Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

St Mary’s National School,
Aughnasheelin, Ballinamore, Co Leitrim
Uimhir rolla: 19365V

Date of inspection: 9 December 2011
1. **Introduction**

St Mary’s National School has a pupil population of 60 pupils and is under the patronage of the Bishop of Kilmore. The holistic development of all pupils is especially fostered: the overall climate of the school is warm, caring and child-friendly and this is reflected in the positive, confident and articulate pupils in all classrooms. Very positive and respectful interactions were observed between teachers and pupils and amongst pupils during the evaluation. Teachers work hard to ensure pupils have a broad educational experience and achieve good standards. 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:

- This school is well run, effectively managed and high expectations are set for pupils.
- Pupils’ attainment levels are good in all the curriculum areas inspected during this evaluation.
- Teaching is of a very high standard in the curriculum areas evaluated.
- Provision for pupils with special educational needs is of a high standard.
- There is a strong spirit of collaboration and a sense of shared purpose among all members of the school community: the role of the principal in nurturing this spirit is acknowledged.
- The utmost concern for pupils is a visible feature of all interactions in this school.

The following **main recommendations** are made:

- An additional focus on the teaching and learning of poetry and greater emphasis on creative writing are recommended.
- Results from assessments should be further analysed.
- It is recommended that discussion take place regarding the rationalisation of the current resource/learning support provision.

3. **Quality of School Management**

- The board is correctly constituted: it meets very regularly and performs its functions effectively. A strong spirit of collaboration and a sense of shared purpose characterise the work of this board. In order to develop its role with regard to teaching and learning, it
is suggested that an examination of trends in pupil achievement, as derived from standardised test results and other assessments, be included on the agenda of board meetings on a periodical basis.

- The leadership of the principal is very effective and is characterised by commitment to high standards in all areas of the curriculum. All records are meticulously maintained and whole school planning has been led with purpose. The collation and provision of individual files in respect of every pupil in the school is most praiseworthy. The quality of the work of the in-school management team is very good. Relevant duties have been clearly specified and are being fulfilled to a high standard. Curriculum and policy review and implementation form a significant and laudable part of these designated duties.

- The quality of the management of resources is very good, with a broad range of resources available to and appropriately used by teachers.

- The quality of the management of relationships with the parent community is very good. In a meeting with the inspector, representatives from the parents’ association reported the satisfaction of the general parent body with the quality of education provided by the school. They are also satisfied with the opportunities available to them to communicate with the teachers regarding their children’s progress and with the nature of teachers’ responses to them. This satisfaction is also echoed in a questionnaire completed by the general parent body.

- The quality of the management of pupils’ behaviour is very good, with effective routines in place to ensure the ordered running of the school and the creation of a positive learning environment for pupils.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- The quality of the school planning is very good. Key organisational policies required by legislation such as enrolment and a code of behaviour are in place: these policies are clear and have a positive impact on school life. Curriculum plans are successful in delineating content and skills between class levels and in providing for differentiation. This planning also ensures that duplication of content from year to year does not take place in multi-grade contexts.

- The school shows a laudable willingness and open-ness to engage in self-reflection. A process of self-evaluation, including action planning around identified priorities, should now be put in place in order to further develop practice in this area.

- The quality of teachers’ planning is very good. Integration, linkage and differentiation are core principles underpinning classroom planning. Multi-grade class settings are planned for and subsequently managed with discernable effectiveness.

- 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

- Tá caighdeán an teagaisc agus na foghlama sa Ghaeilge go han-mhaith. I bhformhór na gceachtanna feicithe le linn na cigireachta, bhí struchtúr cíntie ag gabháil leis an gceacht
The standard of teaching and learning in Irish is very good. In the majority of lessons observed during the course of the inspection, there was a definite structure to the lesson and clarity with regard to the learning objectives. Pupils’ vocabulary is developed well throughout the school. There is flexibility and richness to be seen in the use of this vocabulary. The pupils display a good understanding of a broad range of verbs in a range of communicative settings. Pupils are experiencing success in reading in Irish, and it is now recommended that their reading opportunities be further enriched through the provision and use of more novels and large-format books. Pupils display good competence when they engage in writing: they use a sufficiently broad vocabulary and a variety of verbs. The majority of pupils display a very good ability to structure sentences correctly.

