupils and parents. We are particularly pleased that the report acknowledges the positive spirit that exists in Queen of the Universe N.S. and that it has affirmed the inclusive, child centred and welcoming nature of our 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 the staff welcomes the advice and recommendations of the report. The Board of Management working alongside the Principal and staff will facilitate the recommendations outlined in the W.S.E. and will endeavour to implement them effectively, as soon as possible.

An action plan will be drawn up as to how best this may be achieved and progress will be monitored by staff and the Board of Management.