Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

St. Catherine’s National School,
Model Farm Road, Cork
Uimhir rolla: 18253F

Date of inspection: 04 March 2011
1. Introduction

St. Catherine’s is a primary Catholic school situated in the suburb of Cork City. The school has a current enrolment of 317 girls and 4 boys. Documents have been prepared with due diligence to transfer the patronage of the school from the Mercy Order to the Catholic Bishop of Cork and Ross. 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:

- The members of the board of management contribute a range of skills and expertise to their work which greatly support the school.
- The teaching staff, ably led by the principal, works competently and provides a broad and balanced curricular experience for pupils.
- The quality of teaching and learning is very good. Lessons are carefully structured and a variety of effective methodologies is skilfully used.
- Pupils are very well behaved and participate enthusiastically in the learning process.
- The school is characterised by a community that nurtures the holistic development of the pupil in a stimulating learning environment.
- Parents are enthusiastic and supportive of the work of the school.

The following main recommendations are made:

- It is recommended that planning approaches be further streamlined to include greater parental involvement with more extended dissemination of policies.
- It is recommended that the board of management adhere to the Department of Education and Skills’ regulations with regard to the length of the school day for infant classes and to class size.
- It is recommended that the in-school management team further develop its curriculum leadership role to enhance the school’s self-evaluation process.
- Further development of assessment for learning and a more differentiated learning programme for pupils, to include in-class support, should be implemented.

3. Quality of School Management

- The expertise of members of the board of management enhances the competent functioning of the school. Minutes of meetings are carefully maintained. Accounts are independently audited and submitted to trustees annually. Commendably, a report is agreed at each meeting for circulation to stakeholders. A review of the board’s
managerial role would further promote its effectiveness. The board ensures that the school building and environs are maintained to a very high standard.

- The principal constructively promotes a culture of collaborative decision-making and positive relations across the school community. She is ably assisted in her role by the in-school management team who carry out their responsibilities diligently. It would be beneficial to formalise meetings and to review duties to ensure that the priority needs of the school are fully addressed. A greater emphasis on the team’s curricular leadership role in relation to monitoring and evaluating the implementation of the curriculum would enhance the school’s self-evaluation process. All staff members are strongly committed to the promotion and ongoing development of the school.

- The school authorities, with the support of departmental grants, has invested in a wide range of resources, including information and communication technologies (ICT), which are effectively utilised to support pupils’ active learning across all curricular areas. The work of the school is supported by a diligent and dedicated ancillary staff.

- Class sizes vary, with the largest class significantly larger than the smallest. A review of class size is recommended to ensure compliance with Circular 21/2010 Regulations governing the appointment and retention of teachers in Primary Schools for the school year 2010/2011. Furthermore, the infant school day is shorter than that prescribed in department circular 11/95 Time in school. It is recommended that school should comply with the terms of this circular.

- An active parents’ association commendably supports the work of the school. Procedures to ensure greater representation of parents at committee level are being actively pursued. Some very good communication structures are in place. More formal procedures to enable regular meetings with the principal are advised. Parents’ responses to department questionnaires indicate their satisfaction with the high standard of education provision in the school.

- The management of pupils is very good. They are very well behaved, display a positive attitude to learning and engage enthusiastically in school activities. Classroom atmospheres are affirmative and pupils’ interactions demonstrate high levels of confidence. A range of practices, including a weekly assembly, provides opportunities for pupils to be collaboratively involved in school life.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- Whole-school planning has been progressed through the collaborative activity of staff and board and, in some instances, parents. More formal procedures to ensure parental involvement in all planning and review processes should be established. Greater dissemination of the school plan is also advised. Administrative policies are informative. The school’s enrolment policy, however, should be reviewed in line with legislative requirements. A wide range of curriculum plans have been collectively formulated. These plans should demonstrate more clearly the developmental nature of learning in all subject areas.

- While teachers prepare schemes of work, the quality and frequency of classroom planning varies. Teachers are encouraged to make greater use of the school plan to inform long-term planning. To further progress short-term planning, templates should be reviewed. Teachers carefully maintain monthly progress reports. In general, the process of self-evaluation emanates from review of school plans at staff and in-school management meetings. To further advance this work, staff and management are encouraged to adopt a more formal and systematic approach to school self-evaluation.
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 teaching and learning is very good. Lessons are carefully structured and a variety of effective methodologies is skilfully used. An appropriate balance between whole-class teaching and group work is judiciously practised. The competent use of ICT as a teaching resource is in evidence. To optimise pupils’ learning potential, there is a need to implement a more differentiated learning programme to cater for the wide range of pupil ability.

