Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Castlerahan Central N.S.,
Ballyjamesduff, County Cavan
Uimhir rolla: 19418Q

Date of inspection: 2nd February 2012
1. **Introduction**

Castlerahan National School, under the patronage of the Catholic Bishop of Kilmore, is a rural school located within the hinterland of Ballyjamesduff in Co. Cavan. The school currently has 136 pupils who are distributed across five mainstream classes. Attendance patterns are 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 diligent teaching principal provides effective leadership.
- The board of management supports the school in a conscientious and able manner.
- The teaching staff demonstrates a strong work ethic and sense of team.
- The active parents’ association is involved in a range of valuable support initiatives within the school.
- The management of communications within the school community is very good.
- Pupils demonstrate exemplary behaviour and positive attitudes towards learning.
- The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in English is very good.
- Pupils perform confidently and competently a wide repertoire of musical genre.

The following **main recommendations** are made:

- To enhance pupils’ learning outcomes in Mathematics it is recommended that greater use be made of assessment data and information and communications technology (ICT).
- It is recommended that the school review its current format for monthly progress reports and short-term planning to optimise continuity and progression in pupils’ learning.

3. **Quality of School Management**

- The quality of the work of the board of management is very good. Prudent financial management includes careful budgeting. The board has been successful in managing two building projects and provides spacious and comfortable facilities for pupils and teachers.
- The teaching principal provides effective leadership within the school community. She successfully fosters a positive, industrious learning environment for pupils and staff. Her meticulous attention to record-keeping contributes to the efficient organisation of the school. The in-school management team consists of a deputy principal and one post-
holder who carry out their assigned duties in a conscientious and caring manner. To further improve practice in this area the curricular leadership roles could be extended to monitor the impact of various initiatives on pupils' learning.

- The quality of the management of resources is very good. A strong work ethic and sense of team is tangible among staff. Teachers’ commitment to ongoing professional development and to embracing new educational initiatives is commended. Ancillary staff makes a significant contribution to the smooth running of the school. Facilities and grounds are maintained to a high standard. Interactive white boards are utilised to good effect and staff have identified the need to further develop pupils’ use of ICT as a learning medium.

- The quality of management of communications within the school community is very good. A wide range of communication channels facilitate regular sharing of information between home and school. The active parents’ association is involved in a variety of valuable support initiatives within the school. Formal monthly meetings take place between the principal and representatives of the parents’ association. The response from the questionnaires distributed to parents during the evaluation indicate high levels of satisfaction with home-school communication and the quality of education provided for pupils.

- The management of pupils is of a very good standard in this school. They demonstrate high levels of engagement in their learning activities and a sense of pride in their learning attainments. Ample opportunities are provided for pupils to participate in decision-making through their involvement in the Active School initiative and the Green-Schools’ programme.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- The quality of the school planning and school self-evaluation process is good. Appropriate priorities have been identified within the school improvement plan and satisfactory action plans have been devised to support the achievement of targets. The results of standardised tests in English and Mathematics are carefully documented and monitored. There remains some scope to optimise the use of this data so that further analysis would enhance the differentiated provision required for pupils of varying abilities.

- Whole-school organisational and curricular policies provide clear guidance and reflect the context of the school. The distribution of pupils across five mainstream classes results in varying combinations of classes from year to year. Curricular plans are reviewed regularly and conscientiously to address this situation. To enhance the school’s response to meeting the challenge of ensuring appropriate progression in pupils’ learning it is recommended that consideration be given to an alternative format of monthly progress reports which facilitates school self-review.

- All teachers provide individual short and long-term planning in accordance with the whole-school policy although the quality varies from satisfactory to very good. Where best practice is in evidence objectives in short term planning are specific, reflect progression over time and facilitate the monitoring of pupils’ incremental learning. It is recommended that the current whole-school approach to short-term planning be reviewed to optimise clarity and continuity in pupils’ learning.

