1. Introduction

Carlow NS is a co-educational primary school operating under the patronage of the Church of Ireland Bishop of Cashel and Ossory. The attendance of the 136 pupils is very good. 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 management team and staff have a shared sense of purpose and work in a diligent and committed manner.
- The school building provides excellent facilities for the pupils and a very good range of resources for learning is available throughout the school.
- Provision for pupils with special educational needs is very good.
- All teachers display very good classroom management and organisational skills.
- Very good communication exists between all members of the school community.
- Pupils are making progress in reading and levels of achievement have improved in recent years.
- The school’s commitment to Information and Communication Technology and its use as a teaching tool is particularly noteworthy.

The following main recommendations are made:

- Leadership in the school should commence a systematic review of curriculum plans and implementation.
- The teaching of Mathematics should be further differentiated in order to cater for the range of pupil abilities in the school.
- A separate policy on assessment should be devised.
- To build on the good practices that have been established, it is recommended that core aspects of the literacy be taught and consolidated at each class level.
- The current Irish programme requires systematic review. Moltar athbhreithniú chóir a dhéanamh ar an gclár don Ghaeilge.
3. **Quality of School Management**

- Members of the board of management carry out their duties in an effective and conscientious manner complying with all legislative and departmental requirements. They give generously of their individual time and talents to support the school community.

- The principal is diligent and committed and the overall management and administration is very good. She has established good communication links with the parent body and wider school community. The in-school management team meets regularly and members carry out assigned duties diligently. It is recommended that the management team lead a systematic review of the various curriculum areas. Duties assigned to in-school management team members should be amended as appropriate.

- The school building provides a warm, safe environment for the pupils and has excellent teaching facilities. The school grounds are extensive and maintained to an excellent standard.

- Overall communication between the school and the community is very good. The parent body is very supportive of the school and contributes significantly in terms of funding and time. Further information regarding the work of the board of management, the role of parents in policy-making and some school practices and procedures is required.

- Though pupils’ behaviour was observed to be very good, it was noted that, in pupil questionnaire responses, only 4 in 10 pupils expressed a definitive view on whether children in the school behave well or not. The majority of respondents in parent questionnaires felt discipline was good and that their children liked coming to school.

4. **Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation**

- The school is commended on the comprehensive nature of the school plan and particularly on the very good quality of the organisational policies.

- All curriculum plans have been completed and agreed and ratified by the board of management. However, these plans are not always reflected in the teaching and learning programmes in the classrooms. Some initial steps have been taken to review some particular school practices and approaches. It is recommended that a systematic process of review of curriculum planning and implementation be put in place over the next few years.

- All teachers are using an agreed template for short-term planning and some excellent planning on the part of individual teachers was noted. Continued emphasis by all teachers on using learning objectives to guide teaching is advised. As whole-school curriculum plans are reviewed, relevant adaptations will have to be made to teachers’ long-term plans.

- 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

- Almost all parents feel that their children are doing well in school and a significant majority of pupils stated that they enjoy their lessons and learning. Overall, teaching is well organised. Very good efforts are made to foster pupil participation. Some good teaching practices and approaches are used through the school though primarily at a whole-class level. A wide range of resources, including the interactive whiteboard, are used effectively in lessons. There is a need to develop and enhance some specific teaching skills including, reviewing and consolidating, using differentiated teaching approaches and exploring topics and concepts in an indepth manner. In reviewing each curriculum area emphasis should be placed on the teaching approaches most suited to the range of abilities among the pupils and the desired learning outcomes.

- The principal aim of the current policy on Evaluation, Assessment and Special Needs is laudable. However, a separate assessment policy should be devised which would ensure that assessment becomes an integral part of the teaching process in every class and that individual teaching practices are informed by assessment outcomes. There is a good system in place for reporting pupil progress to parents.


- Moltar san athbreithniú ar theagasc na Gaeilge atá beartaithe i mbliana, clár leanúnach a leagan ó rang go rang, na stráiteisí a aithint chun úsáid na teanga labhartha a theachtaí, agus struchtúr na gceachtanna a forbairt ar mhaithe le neartú agus daingniú chumas cumarsáide na ndaltaí ach go háirithe.

