Whole School Evaluation REPORT

St. Oliver Plunkett N.S.
Newcastle, Athenry, Co. Galway.
Uimhir rolla: 19449E

Date of inspection: 21 October 2009
WHOLE-SCHOOL EVALUATION

This report has been written following a whole-school evaluation of St. Oliver Plunkett National School, Newcastle, Athenry. It presents the findings of an evaluation of the work of the school as a whole and makes recommendations for the further development of the work of the school. During the evaluation, the inspector held pre-evaluation meetings with the principal, the teachers, the school’s board of management and representatives of the parents’ association. The evaluation was conducted over a number of days during which the inspector visited classrooms and observed teaching and learning. The inspector interacted with pupils and teachers, examined pupils’ work, and interacted with the class teachers. The inspector reviewed school planning documentation and teachers’ written preparation, and met with various staff teams, where appropriate. Following the evaluation visit, the inspector provided oral feedback on the outcomes of the evaluation to the staff and to the board of management. 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.

1. INTRODUCTION – SCHOOL CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

St. Oliver Plunkett National School is located in a rural setting approximately 7km from Athenry, Co. Galway. It is a Catholic, co-educational school with an enrolment of 140 pupils. Major infrastructural change and population growth has occurred in the Athenry area in recent years and enrolments in the school have almost doubled since the last school report was issued in 1999. The school staff currently comprises a teaching principal, four other mainstream teachers, a learning-support teacher, a resource teacher, two special needs assistants, a secretary and a cleaner. A second resource teacher visits the school for a small number of hours each week.Projected enrolments indicate that the school may satisfy the criteria for developing school status in September 2010. The provision of appropriate accommodation to cater for the growth in enrolments and staffing is a major concern for the board of management.

The school espouses a Catholic ethos which is supported by regular visits from the acting chairperson of the board and by established school practices in relation to daily prayer and the provision of religious instruction. In keeping with the school’s mission and vision statements, the board of management, parents and staff seek to work collaboratively to create a welcoming, caring, courteous and creative environment in which pupils are valued and can reach their full potential. School records indicate that there is a history of very good attendance on the part of the pupils.

2. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT

2.1 Board of management

The board of management is properly constituted and meets at least five times a year. Minutes of board meetings are very carefully maintained and indicate that the work of the board has focussed of late on health and safety concerns, staffing issues, fund-raising, policy ratification, maintenance and development of the school premises. Financial statements are presented to the board at each meeting and the school accounts are currently being prepared for certification. Tasks are managed in an efficient manner with sub-committees being formed when appropriate. Active engagement in school policy formulation is effectively promoted through the circulation of draft policy statements prior to their discussion and ratification at board meetings.
The board is conscious of its statutory obligations and of departmental regulations and guidelines. Appropriate policies on admissions, attendance and child protection have been ratified and the board is in the process of formulating a committee to review the code of behaviour. A newsletter is issued to the school community at regular intervals and consideration will now be given to adapting an issue of the newsletter as a means of providing an annual report from the board on the operation of the school. The school complies with departmental regulations relating to the length of the school year and school day, the deployment of teachers and the retention of pupils. To guide its work in the future, the board has drawn up a three-year action plan covering maintenance and the review and development of organisational and curricular policy.

The board is very cognisant of the importance of maintaining good relations and communications with the diversity of parents and the wider community. In addition to the school newsletter, parents receive regular notes and letters to inform them of happenings and upcoming events. A small library for parents has been set up and a notice board is dedicated to matters of parental interest. Some draft policy documents are circulated to the general parent body while others can be accessed on the school website. The school plan in its entirety may be viewed in the school. In the interest of promoting increased levels of parental engagement in policy review and development, it is suggested that draft policy statements should be issued directly to the committee of the parents’ association prior to their consideration at board level.

Members of the board recently availed of training which they reported to be most beneficial. The board expressed the opinion that training for new boards is critical and that it should be provided as soon as possible after the formation of a new board. The board is also very supportive of the staff engaging in continuous professional development. Members of staff attend talks, seminars, conferences and courses, and engage in further studies. The principal has participated in the Misneach programme organised by the Leadership Development for Schools. It would be of value now for the Deputy Principal to participate in the Tánaiste programme. The board expressed satisfaction with the provision in the school and cited the commitment of staff, the high quality of teaching and the strong community spirit as strengths of the school.

