1. Introduction

Scoil Cholmcille is a rural primary school under the patronage of the Catholic Bishop of Raphoe. There are 91 pupils currently enrolled. There are four mainstream class teachers and two shared support teachers on the school staff. A part-time teacher also supports pupils with special educational needs. The school participates in Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS, Rural Band 2), the action plan of the Department of Education and Skills for educational inclusion, and in the Modern Languages in Primary Schools initiative. The board of management 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:

- Scoil Cholmcille is a well ordered, very caring, inclusive school community where the pupils’ welfare and development are given priority.

- The school is managed by a very supportive and pro-active board of management.

- The teaching principal provides commendable leadership to the school community. He is very supportive of his colleagues and pupils and has established effective systems for collaboration and teamwork amongst the staff members.

- The teachers work in a conscientious, skilful and earnest manner and they are very committed to their pupils.

- The pupils are very well behaved. They are respectful and friendly in their interactions with peers and teachers.

- Provision for pupils with additional and special educational needs is highly commendable.

- The work of the DEIS co-ordinator is very effective. The Roots of Empathy Programme, utilised in the junior classes, is particularly laudable.

- The overall quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement is very good. The DEIS plan has helped to guide and support the school community very successfully in prioritising improvements in literacy and numeracy.

- The parents’ association is very active in supporting the work of the school.

The following main recommendations are made:

- The board of management and the teaching staff should monitor and actively seek an improvement in pupils’ overall attendance levels.

- The tracking and monitoring of the pupils’ literacy and numeracy achievements should be carried out on an annual basis.
3. Quality of School Management

- The work of the board of management is effective and the board displays a commitment to continual school improvement. Members are very supportive of the principal, of the teachers and of the pupils. Specific roles and tasks are allocated to individual board members and are completed diligently for the benefit of the school. The board’s current priority is the development of information and communications technologies (ICT) in all classrooms. The board should monitor and actively seek an improvement in school attendance.

- The quality of school leadership is very good. The teaching principal is dedicated to raising academic performance and to ensuring that each pupil’s potential is recognised and nurtured. Whilst the daily attendance of pupils is appropriately monitored, it is now recommended that the pupils’ yearly attendance figures are recorded in the school registers. The deputy principal and the post-holder work very diligently and conscientiously to support the principal and to contribute to the overall management of the school. There is very effective collaboration, consultation and shared responsibility within the in-school management team.

- Teachers are very hard working and are commended for their commitment to professional development. There is evidence of commendable shared teaching among class teachers and very effective team-teaching practices with support teachers. The special needs assistant supports pupils very effectively in the mainstream classrooms. The school benefits very significantly from the efficient, diligent efforts of its secretary, cleaner and caretaker.

- The school building and grounds are very clean, maintained to a very good standard and provide a safe, stimulating environment for pupils and staff. All classrooms are well resourced in materials to support the pupils’ learning. In some classrooms, however, there is scope for the development of further number-rich displays. Classroom libraries are very well stocked with a variety of texts but further sets of novels are required. There are commendable resources to support literacy and numeracy in the library and the learning-support setting. The computer suite is used at intervals by groups of pupils. Establishing a rota for this facility would ensure that it is used to the maximum.

- The parents’ association is very active and enthusiastic in its work and is very supportive of school activities. There is good communication between the board and the parents’ association and between the principal and the parents’ association. Parent-teacher meetings are held annually. At the end of each school year, a written report is issued to parents summarising pupils’ progress and attainment. It is recommended that these reports include pupils’ yearly attendance figures and the results of standardised tests in reading and Mathematics. Responses to parent questionnaires indicate that the school has a very good reputation in the community, that it is welcoming towards parents and that the children like attending school.

- The overall management of pupils is very good and most pupils display confidence in classroom interactions. There are good opportunities provided for pupils to engage in a range of extracurricular activities. The school has been awarded a green flag due to its environmental awareness and care practices. It is recommended that weekly assemblies are held to celebrate the pupils’ learning, individual, class or school achievements and to promote and reward school attendance. Pupils’ responses to questionnaires administered during the evaluation indicate that they enjoy very supportive relationships with their teachers, that they know the school rules very well and feel safe in school.
4. **Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation**

- The quality of whole-school administrative planning is good. The board and teaching staff are committed to the development and review of whole-school policies and procedures. Ratification dates and sign off should, however, be included on all school policies. As school plans are revised and developed, further consideration should be given to consulting parents and to involving them more in policy formulation. The school web site should be utilised to facilitate the dissemination of some key policies with the school community.

- The overall quality of curriculum planning is commendable. However, it is recommended that planning grids are devised as part of the future review of the English plan. This will provide whole-school, quick-glance reference tools to ensure continuity and progression in the key areas of the language. An appendix to the music plan should lay out a comprehensive repertoire of music for each class to ensure pupils have opportunity to listen and respond to a wide range of musical styles, tradition and cultures.

- Teachers are committed to school self-evaluation and the current priorities for development that they identify include special educational needs training and support in the use of ICT in teaching and learning across the school. Further links with the Special Education Support Service (SESS) and National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) are recommended. An e-learning plan is also required. This should include a developmental programme of ICT skills for pupils. Planning and implementing e-learning in your school (National Centre for Technology in Education, 2009) will be a useful reference in this regard.

- A three-year DEIS action plan was in place for 2007-2010 and this identified targets with regard to improving the pupils’ attendance, reading and numeracy skills as well as developing home-school partnerships and links with the wider community. In compiling its next action plan, it is recommended that the in-school management team use the data that is available within the school to monitor the progression and the achievements of the pupils in terms of literacy, numeracy and school attendance on an annual basis.