The teachers cultivate a positive attitude towards the Irish language and they have a good range of resource materials available to support the learning. The majority of teachers make good efforts to use Irish as the language of communication in Irish lessons. This practice is commended. The younger children enjoy Irish and sing and recite poems and songs with spirit and energy. The pupils in the middle and senior classes are able to read clearly in Irish. While pupils have a good vocabulary they are not always able to use this in a variety of contexts.

It is recommended that the impending school review on Irish should focus on developing an incremental programme of learning from class to class, the identification of strategies for teaching the spoken word and the development of the appropriate structure for Irish lessons with a particular emphasis on consolidation and re-enforcement of pupils’ communication skills.

- Pupils display a positive attitude towards English reading and are making good progress in this area. From second class, all pupils read class novels and all pupils borrow books regularly from the school library. The school environment is print-rich and a range of resources is used effectively in the teaching of reading. The early intervention approach places emphasis on the development of core reading skills and on fostering reading fluency on an individual basis. The school is commended on the close monitoring and recording of progress used at this level. As pupils progress through the school emphasis should be placed on the continued systematic development of the core reading skills and
reading competence and on consistent monitoring. Pupils are generally articulate and can speak fluently and competently.

- Pupils engage in personal writing in English on a regular basis and some good samples are on display. It is recommended that the programme for personal writing be reviewed to ensure that pupils are exposed to writing in a variety of genres on a systematic basis and that feedback is formative and helpful. Overall the standard of handwriting is very good.

- In general teachers structure Mathematics lessons well, place appropriate emphasis on pupil participation and explain mathematical concepts clearly. The quality of teaching in Mathematics varies through the school as does the quality of the learning outcomes. Very good teaching practices involved the sharing of the learning objectives, the effective use of support materials, the provision of meaningful group and pair work and the setting of challenging tasks. To improve achievement in Mathematics, further attention needs to be given to the teaching of mental Mathematics across the school. It is also recommended that further differentiated teaching be put in place to cater for the range of abilities among the pupils. Information gathered from the teachers’ ongoing assessment will inform the group teaching approach in every classroom. A renewed emphasis on problem-solving from the infant classes to sixth classes is also essential.

- The quality of resources available in the school to support the implementation of the Physical Education curriculum is excellent. In most classes, a broad range of activities is planned for, including aquatics and dance. The quality of PE lessons observed varied. In most instances, the pupils engaged in appropriate warm-up activities. Most of the teachers use station teaching as the preferred methodology. It is recommended that the pupils’ skill development becomes the focus of the lessons. Teachers are advised to encourage the children to engage in self-assessment practices with regard to progress made in the development of gross and fine motor skills.

6. Quality of Support for Pupils

- The provision for pupils with additional learning needs is very good. Good planning practices exist, with effective collaboration between class teachers, support teachers and external agencies. Individual Education Plans and group plans are regularly reviewed. A suitable range of assessment and diagnostic tests is administered. The Special Needs Assistant works very effectively with the pupils in her care. A very good balance between the provision of in-class support and pupil withdrawal has been struck. It is evident that many of the pupils make good progress. A small number, however, are in receipt of support for many years. Clear guidelines need to be developed that will guide the school in ensuring that the learning needs of all pupils identified for support are adequately addressed.

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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, staff, parent's representatives and our school community welcomed the assessment and would like to thank the Department of Education and Skills Inspectorate for the courteous, professional and supportive way in which our recent W.S.E. was carried out.

We are delighted that the diligence, commitment and dedication of the Board of Management, Principal, teachers and parents were affirmed.

We are also very pleased that the classroom management and organisational skills of our teaching staff was acknowledged as were the improvements in school facilities, ICT and resources for learning. And in addition that the very good communication that exists between all members of the school community was commended.

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 in consultation with the Principal and the teaching staff will continue the review begun at the beginning of the present school year. We welcome the advice and recommendations made in the report and we are endeavouring to implement them.

The teaching staff are currently implementing a differentiated approach to oral Maths and are developing oral language in Irish.

Assessment models are presently being explored with a view to developing a more comprehensive policy. All recommendations will be addressed in due course.