The quality of teaching and learning in English is good. Story, discussion, Drama and oral presentations are examples of effective approaches used by the school in providing for oral language development. Engagement on a deeper level with a wider range of poetry will extend even further pupils’ access to and use of a rich language register. It is now recommended that pupils in all classes be exposed to a range of poetry on a thematic basis and that they be encouraged to memorise and appreciate selected verses to enrich both oral and written language. The attainment of pupils in reading is good. Results from standardised tests, however, need to be analysed further and used to plan future literacy learning. The quality of pupils’ independent writing skills is good. As pupils progress through the school, they demonstrate a good knowledge of punctuation and an increasing ability to structure their writing coherently. They also demonstrate a good mastery of stylistic conventions in their writing. The emphasis placed on providing pupils with an audience for their writing is very worthwhile. Creative writing, however, needs to be extended further.

The quality of teaching and learning in Mathematics is very good. The mathematics curriculum is being taught in a broad and balanced manner. Teachers are successful in situating concepts in the context of pupils’ own experiences. At junior level a sound mathematical basis is established through the practical activities associated with sorting and classifying and the use of concrete materials. A whole-school approach to the teaching and acquisition of mathematical language is in place. Real-life problems are effectively used as a context to apply Mathematics. Pupils respond well to oral questioning and display a competent knowledge of number facts. Regular revision is undertaken and the pupils record their work appropriately. Results from standardised tests should be scrutinised further and used to plan future learning.

The quality of overall teaching, learning and pupil achievement in Science is very good. A wide range of work is undertaken across the four strands of the science curriculum. The children respond positively and are enthusiastic about the topics they have studied. Lessons are appropriately focused, sufficiently challenging and structured correctly. Pupils’ attainment levels are very good: pupils show a particularly deep knowledge of topics related to agricultural issues. The broadening and extension of the literacy aspects of this area in the senior section, through the planned and consistent use of newspaper texts, is worthy of particular note. The participation by the school in a number of
initiatives, such as the Green School and Leitrim Co. Council floral prize contributes to the fostering of positive attitudes to the environment.

- The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in this school is very good. Lessons are pitched at an appropriate level, paced effectively and teacher questioning is successful in developing and consolidating pupils’ understanding. Explicit teaching of key concepts and an expectation of high standards are a feature of teaching in all contexts.

6. Quality of Support for Pupils

- The quality of support for pupils with special educational needs is very good. An overarching commitment to providing pupils with special educational needs full access to all aspects of school life, highly targeted support, and consistent affirmation characterises this school. Teacher observation, standardised assessment and diagnostic testing are used in a highly effective manner to identify pupils’ learning needs. Targets are very clearly set and reviewed regularly. Lesson activities meet pupils’ needs and are pitched at an appropriate level. Teaching is affirming and well paced. A high level of collaboration between mainstream class teacher and support teachers characterises this work. Early intervention work is very effective. The current arrangements for special education, involving the use of three different teachers, all working both in this school and in other local schools, are unwieldy. The school authorities should now enter into dialogue with relevant parties to instigate a process towards the rationalisation of this service.

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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 St Marys National School, Aughnasheelin would like to thank and record its appreciation for the courtesy and professionalism of the Inspectorate of the D.E.S. during the course of this WSE. The Board of Management, staff and whole school community welcome the recognition and affirmation of our school’s commitment to best practice in the areas of management, teaching and learning. We are delighted that the positive collaboration between all in our school community has been acknowledged and that the principal’s role in actively fostering and nurturing this spirit has been recognised in this evaluation.

It is a source of pride for the team who constitute the staff of the school and the lauding of our schools bedrock of operation which is their child centred focus combined with genuine real respect for all which permeates all aspects of the schools operation, giving life to our school’s motto of: *Ní neart go cur le chéile*

We are gratified that the high standards of teaching and learning are identified and recorded. We are honoured that the distinguished commitment of all our staff to the provision of top quality highly effective support to all our pupils including particularly our pupils with special needs is identified and 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 following actions have been planned and complemented in line with the recommendations outlined.

The additional focus on poetry and creative writing have been incorporated and promoted in our current literacy strategies: As with our involvement with the Write a Book project in the past, the school’s participation and success in the Write a Poem project organised by Carrick Education Centre has given real expression to the implementation of this added initiative to our current literacy policy.

The further analysis of assessment results has been initiated with duties in this regard being delegated and agreed by staff. Trends of pupil achievement will continue to be monitored and relevant procedures adopted in line with our current practice. The Board of Management will be informed of these trends periodically.

Discussions on the rationalisation of the current resource/learning support provision is currently being considered as D.E.S. directives in these areas dictate implementation of new structures. However the school will seek to discuss this matter with the relevant parties as has been recommended.