An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Christ Church NS
Lower Newtown, Waterford
Uimhir rolla: 18681D

Date of inspection: 13 December 2010
1. Introduction

Christ Church NS is a seven-teacher, co-educational, vertical primary school with a current enrolment of 109 pupils. The school is under the patronage of the Church of Ireland Bishop of Cashel and Ossory. Attendance levels in the school are very good. The board of management was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the evaluation, and the response of the board will be found in the appendix to 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 has a clear vision for the school, which is shared by all the education partners, and there is a collective commitment to realising this vision.
- The school is characterised by its positive school climate and co-operative working relationships are in evidence across the school community.
- The school enjoys the support of a dedicated and supportive board of management and parent-teacher association.
- The teachers are open to exploring new teaching approaches and methodologies in pursuit of best practice.
- The pupils are exposed to a wide variety of writing genres in English, with very impressive samples of their work on display.

The following main recommendations are made:

- In Irish lessons, there needs to be a greater emphasis on the promotion of accurate pronunciation when pupils are reading and their independent writing should be further encouraged.
- A greater range of diagnostic tests should be employed, to enable the identification of specific learning targets for pupils in receipt of additional support.

3. Quality of School Management

- The board of management is constituted properly and offers significant support to the school. The board has a clear vision for the school, which is shared by all the education partners, and it is committed to the realisation of this vision.
- The quality of leadership in the school is very good. The principal is commended for her commitment and dedication to the school and for the cultivation of a positive school climate. She takes her organisational and curriculum leadership roles very seriously. She is capably assisted by a hard-working in-school management team, who work collaboratively with her. Their duties are reviewed annually and are in line with the needs of the school.
• The school building and grounds are maintained to a very high standard. Presently the school will be commencing a building project, which will add considerably to the facilities. All classrooms are very well resourced. Considerable investment has been made in information and communication technology (ICT). The teachers use these resources very effectively to advance the pupils’ learning.

• The school has a highly committed parent-teacher association which is dedicated to supporting the school. In the parent questionnaires, all parents report that their children like coming to school.

• The management of pupils is highly effective and caring. The pupils are well mannered, confident and co-operative. They demonstrate a praiseworthy capacity to work both independently and collaboratively with their peers.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

• The quality of school planning is good. Curriculum plans for all areas of the curriculum and a range of organisational policies have been devised collaboratively by the principal and teaching staff, in consultation with the board of management. Some of the curriculum plans offer clear direction to the teachers regarding the mediation of the curriculum at each class level and outline the spiral approach to pupils’ learning. It is recommended that all plans be reviewed to ensure that they offer similar guidance. The teachers prepare long-term and short-term plans and record progress in each of the curriculum areas. Appropriate attention is afforded to linkage and integration between subjects, to assessment modes and to a variety of teaching methodologies and approaches.

Child protection policy and procedures

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 teachers employ a range of teaching strategies and are open to embracing new approaches and initiatives. Emphasis is placed on improving teaching and learning through reflective practice. In their classrooms, the teachers create stimulating learning environments and articulate positive expectations of the pupils. The pupils are encouraged to work independently and to become actively involved with others in collaborative learning activities. The teachers encourage the pupils to ask questions and to express views and to share ideas and knowledge. Aistear: The Early Childhood Curriculum Framework (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, 2009) is being implemented very effectively in the infant classroom. The responses to the pupil questionnaire confirm that most pupils consider that their lessons are interesting and that their teachers explain things clearly.

• Ar an iomlán, sroichtear caighdeán sásúil i múineadh na Gaeilge. Leagtar béim ar réimse leathan modheolaíochtaí. Baintear úsáid mhaith as pictiúr, cairteachá, an teicneolaíocht
In general, the teaching of Irish is of a satisfactory standard. Due emphasis is placed on the use of a wide range of learning approaches. Pictures, charts, technology and language games are used to strengthen the pupils’ language skills and to create speaking opportunities for them. Lesson content is suited to the interests and abilities of the pupils. It is important that language structures and phrases are taught along with the vocabulary of the various themes. Overall, most pupils in middle and senior classes read with appropriate fluency. However, it is advised to focus more closely on the promotion of accurate pronunciation.

