An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Ardlios NS, Ballickmoyler, Co. Laois, via Carlow
Uimhir rolla: 18532J

Date of inspection: 22 September 2011
1. Introduction

Ardlos NS is a co-educational school catering for 79 pupils from Arles and the surrounding area. The school is under the patronage of the Catholic bishop of Kildare and Leighlin and strives to help all children to fulfil their potential while respecting difference. Pupil attendance rates are good. The principal was appointed in March 2011. 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:

- The board of management and parents’ association actively support the work of the school.
- The principal has a clear vision for the development of the school and exhibits effective leadership qualities.
- All teachers and staff work collaboratively and demonstrate dedication and commitment to their work.
- The quality of teaching and learning in the four subjects evaluated is good.
- The management of pupils is of a very high standard.

The following main recommendations are made:

- Curriculum plans for the remaining seven subjects should be developed to guide teaching and learning.
- Assessment for learning strategies should be developed at a whole-school level to inform differentiation.

3. Quality of School Management

- The quality of the work of the board of management is good and it is committed to developing the school as a central service within the local community. The board is commended for the provision of a productive and well-resourced learning environment. School finances are managed carefully. The board plays an ongoing role in the development and ratification of organisational policies and curriculum plans. Further strategies to communicate its activities with the wider community and greater involvement of parents in the policy development process should be explored.
- The newly-appointed principal is innovative in her work and places a clear focus on instructional leadership. She combines leadership and management of the school with her teaching duties very competently. The in-school management team is effective.
Members meet regularly and conscientiously undertake a range of assigned duties. The need to regularly review these duties has been identified by the school. It is recommended that a greater focus be placed on the curriculum leadership aspect of the duties of the in-school management team.

- The management of relationships and communications within the school community is good. In-school communication is very good and this is assisted by the recently developed school intranet. The parents’ association actively supports the work of the school. In questionnaires, the vast majority of parents reported that they were happy with the education provided by the school. The school communicates effectively with parents through a range of media, including its informative website. In general, parents should not be expected to finance external tutors to implement aspects of the curriculum during school hours.

- Resources are managed effectively by the school. Cordial working relationships are evident and all members of staff work collaboratively in the best interests of pupils. The differential in class sizes should be kept under continuous review by the board.

- The management of pupils is very good. They are enabled to develop holistically through the provision of a wide variety of co-curricular and extracurricular activities. The positive school atmosphere fosters very good discipline. The majority of pupils report in questionnaires that they enjoy positive relationships at school and are achieving well in reading and Mathematics. The proposed development of a pupil council is timely to address pupils’ desire for greater involvement in relevant school decision-making processes.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- The overall quality of whole-school planning is good. Organisational plans are contextualised to the needs of the school. The enrolment policy, special education needs policy and the code of behaviour should be prioritised for review. Curriculum plans for the four subjects evaluated are of a high quality and inform teachers’ planning and practice. As identified by the school, the development of a plan for the remaining seven subjects is a priority in order to guide whole-school approaches. Commendably, recent school self-evaluation has focused on the key areas of literacy and numeracy.

- The quality of teachers’ individual planning is good and long-term plans are of a very high quality. Planning is closely aligned with available whole-school planning and reflects the structure and format of the curriculum. In some instances, teachers are advised to ensure that learning activities organised to achieve the curriculum objectives are clearly delineated.

- 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 overall teaching, learning and pupil achievement is good. The teachers display proficient classroom management skills. Good use of information and communication technology (ICT) by teachers is evident throughout the school. Daily play activities provide pupils with opportunities to explore, interact and be creative in the infant classroom. Effective use of active and collaborative methodologies was observed in most settings. Written work is well monitored by all teachers. While there is some provision for differentiation based on class levels, this should be developed further to exploit the potential of the multi-class context. Pupil engagement is very good and they discuss aspects of their learning competently and confidently.

• Provision for assessment of learning is of a high quality. A range of screening and standardised tests are administered annually and the results are analysed at a whole-school level. While all teachers undertake some assessment for learning, there is scope to develop this aspect of their practice. This would provide data on pupils’ progress across the curriculum and inform the organisation of differentiated learning experiences. The proposed development of pupil profiles will bring greater cohesion to assessment records.