- Sa Ghaeilge, léiríonn daltaí tuiscint an-mhaith ar an dteanga. Leagtar béim fhónta ar scéalaíocht agus ar fhilíocht i roinnt ranganna chun scileanna éisteachta agus labhairtha na ndaltaí a fhobairt. Ba de thairbhé foghlaím na ndaltaí an dea-chleachtaics seo a chur chun cinn ar bhonn uile-scoile. Múinteir ionchar teanga go córasach ach is gá breis deiseanna a sholáthar do dhaltaí an teanga seo a chleachtadh i gcumhthéacs cumarsáide. Tá sé ar a gcomas abairtí iomlána a struchtúr go crúinnt. Tá caighdeán na léitheoireachta agus na foghraíochta an-mhaith ach is gá eispéar eolais leis deiseanna saor-scribhneoireachta a chur i gcomhthéacs cumarsáide.

Pupils display a very good understanding of Irish. Strong emphasis is placed on story-telling and on poetry in some classes to develop pupils’ listening and speaking skills. Further development of this good practice, on a whole-school basis, would benefit pupils’ language learning. Vocabulary is taught systematically. However, there is a need to provide pupils with more opportunities to practice the language learned in a communicative context. Pupils structure sentences accurately. A very good standard of reading and pronunciation is evident in classes. The provision of more reading material would enhance pupils’ reading experience. Due emphasis is placed on writing in lessons. However, the provision of more free-writing opportunities is recommended.

- The quality of teaching and learning in English is very good. Oral language skills are conscientiously developed and pupils communicate confidently. The further development of a whole-school co-ordinated approach to a discrete oral language programme is recommended. Pupils’ response to and appreciation of poetry is actively nurtured. A compilation of suitable poems for each class level would further promote poetry recitation throughout the school. Pupils’ literacy skills are effectively developed and many pupils achieve high standards in reading. Some very good examples of process writing across a variety of genre are in evidence. It is recommended that a whole-school approach to process writing be adopted and further integrated with ICT. The frequency of pupil engagement in independent writing should also be extended. Pupils’ handwriting is exemplary and the presentation of written work is highly commended.

- Teaching and learning in Mathematics is very good. Teachers provide purposeful mathematical activities which are well supported with a wide variety of resources. There is clear evidence of progressive development of all curriculum strands. Hands-on experiences ensure a high level of interest and participation. Placing greater emphasis on
relating mathematical activities to pupils’ experiences and environment is encouraged. Appropriate attention is focused on the teaching of mathematical language. Focused oral work, which includes challenging questioning and the development of estimation and mental strategies, is frequently provided. Well structured station teaching is a regular feature of some classes.

- The quality of teaching and learning in Drama is very good. A safe environment, which includes the agreement of the drama contract, enables pupils to enter the fictional world effortlessly. A wide range of effective strategies are skilfully used to facilitate pupils’ full participation. Story is used to very good effect. Pupils display an ability to role-play, improvise and enter into character with spontaneity. Through interaction with others in group scenes, pupils are enabled to cooperate and create fictional relationships. Pupils’ reflections on the dramatic activity should be encouraged. Drama is gainfully employed to enhance learning in other curricular areas.

- Pupil attainment is regularly assessed through a combination of formal and informal assessment strategies. Standardised test results indicate that pupils are making very good progress in literacy and numeracy in accordance with their ability. Consideration might now be given to tracking pupil progress and creating profiles. While all teachers monitor learning a more consistent whole-school approach to assessment for learning should be adopted.

6. Quality of Support for Pupils

- Support for pupils with special education needs (SEN) is provided by three teachers. A very inclusive environment is created for pupils. Support is mainly delivered on a withdrawal basis. It is recommended that a greater balance be ensured between withdrawal and in-class support. Well-structured and focussed early intervention strategies are implemented in some classes. The development and extension of these practices would further benefit pupils’ learning. Consultation between mainstream and support teachers takes place informally. Individual education plans are devised through a collaborative process. Lessons are well structured and interactions between teachers and pupils are positive and affirming.

- Language support for pupils for whom English is an additional language (EAL) is mainly provided on a withdrawal basis. Pupils’ communicative language is suitably developed through a range of effective methodologies and through active learning approaches. Useful structures are in place to ensure teacher collaboration, a practice that should be extended to all classes. Further focus should now be placed on recording pupil learning and on the systematic development of pupils’ cognitive language, particularly through in-class support structures.
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 of St. Catherine’s welcomes and is very pleased with the findings of the Inspectorate based on our recent W.S.E. We wish to thank them for their kindness, thoroughly professional approach and their very supportive and constructive engagement with pupils, staff, Board and parents alike. We are especially pleased that the essence of our school as a holistic and stimulating learning environment is clearly captured by this report. We are also very happy to see that the quality of teaching and learning in St. Catherine’s as well as the management of the school were viewed so favourably.

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 community in St. Catherine’s have been actively engaged in implementing all of the findings and recommendations of this report since our post inspection meeting. We can happily report that in particular.

(a) Infant Classes now stay in school for longer day to allow for second break time/playtime.
(b) Class sizes are now in keeping with circular 21/2010.
(c) Parental involvement in planning, as well as greater dissemination of policies, are both being addressed.
(d) In class support for pupils has been further embraced.
(e) Further development of the Curriculum leadership role of I.S.M. team is underway.