

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Piercestown National School
Drinagh, County Wexford
Uimhir rolla: 18558E

Date of inspection: 11 November 2011



1. Introduction

Piercestown National School is a rural, co-educational, vertical primary school under the patronage of the Catholic Bishop of Ferns. There are 246 pupils enrolled and attendance levels are very good. The board of management of the school was given an opportunity to comment on the findings and recommendations of the evaluation; 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:

- The school plays a central role in the local area and enjoys the high regard of the Piercestown community.
- The board of management, parents' association and parent body provide active support to ensure the continued development of the school.
- The principal leads and manages the school very effectively and the in-school management team plays a central role in leading school improvement.
- Whole-school planning and school self-evaluation are of a very high quality and impact effectively on provision for pupils.
- The principal and teaching staff are strongly committed to, and successful in ensuring continual innovation in teaching and learning.
- The overall quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement is very good.
- The school's effective provision for Mathematics ensures very high levels of pupil achievement.
- The pupils are eager and motivated, and their participation in learning is excellent.

The following **main recommendations** are made:

- In implementing the school's class allocation policy, it is recommended that the teachers be facilitated to experience a wider range of class settings and contexts.
- It is recommended that the school's current approaches to individual teacher short-term planning and the recording of monthly progress be reviewed.

3. Quality of School Management

- The board of management works productively to support the continued development of the school. Decision-making procedures are open and effective, and individual members fulfil assigned roles responsibly. Statutory requirements and departmental guidelines are complied with and the board plays an important role in policy development. The board is

now well positioned to further develop its consideration of teaching, learning and pupil achievement matters.

- The principal's work in leading and managing the school is very effective. He exemplifies excellent professional standards, has established a high level of professional credibility and sets high expectations for staff and pupils. The quality of his curriculum leadership deserves high praise and the school is characterised by a culture of team work and school improvement. The in-school management team has a clear and purposeful range of duties which are reviewed regularly and reflect the changing curriculum priorities of the school. Members of the team play a central role in leading improvement and innovation.
- The school building and grounds are well maintained and provide a stimulating learning environment. Interactive whiteboards are used purposefully to aid teaching and learning. The proposed expansion of the school's existing ICT facilities to ensure pupils' greater access to and use of ICT is welcomed. While the school's extensive literacy resources in English and Irish are beneficially employed, the more careful grading of reading materials is advised. In implementing the school's class allocation policy, it is recommended that the teachers be facilitated to experience a wider range of class settings and contexts.
- The school is characterised by its open and welcoming atmosphere. High quality relationships are in evidence between the board of management, the staff, the parents' association and parents generally. Parents are kept well informed regarding their children's progress and school events, and are facilitated to become actively involved in a variety of in-school and co-curricular activities. The parents' association contributes significantly to the work of the school and the range of activities provided. All parents who completed questionnaires confirmed that the school is welcoming of them, that it is well run and that it has a good reputation in the local community.
- The pupils are valued members of the school community and are treated with equality, fairness and respect. They are eager and motivated in their learning and demonstrate high levels of confidence and self-esteem. The implementation of a number of initiatives to develop the pupils' capacity to participate in age-appropriate decision-making is praised. The management of pupil behaviour and their participation in learning is excellent.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- Whole-school planning and school self-evaluation are of a very high quality and impact effectively on provision for pupils. Collaboratively devised, coherent planning is in evidence for all curriculum and organisational areas. Systematic arrangements are in place to ensure that the effectiveness of curriculum implementation is reviewed regularly. Assessment information regarding teaching, learning and pupil achievement, including information received from the education partners, is used purposefully to identify development priorities and to guide planning for improvement. The school's recently devised three-year plan for literacy is deserving of particular commendation.
- Individual teachers provide long-term and short-term planning to guide their work and carefully maintain monthly progress records. It is recommended that the school's current approaches to short-term planning and monthly progress records be reviewed. In so doing, greater emphasis should be placed on the articulation of clear learning outcomes in terms of pupil knowledge, skills and understanding.
- Confirmation was provided that the board of management has formally adopted the *Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools* without modification and

that the school is compliant with the requirements of the *Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools*.