The pupils engage in various written exercises based on the workbooks or under direction from the teachers. It is recommended that the pupils’ independent writing be further encouraged and promoted.

- The quality of teaching and learning in English is very good. The pupils’ oral language abilities are developed appropriately through the implementation of discrete oral language lessons and through the integration of language learning with reading and writing activities. The pupils communicate confidently and competently across a range of topics and are also provided with regular and structured opportunities to engage actively with the views and opinions of their peers. The pupils’ interest in poetry and rhyme is fostered capably at each class level. The school employs a range of strategies to foster the pupils’ reading skills. The pupils benefit from the schoolwide promotion of a process approach to writing. Impressive examples of the pupils’ work across a range of genres are in evidence in the classrooms. Good use is made of ICT to aid the publication and display of the pupils’ stories and poetry.

- The quality of teaching in Mathematics is very good. In the main, the pupils demonstrate suitable understanding of mathematical content previously addressed. A mathematics-rich environment is in evidence in all classrooms. Lessons are well designed and are presented competently. A variety of teaching approaches is employed including whole-class teaching, group-based activities and pair work. Well-structured talk and discussion and skilful teacher questioning facilitate the pupils’ understanding of the mathematical concepts being investigated. There is a laudable focus in all classrooms on the development of appropriate mathematical language.

- The quality of teaching and learning in Music is good. Through a range of activities such as listening, responding and performing, the pupils are provided with opportunities to develop an appreciation and enjoyment of Music. They are taught a repertoire of rhyme and song, and they sing with confidence. They also demonstrate a good knowledge and understanding of musical concepts and music literacy. Music is integrated productively with other curricular areas. The pupils participate in liturgical ceremonies and school events and these serve to enhance their overall musical experience.

- The progress of pupils is monitored carefully by the teachers through the use of teacher observation, teacher-designed tasks and tests, work samples and standardised tests. The introduction of pupil self-assessment practices is commended. It is recommended that consideration be given to analysing further the results of standardised testing in English and Mathematics as a means of tracking individual pupils’ progress over their entire attendance at primary school.
6. Quality of Support for Pupils

- The interest and enthusiasm of the new team of support teachers is commended. Individualised education plans are prepared for pupils in receipt of additional support. These plans have been developed in consultation with class teachers and parents and the utilisation of this collaborative approach is praised. When devising education plans, the support teachers are advised to ensure that the learning targets established for individual pupils are specific in nature and are duly responsive to their individually assessed needs. The utilisation of a more comprehensive range of diagnostic tools to identify and review specific learning targets is recommended. In support-teaching contexts, teacher-pupil interactions are encouraging and supportive and they serve to build the pupils’ self-esteem and confidence in their own abilities. The pupils engage purposefully in the range of learning activities provided. The support rooms are presented imaginatively with print-rich and mathematics-rich displays. A vast range of resources is available and they are well organised, readily accessible and utilised efficiently.

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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 Christ Church N.S. would like to thank the Department of Education and Skills for the affirmation which the school received in the recent W.S.E. The professionalism of the Inspector carrying out the inspection was especially noted and appreciated. It is also noted by the Board of Management that the staff are working on the recommendations of the W.S.E. as part of the school plan.

Area 2: Follow-up actions planned or undertaken since the completion of the inspection activity to implement the findings and recommendations of the inspection

- Irish Pronunciation: as a staff, we are more conscious now of the need for accuracy in pronunciation in Irish, and we are not only focussing on fluency now. Techniques being used now include:
  - echo reading
  - repeating after teacher
  - repeating after CD.

- Genres in writing: Techniques being used include
  - teacher models writing based on a theme
  - 3rd and 4th classes using Bí ag Scríobh 3 & 4
  - children are being further encouraged to develop their writing, free writing using new vocabulary learned.

- Diagnostic tests: we have researched and looked into diagnostic tests so that we will have a wider range of tests to assess children’s specific needs.

- The Board of Management was very pleased to note that all parents reported that their child is happy to come to school and that children consider their lessons interesting and clearly explained.

- Policies: we continue to review and make policies more concise while also adding more specific information pertaining to each class level.

- More consideration is now being given to analysing standardised tests so that tracking children’s progress becomes easier.