An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

St Finian’s NS
Clonalvy, Co. Meath
Uimhir rolla: 18195R

Date of inspection: 15 September 2010
1. Introduction

St Finian’s National School is a three-teacher co-educational vertical primary school under the patronage of the Catholic Bishop of Meath. There are 63 pupils enrolled. The number of pupils absent for more than 20 days is slightly above the national average. The school is proactive in seeking to improve attendance rates for these pupils through careful monitoring and on-going communication with parents. The board reports that it is having some measure of success in improving attendance for some of these pupils. The board of management of the school was given an opportunity to comment on the findings and recommendations of the report; the board chose to accept the report without response.

2. Summary of Findings and Recommendations for Further Development

The following are the main strengths of the work of the school:

- There is a strong sense of community and shared purpose between the board of management, teachers and the parents’ association resulting in a wide range of well-resourced and interesting learning experiences for pupils. Co-operation in a number of areas with another school in the parish enhances these learning experiences and this sense of community.

- Pupils are attaining a good standard in Mathematics. The majority of pupils either maintain or improve on their attainment level in Mathematics from year to year.

- There are efficient and effective routines in place for the management of pupils. The relationship between teachers and pupils is respectful and positive and pupils behave appropriately towards each other.

The following main recommendations are made:

- Níor mhiste don scoil feabhas a chur ar chumas na ndaltaí sa Ghaeilge, go háirithe sa Ghaeilge labhartha neamhfhoirmiúil agus sa scribhneoireacht.

  The school needs to improve the achievement levels of pupils in Irish especially in informal spoken Irish and writing.

- The development of pupils’ independent writing skills requires further attention in the infant and senior classrooms so that these pupils achieve at an appropriate standard.

- The storage of standardised test results should be centralised and a system devised for presenting these results that better indicates pupils’ progress from year to year.

3. Quality of School Management

- The board of management is constituted correctly and carries out its duties with due regard to the required procedures and protocols of the Education Act. The board participates effectively in the school development planning process. There are clear and effective channels of communication between the board and teachers and parents.
• The principal displays good interpersonal and reflective skills resulting in a positive and collegial work environment and a clear sense of purpose with regard to the school’s development.

• The quality of the physical environment of the school is very good. The building is clean and maintained to a very good standard. There is a plentiful supply of appropriate resources for teaching and learning and the school grounds are spacious and attractive with the recent development of a school garden. The board is anxious to develop the current provision for ancillary accommodation within the school.

• Interactions between pupils and staff are respectful and positive and pupils behave appropriately towards each other. Indeed, the majority of pupil respondents to a questionnaire issued during this inspection state that pupils get on very well together in this school.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

• Organisational policies developed in the school are successful in contributing to the efficient and effective management of the school.

• The quality of curriculum planning is satisfactory. According as curriculum plans are reviewed, it is suggested that a greater emphasis be placed on documenting curriculum decisions and approaches specific to the school.

• A clearer focus on identifying specific learning objectives is required in classroom planning for English.

• The school’s engagement with the development planning process will be enhanced by a greater emphasis on self-evaluation in order to identify priority areas for development. The school also needs to adopt a more formalised approach to action planning in order to address these priorities.

• 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

• Tá gnéithe le forbairt maidir le cáilíocht an teagaisc agus na foghlama sa Ghaeilge. I labhairt na Gaeilge, moltar don scoil scéim don Gaeilge neamhthoirmiúil a chur ar siúl bunaithe ar shaol na ndaltaí agus dírithe ar an gcáithdeán lenar chóir a bheith ag súil i ngach rang. Moltar córas cáimhneachta a chur ar siúl maidir le forbairt na scríbhneoireachta. I múineadh na leitheoireachta, moltar béis sa bhreis a chur ar an bhfoghfraíocht cheart a mhúineadh. Moltar don scoil éispéireas na Gaeilge a shaibhriú do na daltaí trí dhánta, amhráin agus scéalta a aithint ag gach léibhéal.
There is scope for development with regard to the quality of teaching and learning in Irish. The school is advised to develop a programme for informal Irish based on pupils’ life experiences and which would be directed towards the standard expected in each class. It is also recommended that a systematic programme be put in place to develop writing. In the teaching of reading, it is advised that further emphasis be placed on teaching correct pronunciation. It is suggested that the pupils’ experience of Irish be enriched by identifying poetry, songs and stories to be taught at each class level.