- The quality of classroom planning is very good. In all classrooms, teachers provide very effective long-term planning with clear, time-bound targets. The quality of short-term classroom planning is very good with some very effective use of thematic planning. Records of monthly progress are maintained by the principal.

- 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 caighdeán maith le sonrú i múineadh agus foghlaim na Gaeilge. Baineann na hoidí feidhm fhiontach as rainn agus as amhráin chun fuaim agus rithim na teanga a chur ar chluasa na ndaltaí. Tá sé le moladh go bhfuil stór cuí de dhhánta ar eolas de ghan
The overall quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in English is commendable. Some very good approaches to poetry exploration, composition and learning were observed during the evaluation. Pupils in the middle and senior classes should be given more opportunities to learn excerpts from their favourite poems as a development of this work. A range of activities is employed to good effect to foster phonological awareness. A culture of reading is promoted through a variety of activities and the teachers are commended for their work in raising standards of reading. An analysis of the pupils’ work indicates that they are exposed to a range of writing activities. There are some highly commendable practices in many classrooms with regard to developing writing skills. This work should be developed and progressed on a whole-school basis.

The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in Mathematics is very good. Early mathematical activities are very effective in the infant classroom; they engage pupils actively in learning and incorporate highly commendable use of concrete materials. Across the school there is very good emphasis on oral maths and tables in particular. Teaching is challenging and there is evidence of group teaching and appropriate additional challenges for higher achievers. Effective strategies such as pair work and number games ensure very good engagement in learning activities in the senior classes. Pupils in all classes display a very good knowledge of number facts and an age-appropriate ability to carry out number operations.

The quality of teaching and learning in Music is very good. Listening, responding, musical literacy, composition and performing are incorporated into lessons. The school is very well equipped with percussion instruments and there are some good support resources for teachers’ use. In all classes, pupils sing a range of songs tunefully and enthusiastically in Irish, English and French. They sing expressively and with confidence. Pupils have a good understanding of pulse, rhythm, tempo and pitch. Music is used to very good effect for classroom management in the infant classes. The school choir performs at various school and church events. There are some areas, however, where further development is necessary and these include the need for better continuity and progression in pupils’ opportunities to play tuned instruments and the development of singing in the middle and senior classes to include rounds, drones and simple harmonies.
• French is taught to senior pupils twice weekly by a visiting teacher. Pupils demonstrate an enthusiasm for the language and their emergent language skills are successfully supported. Lessons are very well structured, have clear learning outcomes and employ active learning approaches very effectively. A range of resources is used to very good effect to support the learning. In the past school year the pupils’ project, Vive Les Maths, won a national award for promoting Mathematics through the medium of French.

• The overall quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement is very good. There is effective use of group teaching which ensures that pupils are supported and challenged appropriately in their learning. Structured play is used effectively to support learning in the infant classroom. The local environment is used as a key resource in many subjects. There is scope for development in the use of ICT in teaching and learning in all classrooms. In their responses to questionnaires administered during the evaluation, the pupils indicated that they get very good direction in how to improve their work and that their teachers explain things very clearly.

• Teachers place commendable emphasis on ongoing assessment and their use of individual pupil profiles in the infant classes and in the senior classes is very good. The system of using personal record books for pupils’ writing is highly commendable and these records show progression in writing skills from junior infants upwards. Suitable screening tests are administered to the junior and senior infant pupils in order to facilitate the early identification of learning difficulties. Standardised tests are administered from first to sixth classes and are currently used to identify pupils needing learning support.

6. Quality of Support for Pupils

• The principles of inclusiveness, equality of access and participation are effectively promoted in the school. The learning-support teacher spends three days per week in the school and gives very effective support to pupils with additional literacy and numeracy learning needs. Highly commendable individualised learning programmes, based on priority learning needs, are in place for all pupils attending learning support. These are devised in collaboration with class teachers. Early intervention strategies are in place for senior-infant pupils. Consideration might be given to some earlier intervention work with junior infants.

• The school has been allocated twenty-two resource teaching hours for pupils with low incidence special educational needs. This is currently provided by two teachers. While both offer commendable support to the pupils, it would be more efficient in terms of pupil-contact time if this service was provided by one teacher. Both teachers use very effective teaching methodologies including in-class support. A good range of diagnostic tests is used to identify pupils’ learning strengths and needs. Appropriate individual educational plans (IEPs) are formulated in consultation with class teachers and parents. Ongoing communication with parents is very good. Record keeping is of a high standard and the pupils’ progress is monitored and recorded diligently. Consideration should be given to holding regular formal meetings with class teachers to progress and review the IEPs.

• Provision for pupils from disadvantaged, minority and other groups is very effective. The work of the DEIS co-ordinator is closely aligned to the priority targets identified in the DEIS plan. Home visitation is a significant element of the co-ordinator’s role. Roots of Empathy, a programme delivered in a junior classroom with the support of the Health Service Executive (HSE), a local parent and her baby, is highly supportive of the pupils’ social and emotional development. The co-ordinator places considerable emphasis on the successful transition of pupils into the primary school and has very good links with pre-school parents and pupils. Close links are also established with the local post-primary schools in preparation for the transfer of senior pupils. A laudable range of after-school
courses and in-school activities are organised for parents to help them support their children's learning and development.
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 and staff wish to acknowledge the courtesy and professionalism of the Inspector during the W.S.E. in Scoil Cholmcille. The Board of Management and staff welcome the positive findings and constructive comments made throughout the report.

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 staff will actively promote and encourage an improvement in overall attendance levels. Pupil literacy and numeracy achievements will continue to be monitored as is current practice in accordance with the recommended methodology.