An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

St. Mary’s National School Kilmeen,
Rossmore, Clonakilty Co. Cork
Uimhir rolla: 19224D

Date of inspection: 16 January 2012
1. Introduction

St. Mary’s National School, Kilmeen is a mixed, rural school under the patronage of the Catholic Bishop of Cork and Ross. Currently, there are one hundred and fifty one pupils enrolled in the school. Enrolment trends are stable and attendance levels are high. The board of management of the school 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:

- There is a positive and supportive working atmosphere in the school which is inclusive of the community and of the individual needs of pupils.
- The quality of relationships within the school community is very good.
- Very good leadership exists within the school and a supportive, collegial environment enables critical self-evaluation and reflection.
- The school has a committed and dynamic staff that work effectively as a team and are mutually supportive of each another.
- Pupils are positively engaged in the learning process and are suitably challenged and progress in line with normal expectations.

The following main recommendations are made:

- The board should review the practice of using external tutors within the school day.
- The board should consider the value of issuing an annual school report for dissemination locally.

3. Quality of School Management

- The board of management is properly constituted and individual members give of their time and expertise generously. They play a central role in school affairs and expressed their unequivocal confidence in the teachers and with the general level of pupil attainment on completion of primary level schooling. The board plays an important role in the maintenance of good relationships which they recognise as being a cornerstone of effective educational provision in their community. Parental questionnaire responses indicated that the parents surveyed consider the school to be well run.

- The in-school management team is very effective and their work is disseminated effectively across the whole school community. A distributed leadership model is evident throughout the school and all staff members are encouraged to take leadership roles in aspects of the work in line with their ambitions, expertise and interests. The principal and staff are open to self-evaluation and reflection. A suggested challenge for the in-school
management team might be the promotion of an image of the school through displays of the quality of the written work being completed which celebrates the achievements of individuals or groups across the curriculum.

- Though no formal parents’ association exists the quality of relationships within the school community is excellent. Parental questionnaire responses indicated that the overwhelming majority of parents feel welcome in the school, appreciate the positive and affirming manner in which their children are educated and trust the school authorities and staff. Notwithstanding the above, it is recommended that the board facilitate the development of a formal parents’ association and their initial moves to achieve this were noted.

- The board manages the financial affairs of the school responsibly and records are carefully maintained. However, it is recommended that, in the future, accounts are certified annually in line with current Departmental guidelines.

- A suitable range of teaching and learning resources has been provided and their effective use was a feature of many of the lessons observed. The provision of ICT hardware and software is at an advanced stage in the school and all staff members are proficient in its use as a teaching tool.

- The school engages in a wide range of extra-curricular activity and the pastoral care of pupils is afforded a high priority. This is reflected in the questionnaire responses of pupils which indicated an almost exclusively contented group of learners with positive self-esteem.

- However, the practice of using external tutors in specific aspects of the curriculum during the school day should be reconciled with Departmental guidelines in relation to voluntary contributions to schools and also in the context of its possible negative effect on teacher competency levels.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- Whole-school planning is at an advanced stage in the school. Plans are relevant, reflect current practice and are cognisant of the legal framework in which schools operate. A high level of compliance with Departmental guidelines in respect of the provision of education is evident from official school documents.

- In order to further improve practice the school is advised to develop more formal collaborative structures whereby parents could contribute to the review and development of official school administrative and curricular documents.

- All teaching staff members complete long-term and short-term plans in respect of all curricular areas and record progress on a monthly basis.

- The school is open to the concept of self-evaluation. Advice was given on the benefit of presenting an annual school report on all aspects of the work of the school to the general community as a means of celebrating their work and identifying new targets for short-term strategic planning.

- 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**

- A broad range of teaching methods are used throughout the school. Classes are well managed and relevant to the learning needs of pupils. Progression from class to class is evident. Pupils are active agents in the learning process and opportunities for collaborative learning are provided on a regular basis. Pupil-teacher and pupil-pupil relationships are exemplary. Questionnaire responses indicate that parents believe that teaching is very good in the school and that pupils enjoy their lessons and learning.

- **Moltar caighdeán an teagaisc agus na foghlama sa Ghaeilge. Cothaithear suim na ndaltaí san ábhar trí cheachtanna a chur i láthair go bríomh ar agus úsáidtear modhanna múinte oiriúnacha. Bunaítear an t-ábhar foghlama, go rialt a, ar théamaí a bhaineann le saol agus le taithí na ndaltaí. Úsáidtear clár foghlama comhtháite sna bunranganna le héifeacht agus bhi cumas cainte na ndaltaí go han-mhaith. Moltar an cur chuige seo a leathanú trasna na scoile ar fad chomh luath agus is féidir.**

  The quality of teaching and learning in Irish is commendable. Pupils’ interest in Irish is promoted through lively lessons and suitable teaching methods are used. Learning themes are, regularly, based on the lives and on the experiences of pupils. An integrated approach is used to very good effect in the lower classes and the communicative abilities of pupils are very good at these levels. It is recommended that this approach is extended across the school as soon as possible.

- In English pupils are exposed to a wide variety of print and there is a considerable focus on the teaching of reading, on developing reading competencies and generating a lively interest in reading as a leisure activity. Across the school there is evidence of a balanced oral, reading and writing programme. There is a consistent emphasis on language development across the curriculum and pupils are, generally, articulate and confident. Standardised test results indicate learning standards in line with normal expectations and both pupil and parental questionnaire responses indicate high levels of satisfaction with the reading abilities of pupils.

  It is recommended that greater priority be given to the presentation and display of pupil’s written work. This should be in conjunction with a whole school focus on penmanship as a greater balance needs to be attained between the writing process and the quality of the finished product in writing.

- **Standardised test results (Sigma-T) in Mathematics indicate satisfactory results in line with expectations. Lessons observed were well structured and learning outcomes were clear. Good use is made of mathematical equipment and pupils display a good understanding of number facts and of mathematical skills. Parents believe that the school is helping their child(ren) to progress in Mathematics and almost all of the pupils surveyed believe that they are doing well at Mathematics. Positive attitudes to Mathematics are evident in the school and the pupils enjoy problem solving. The traditional over-emphasis on mechanical operations in mathematics was discussed at the post-evaluation meetings and more widespread use of co-operative learning as a key strategy in Mathematics education was recommended.**

- **History is taught effectively in the school in an integrated manner. Suitable learning methods are employed and there is a good balance between content material and skills development. Teachers display creativity in leading and developing an appropriate range**
of learning activities. Local history is afforded some priority and active methodologies are used in many instances. Timelines are used to good effect and pupils display a good understanding of chronology as well as continuity and change over time. To further improve existing good practice more use might be made of local visitors and experts and more field trips and project work might be incorporated into whole-school planning as a suitable learning strategy.

6. **Quality of Support for Pupils**

- Pupils with special educational needs are supported by a team of nine which includes two full-time and two part-time resource teachers (RTs), one learning-support teacher (LS) and four special needs assistants (SNAs). Policies and practices within the school facilitate very good access of pupils with special educational needs to the broad curriculum. The work of the team is well managed and resources are used effectively. A wide variety of strategies are employed and assessment data are used to develop clear learning targets.

Results are communicated to parents in an suitable manner in line with departmental guidelines and most parents believe that school reports give a good picture of how their child(ren) is/are doing.

*Published, May 2012*
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 is very satisfied with this WSE report and congratulates the Whole School Team.

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

1. The Board will issue an annual school report.
2. The Parents’ Association has been formed.
3. The practice of using external tutors for music etc within the school day will be discontinued.