• Tá caighdeán mhaith á bhaint amach i múineadh agus i bhfoghlaim na Gaeilge. Cothaítear dearcadh dearfach i leith na Gaeilge agus úsáidtear go minic í mar theanga bhainisteoireachta an ranga. Sonraítear na torthaí foghlama is fearr i gceachtanna nuair a chuirtear béim ar an gcur chuige cumarsáideach agus nuair a chomhtháítear an fhoghlaim trasna na snáithé. Trasna na scoile, aithrisíonn agus canann na daltaí réimse leathan rainn agus agus amhráin go muiníneach. Tá scilea nna léitheoireachta agus scribhneoireachta a saothrú go céimniúil ach d’fhéa dfaí béim sa bhreis a chur ar fhorbairt na saorscríbhneoireachta.

• A good standard is being achieved in the teaching and learning of Irish. A positive attitude to Irish is nurtured and it is regularly used throughout the day for classroom management. The best learning outcomes were observed in lessons when an emphasis was placed on the communicative approach and when learning was integrated across the strands. The pupils competently recite and sing a wide range of songs and poems throughout the school. Pupils’ reading and writing skills are developed systematically but more emphasis could be placed on developing independent writing skills.

• Effective practice is evident in the teaching and learning of English. Discrete oral language time is an element of each English lesson. A structured and effective approach to the teaching of phonics is evident. Pupils engage with a wide range of reading materials and differentiated parallel readers are used in many classrooms. A further focus on the development of comprehension skills is recommended in some settings. Pupils at each class level are provided with regular opportunities to write and a good emphasis is placed on the writing process. A more consistent application of the school’s handwriting policy is advised. Pupils are given opportunities to listen to, read, learn, recite and respond to a range of age-appropriate jingles, rhymes and poems.

• The quality of teaching and learning in Mathematics is commendable. A very good focus is placed on mental mathematics in all classrooms. Appropriate emphasis is placed on the introduction and use of correct mathematical language. Lessons observed were characterised by the successful use of manipulatives and ICT. Pupils were enabled to cooperate with one another in many settings to develop their understanding of mathematical concepts. An adequate range of problem-solving strategies was demonstrated by pupils during the course of the evaluation. Pupils display a positive attitude to Mathematics and learning outcomes are good.
• The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in Geography is very good. Lessons correctly build on pupils’ existing knowledge and a good emphasis is placed on the concurrent development of knowledge, skills and attitudes. Discussion, story, maps, photographs, ICT and collaborative group work are used effectively to develop pupils’ geographical understanding. The systematic approach to undertaking fieldwork in the locality of the school is commendable. Follow-up work is well managed and further develops the pupils’ investigation and graphicacy skills. Pupils’ focus on environmental awareness and care issues is evident from their successful participation in a range of environmental initiatives.

6. Quality of Support for Pupils

• There is good quality support for pupils with special or additional educational needs. Comprehensive individual plans are in place for all pupils in receipt of support teaching and these are shared with teachers. Some short-term planning would benefit from the use of more specific objectives to guide teaching and assessment of progress. The teaching and learning observed was characterised by affirming teacher-pupil relationships and was clearly linked to pupils’ learning targets. Consideration should be given to developing provision for in-class support. A more structured implementation of the staged approach is recommended within the school, placing a greater emphasis on support for pupils at stage one of the continuum. The competence of the special needs assistants contributes to the effective inclusion of assigned pupils in mainstream classes.

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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 of Ardlios N.S. welcomes and accepts the inspector’s very positive evaluation report on our school. We are pleased that the main strengths of the work of the school were identified and that the commitment and dedication of all members of the school community were affirmed. In light of the proposed cuts by the DES we are concerned that we will not be allocated the resources to continue to meet the requirements of the pupils with special needs.

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 in consultation with the Principal and staff, has prioritised the curriculum plans to be developed as part of our action plan. Assessment for learning strategies are being developed at a whole school level to inform differentiation in the classrooms. A Student Council has been set up and is encouraging pupils’ desire for greater involvement in relevant school decision-making processes.