An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Scoil Náisiúnta Chóbh Chionn tSáile
Kinsale, Co. Cork
Uimhir rolla: 18829J

Date of inspection: 19 Sept. 2011
1. Introduction

Scoil Náisiúnta Chobh Chionn tSáile is a co-educational school under the patronage of the catholic Bishop of Cork and Ross. Though built originally, as a two-teacher school with 43 pupils, enrolment has now grown to 215. This growth, though managed successfully, has been a significant challenge to the school community and has placed limitations on the manner in which the curriculum can be mediated in support of the full and harmonious development of each pupil. The limitations of the current site are being addressed by the board of management. The board of management of the school was given an opportunity to comment on the findings and recommendations of the report; 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 board of management manages the school effectively on behalf of the Patron and in line with the guidelines of the Department of Education and Skills.
- The school provides an education appropriate to the needs of the school community.
- All staff members are committed and dedicated professionals and exhibit a broad range of complementary skills.
- The school is well resourced and well maintained.
- There is an emphasis on the achievement of high standards throughout the school and the general level of pupil attainment is very good.
- The principal has played a key role in the successful creation of a positive and collegial teaching and learning environment.

The following main recommendations are made:

- It is recommended that the board of management continue its efforts to build a new school on a green field site as a key priority.
- It is recommended that, in the normal process of review, curricular plans in English and Mathematics be revisited to incorporate the principles of the National Strategy to improve Literacy and Numeracy 2011-20.
- It is recommended that the instructional leadership capacity of the teaching staff be more fully utilised and that, in addition to the formal middle management structures, the leadership potential of all staff members be facilitated, where possible.
- It is recommended that in-school management tasks and responsibilities are reviewed annually in line with current school needs and that more formal reporting structures are put in place to monitor outcomes of middle management activity within the parameters of circulars 008/2011 and 0025/2011
3. **Quality of School Management**

- The board of management is properly constituted and plays a significant role in the general work of the school by providing strategic leadership, facilitating the development of internal leadership capacity and by providing clear channels of communication with parents and other stakeholders. The financial affairs of the school are effectively managed by an appointed treasurer in a voluntary capacity. Accounts are certified annually in line with Departmental guidelines. Relationships are very good within the school community.

- The process of change arising from the growth in pupil population has been managed effectively and, notwithstanding the limitations of space and the prefabricated nature of the accommodation, the provision of resources in support of teaching and learning is a successful feature of the work of the board. The provision of ICT hardware and software and its effective use as a teaching tool is at an advanced stage in the school.

- Parental questionnaire responses provide a resounding endorsement for the work of the school in the community and that almost all parents consider it to be a well run school. A degree of uncertainty was apparent with regard to information sharing practices by the board and a significant percentage of parents were unsure about the work being done by the board on behalf of the school. However, this statistic has to be reconciled with the confidential nature of many aspects of the work undertaken by boards of management.

- The most significant challenge now facing the board is to acquire a new school of adequate size on a new site. Most parents consider school facilities to be unsuitable and this was also a significant and consistent theme in interviews with the board, the parents’ association representatives, the principal and the staff. This is a critical priority given the challenges of implementing the principles of the curriculum in a restrictive environment and the implications for the health, safety and welfare of pupils that exist in the current premises. Given that a development plan is underway, it is recommended that the board should continue its efforts to bring this key project to a successful conclusion.

- The formal in-school management team is comprised of the principal, deputy principal and three special duties posts. They take responsibility for a broad range of duties in line with Departmental guidelines and some other teaching staff members are empowered to lead and manage aspects of the work of the school. In order to improve existing good practice, it is recommended that leadership roles be reviewed annually in line with agreed school priorities and that provision for formal in-school management meetings be arranged within the context of the additional hours (Circulars 008/2011 and 0025/2011) and that more formal reporting structures are put in place to monitor outcomes.

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

- School planning is at an advanced stage within the school and, generally, policies are clear and unambiguous statements which accurately reflect current school practices. Planning is underpinned by collaboration and key policies are issued to all relevant partners in advance of ratification by the board. However, fewer than half of the parental questionnaire responses indicated a need for school management to engage more systematically with parents to elicit their views with regard to relevant school policies. In an interview conducted with members of the parents’ association, similar views were presented in a very constructive manner.
The school is a reflective school and records of progress and of pupil achievement are systematically collated and maintained. Parental questionnaires indicated that most parents trust that school reports give them a good picture of their children’s progress. In order to further develop self-evaluation as a cornerstone of learning within the school community, it is recommended that an annual report be published which might include key teaching and learning priorities for the next school year based on current data. It is also recommended that standardised test scores are evaluated in depth to identify target groups within specific curricular bands which may benefit from specific interventions within agreed timeframes.