5. Quality of Teaching, Learning and Pupil Achievement

- The overall quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement is very good. The teachers provide contexts for learning that are challenging, collaborative and enjoyable. They ensure that the teaching approaches and learning activities in use support and challenge the diversity of learning needs. The pupils are facilitated to use higher order and critical thinking skills to solve problems and construct new understandings. They display high levels of motivation and engage positively and successfully in their learning. The teachers use a range of effective approaches to evaluate the quality of learning outcomes and to continually improve their teaching. In the pupil questionnaires, almost all pupils reported that their lessons are interesting and that their teachers explain things clearly and tell them how to improve their work.
- Tá caighdeán sásúil i múineadh agus i bhfoghlaim na Gaeilge agus i ngnothachtáil na ndaltaí. Éiríonn go sciliúil leis na hoidí atmaisféar dearfach i leith na Gaeilge a chothú tríd an scoil. Baintear úsáid fhiúntach as raon straitéisí gníomhacha chun cumas labhartha na ndaltaí a fhorbairt agus tá leibhéal creidiúnach sroichte acu. Cé go léann formhór na ndaltaí le cruinneas agus le líofacht oiriúnach, b'fhearrde an toradh dá gcuirfí scéim léitheoireachta níos céimniúla i bhfeidhm agus dá n-úsáidfí raon níos leithne d'ábhair léitheoireachta. Tá dúl chun cinn inmholta le sonrú sa scríbhneoireacht agus ba thairbheach do na daltaí an bhéim ar an saor-scríbhneoireacht a dhaingniú.

Teaching, learning and pupil achievement in Irish is of a satisfactory standard. The teachers skilfully cultivate a positive attitude to the Irish language throughout the school. A range of active-learning approaches is usefully employed to develop the pupils' speaking skills and they have reached a creditable standard. While most pupils read with appropriate accuracy and fluency, the implementation of a more structured reading programme and the use of a wider range of reading materials would improve learning outcomes further. Commendable progress in writing is in evidence and a strengthening of the emphasis on independent writing would be beneficial to the pupils.

- High quality teaching, learning and pupil achievement are in evidence in English. The pupils communicate competently, demonstrate a richness of language and engage confidently with the views and opinions of others. Laudable reading standards are in evidence throughout the school in response to the successful implementation of a breadth of literacy initiatives. Almost all pupils report that they think they are doing well at reading. In particular, the effective development of the pupils' comprehension skills is commended highly. The pupils demonstrate a well-developed capacity to write for a variety of purposes and audiences, and the quality of their completed works is very good.
- The school's very effective provision for Mathematics ensures highly commendable levels of pupil achievement, with a majority of pupils reporting that they think they are doing well. Laudable features of provision include skilfully managed talk and discussion, the effective use of active learning and manipulatives, and the linking of learning to real-life situations. The implementation of well-structured, whole-school approaches to problem solving has resulted in the achievement of very high quality learning outcomes in this specific area.
- Teaching, learning and pupil achievement in the Visual Arts is of a high quality. The pupils experience a broad programme and are facilitated to develop their skills, techniques and creativity through the purposeful use of a wide range of media and tools. While acknowledging the school's commitment to promoting art appreciation, it would be

beneficial to further consolidate the pupils' responsiveness to art. Their completed works contribute substantially to the attractiveness of the school environment and are celebrated regularly, including through an annual art exhibition.

6. Quality of Support for Pupils

- There is effective support for pupils with additional learning needs. Individual needs are carefully diagnosed and addressed through a judicious balance of withdrawal and in-class support measures, including a range of well-structured early intervention initiatives. The pupils experience very encouraging relationships with their teachers that support their progress in learning and the cultivation of their independent learning skills. Lesson provision is well structured and resourced, and lesson activities are designed skilfully to respond to the pupils' individual and shared learning needs. As a consequence, the pupils are making good progress in their learning. The level of collaboration between support teachers, class teachers and parents is highly praised, as is the quality of special needs assistance.
- Pupils in Piercestown National School experience being educated in an inclusive environment. The supports received under the Department's *School Completion Programme* are used effectively to support pupils' full and continued participation in education. In particular, the role of home visitation is praised.

Published February 2012