- 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 na foghlama agus an teagaisc sa Ghaeilge go maith. Cothaithear dearcadh dearfach i leith na teanga i measc na ndaltaí go torthúil agus glacann slad páirt go fonnmhar sna gnomháiochtáil foghlama fiúntacha. Is inmholta mar a chuítear bheimh fhónta ar úsáid na mbriathra agus ar chumadh na n-abairtí. Is féidir tógáil ar fhoghlaím na ndaltaí a thuilleadh tríd an ábhar teanga a chéimniú ó rang go rang. Baintear feidhm éifeachtach as an bhfhillocht agus as an scéalaíocht i múineadh na teanga i gcolm de na ranganna agus is fíú é sin a dheanann i ngach rang. Léann fórmhór na ndaltaí le crúinneas agus le tuiscint. Moltar anois monatóireacht a dhéanamh ar chur i bhfeidhm an chlár léitheoireachta uile-scoile agus ar thótháir foghlama na ndaltaí trí scrúdaithe caighdeánaithe a úsáid. Baintear úsáid as straitéisí difriúla chun cur ar a gcumas tascanna easgúla scribhneoireachta a chleachtadh.

- **The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in Irish is good.** A positive attitude towards the language is successfully nurtured among pupils and they participate enthusiastically in valuable learning activities. A praiseworthy emphasis is placed on the use of verbs and on the formation of sentences. It is possible to enhance the pupils’ learning further through ensuring appropriate progression in the language content from one class to the next. Effective use is made of poetry and story in the teaching of the language in some classes and it would be valuable to extend this to all classes. The majority of pupils read with accuracy and understanding. It is now recommended that implementation of the whole-school reading plan and pupils’ learning outcomes be monitored using standardised testing. A variety of different strategies are used to enable pupils practice a range of writing skills.

- The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in English is very good. Commendable emphasis is placed on the incremental development of pupils’ oral language skills throughout the school. Very good practices are in evidence with regard to the teaching of reading which contributes to positive learning outcomes. Pupils are provided with a range of suitable reading material and literacy skills are developed in a systematic and coherent manner. Regular opportunities are provided for pupils to engage in independent writing in a variety of genre with due regard for the conventions of writing.

- The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in Mathematics is good. Mathematical language is developed in a consistent manner throughout the school. Pupils demonstrate appropriate understanding of key mathematical concepts and procedures. It is recommended that greater use be made of assessment data to ensure provision is suitably challenging for pupils with varying abilities and in particular the more able pupil. More extensive use of ICT and team-teaching models is encouraged to facilitate the incremental development of pupils’ problem-solving skills.

- The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in Music is good. Pupils participate with enthusiasm in a wide range of musical activities. The standard of performance in singing and tin-whistle playing is praiseworthy. Pupils demonstrate a good knowledge of the rudiments of music literacy. Excellent lessons were observed during the evaluation which facilitated pupils’ listening, responding and composition skills. However further exploration of these strands through an integrated whole-school approach is recommended to ensure a comprehensive developmental programme. Pupils’ participation in school concerts and external performances enhances their musical experiences and confidence.
• The quality of overall teaching, learning and pupil achievement is good. Commendable aspects of practice include the well-managed, affirming teacher-pupil interactions, stimulating lessons and carefully facilitated group work. Pupils engage purposefully in learning activities and demonstrate positive learning outcomes and attitudes. Pupil progress is closely monitored. While considerable attention is given to differentiating work in accordance with pupils’ abilities there remains scope in some instances to provide more challenging work for the significant number of pupils who present as more able. The provision of attractive print and number rich learning environments within the school is noteworthy.

6. Quality of Support for Pupils

• The overall quality of provision for pupils with special educational needs is good and pupils are benefiting from the supplementary tuition which is currently provided by one full-time learning support teacher and one part-time resource teacher.

• The comprehensive policy on special education clearly outlines the practices which underpins provision for pupils with special education needs. The practice of drawing up individual educational programmes for pupils in consultation with their parents and mainstream teachers is well established. The importance of formally recording targets achieved and progress made by pupils during instructional terms was advised in some instances.

• A range of early intervention support initiatives has been successfully implemented which includes Reading Recovery and in-class support. Further development of team-teaching models is advised to facilitate the provision of targeted support and the development of specific skills commensurate with pupils’ abilities and needs. Lessons observed during the evaluation were well-structured and suitably resourced.

*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

We wish to acknowledge the professionalism with which the WSE was carried out. The staff of the school were empowered by the WSE experience. We feel the report is a fair and balanced reflection of the quality of teaching, learning, planning and management in our school.

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 recommendations made in relation to changing our short term planning format have been adopted by all teachers since April 2012. Our I.T. Postholder is currently liaising with NCTE and other agencies regarding the purchase of ICT and software to enhance pupils learning outcomes in Mathematics.