All teaching staff members complete long-term and short-term plans in respect of all curricular areas and record progress on a monthly basis. In order to further improve existing practice, it is recommended that a strategic plan be put in place to develop agreed school templates for classroom planning. These should be outcomes focused, linked to whole school aims and objectives and identify clear content or lesson topics for each class.

School authorities provided evidence that, in compliance with the current Primary Circular, 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 overall quality of teaching is very good in the school. There is a clear focus on the full and harmonious development of the child and activity and discovery methods are used effectively. Almost all parents surveyed believe that teaching is good in the school and almost all pupils believe that their lessons are interesting. In addition, the board of management and the representatives of the Parents’ Association expressed their unconditional support for the principal and staff together with their clear satisfaction regarding the general level of pupil attainment.

The manner in which Irish is promoted throughout the school is commended as is the standard of the teaching staff in the language. Hence, many examples of good practice in teaching and learning the language are noted throughout the school. Such practice allows various pupils to use newly acquired language with confidence and in a communicative manner. The effective use of interactive whiteboards in support of oral
work and reading is also a very positive feature of the work. The pupils’ skills in writing are also commendably developed on a whole-school basis.

The further development of the school’s Irish plan is now recommended. This could include further identification of language targets informed by relevant standardised tests and would promote additional staff development as well as curricular leadership. To this end, it is recommended that a staff member with relevant experience and skills be identified and facilitated to promote this aspect of the work.

- English is taught effectively in the school. The results of standardised tests (Micra-T) indicate very good standards with regard to the overall reading ability of pupils. Pupil questionnaires also indicated that almost all pupils have positive self images with regard to their ability to reading. There is a consistent emphasis on language development across the curriculum and pupils are, generally, articulate and confident. Across the school, there is evidence of a carefully structured oral, reading and writing programme within which the abilities of pupils are nurtured through age-appropriate exercises. Individual pupils experiencing learning difficulty are identified and effectively supported. In the great majority of instances, and in line with Circular 32/03 on the retention of pupils in the same grade in primary schools, these pupils move consecutively through the different class levels with their peers.

In order to further improve English standards, and in the context of current national literacy targets, it is recommended that the school review their planning documents for the specific purpose of providing clearer targets at different developmental stages.

- Mathematics is taught effectively in the school and standardised test results (Sigma-T) indicate above average results in almost all of the percentile bands. Almost all parents believe that the school is helping their children to progress in Mathematics. Most pupils also believe that they are doing well at Mathematics. Across the school, there is consistent development and reinforcement of key concepts and skills. The language of Mathematics is emphasised and there is a regular emphasis on problem solving. A wide range of materials and resources are available to promote activity learning which ensures a lively interest in the subject.

In order to further enhance the quality of learning in Mathematics, it is recommended that real-life problem solving be incorporated, where possible, into current practice and that the mathematical potential of the school grounds and the immediate environment be explored in the context of developing mathematical trails.

- Geography is taught effectively in the school and all three strands, human environment, natural environment and environmental awareness and care, are given due consideration. Lessons are well structured and good use is made of appropriate resources such as maps, globes, ICT and other materials. The curiosity of pupils about the world around them is successfully stimulated and their skills as geographers are nurtured. There is a good balance between imparting knowledge and project or investigative work. Consequently, the pupils speak knowledgeably about aspects of the curriculum which they have studied.

In order to further improve the teaching and learning of Geography in the school, it is recommended that the staff consider, when appropriate, the advantages of mapping the school and its environment, engaging in investigative cross-curricular projects which might combine text and illustrative work and using the subject to engage in structured group activity on a more regular basis.
6. **Quality of Support for Pupils**

- Pupils with special educational needs are supported by two full-time teachers and one part-time teacher. Three special needs’ assistants (SNAs) are employed to support a number of pupils with specific needs.

- The work of the team is effective and caseloads are constantly under review. A wide variety of teaching approaches, withdrawal in groups or individually, in-class support, peer tutoring, for pupils with special educational needs are employed successfully and early intervention and short-term initiatives are the norm. Every effort is made to allow each individual to progress in line with his/her peers but, in exceptional circumstances, pupils are retained in specific class settings.

Good collaboration occurs between support staff and mainstream teachers and reporting procedures are satisfactory. Systematic testing occurs and practices are informed by relevant policy documents which are actively implemented. Very good practice was observed in a number of settings during the course of the whole-school evaluation which clearly address the needs of pupils with high incidence or low incidence learning difficulties.

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