- Pupils have good oral language abilities in English. The teaching of reading is systematic and appropriately differentiated to take account of varying pupil ability levels. It is good practice that the responses of pupils in standardised tests are analysed to identify aspects of the reading process requiring development and that provision is made to address these areas on both a class and individual basis. In the infant classes, parents have been working with small groups of pupils on reading and phonological awareness activities and this is successful in contributing to pupils’ good phonological awareness skills.

- While pupils engage in a suitably broad range of independent writing activities, the development of these writing skills requires further attention. In the infant classes, a more targeted development of pupils’ ability to write commonly occurring words and words related to their own life experience is required. In the senior classes there needs to be a more specific focus on the cultivation of style in pupils’ writing.

- There is steady, measurable progress in the standards of Mathematics achieved. The teaching of Mathematics places an appropriate emphasis on discussion, visual resources, the manipulation of concrete materials and the relating of mathematical concepts to pupils’ life experience.

- In most classes, the curriculum in Physical Education is delivered in a broad and balanced fashion. Lessons in Physical Education observed during this inspection were correctly structured, appropriately paced and effectively managed with sufficient regard for safety and optimising time available for pupil activity. In some cases, however, skill development needed to be accompanied by a more clearly focused learning objective. This would enhance pupil participation in the lesson. The school participates in a rounders league and a tag-rugby league with other schools, providing the pupils with the opportunity to represent their school and to experience competitive team sports. A ‘sports for all’ day is held each year with the emphasis placed appropriately on the provision of challenging activities which focus on optimising participation and enjoyment rather than competition.

- The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in this school is generally good. Lessons are pitched at an appropriate level, paced effectively and teacher questioning is successful in developing and consolidating pupils’ understanding. Pupils are attaining a good standard in English, Mathematics and Physical Education. While a satisfactory standard generally applies to the teaching of Irish, there is significant work to be done by the school to improve standards of pupil attainment in aspects of the language. Pupils’ written work is carefully monitored with appropriately personalised comments adding to its impact for pupils. The storage of standardised test results should be centralised and a system devised for presenting these results that better indicates pupils’ progress from year to year. Good use is made of the multi-grade context to develop pupils’ learning through very effective cross-class pair work. Additional learning experiences such as participation in the modern language initiative, the Green Schools Programme, Discovery Science and the Pride of Place add richness to the pupils’ learning. Questionnaire responses record that all pupils find their lessons interesting and that they think St Finian’s NS is a good school.
6. **Quality of Supports for Pupils**

- The enrolment of pupils with special educational needs is undertaken fairly. Pupils requiring additional support are identified effectively. Lessons in the support setting successfully focus on pupils' needs and are taught effectively by means of a good variety of appropriate and suitably paced activities. According as support plans are formulated for the current school year, it is recommended that the school set clearer targets than those set during the previous school year in order to ensure that optimum impact from learning support activities is generated for pupils. It is recommended that senior pupils play an active role in the devising of their learning programme so that they can participate in identifying their own learning needs and play a part in reviewing their own progress. This will help them to apply their learning in the support setting to the classroom setting. The learning support teacher is judiciously deployed within both the support and mainstream setting working effectively with both groups and individual pupils. There is scope to develop this role in the cultivation of the pupils' independent writing skills. The storage of standardised test results should be centralised and a system devised for presenting these results that better indicates pupils' progress from year to year.