2.2 In-school management
The in-school management team comprises the principal, the deputy principal and two special duties teachers. The principal undertakes the duties of the role in a very conscientious manner. A vision for the school is clearly articulated and is shared effectively with the school community. A positive, supportive school climate is promoted and staff members are provided with opportunities to work collaboratively, to share practice and to use and develop their strengths and personal skills. The principal leads change in an effective manner and regularly discusses organisational, curricular and pastoral priorities with the staff and board. Staff meetings are regularly organised and engagement with the support services is facilitated. The post holders assume responsibility for an appropriate range of duties and are encouraged to take initiative and to undertake leadership roles to bring about school improvement. The team engages actively with the pupils, other staff members and outside agencies in pursuit of the school’s aims and objectives. The board is reminded that the duties attached to individual posts should be reviewed regularly in the light of the changing prioritised needs of the school and the specific support required by the principal for the effective day-to-day running of the school.

2.3 Management of resources
The school’s 140 pupils are divided among five mainstream teachers in a single class group and four dual-class groupings. The mainstream teachers are supported by a learning-support teacher and two resource teachers. The second resource teacher works in the school for one-and-a-half hours each week. Teachers are consulted annually in relation to class and role allocation. This
facilitates a degree of movement between the different class levels and roles. Other opportunities to develop experience are provided through team-teaching and the exploration of a variety of other co-teaching styles. Some class groupings are currently in excess of the recommended class size. With the appointment of additional staff in the future, every effort should be made to distribute the pupils equitably among the mainstream class teachers and to adhere to departmental guidelines on class size. The school has one full-time special needs assistant while another special needs assistant, a secretary and a cleaner are employed part-time. All members of the auxiliary staff provide a high level of support to the principal and teaching staff.

Classroom accommodation is provided in an L-shaped linear style building and in a prefabricated unit located on the school grounds. The school recently used grant-aid and locally raised funds to extend the main building. The extension comprises a resource room, a learning-support room, a special toilet, a secretary’s office and a principal’s office. A canopy was also constructed along the front perimeter of the main building. Further accommodation is required to provide for the projected increase in enrolments and staffing in the immediate future. The school also lacks appropriate on-site indoor facilities suitable for whole-school assemblies and physical education activities. The board is in the process of reactivating an earlier application for an extension and has provided an updated application for major capital works to the Department.

The board of management, staff and parents are to be complimented on the maintenance and development work carried out on the premises in recent years. Despite limitations of space, the school provides a very cheerful, stimulating learning environment enhanced by attractive and meaningful classroom displays. While the school is very well resourced with equipment and materials of high quality, consideration should be given to ensuring that there is ready access to furniture of appropriate size in the support rooms, that there is an adequate supply of basic mathematical equipment permanently located in the classrooms and support rooms and that, over time, the school’s range of maps, globes and musical instruments is augmented.

2.4 Management of relationships and communication with the school community
The school’s parent association was reactivated in 2007. It is now diligently striving to work effectively with the other stakeholders in the school community. The association has worked in consultation with the board of management on a number of different ventures to raise funds for the school extension. It has also participated in the formulation of policy on the school’s dress code and will shortly be involved in the committee to review the code of behaviour. The association has identified priorities for the future which should see it broaden its focus further. A number of effective strategies are in place to support the association in communicating with the board and with the general parent body. The committee recently met with the chairperson of the board as a means of further enhancing communication. It is clear that all the parties are working towards a shared understanding of one another’s work and responsibilities, which will ultimately enrich school life and greatly benefit the pupils.

Many parents actively support school activities and become involved in the work of the school. Of late the Beo Heritage Project has involved parents, past pupils and the community at large in gathering evidence and in documenting change in the community, thus supporting the school in building up a rich historical archive. The school is highly appreciative also of the involvement of parents in the Make our School Proud programme which saw parents work in a ‘meitheal’ to carry out maintenance work on the school building and grounds. Parents actively support the school’s involvement in the Green School Initiative and the St. Patrick’s Day Parade. Parents attend sporting events, prepare fare for school celebrations and help develop the school garden. They assist in coaching games and in the organisation of book fairs, class tours and sports days.
2.5 Management of pupils
The pupils in this school are very well managed. They are courteous at all times and display a caring and respectful attitude to their fellow pupils, to their teachers and to visitors. They eagerly engage in classroom activities and communicate with confidence. Pupils are encouraged to participate in a wide range of activities including project work, quizzes, competitions, inter-school activities, community events and the school’s extra-curricular programme. The school is particularly proud of the awards received in local and national quiz competitions, in The Tidy Town’s School Competition and in the County Heritage Awards. It is commendable that the pupils are also provided with opportunities to serve on committees and to play their part in the management of aspects of school life. Pupils currently serve on the Green School Committee and on sub-committees which assume responsibility for recycling, composting, identifying waste for landfill, maintaining bird feeders and developing the school’s organic garden. Pupils’ views are also sought during reviews of school rules and procedures.

3. Quality of School Planning

3.1 School planning process and implementation
The whole-school planning process is collaborative and ongoing. The board of management, staff, parents and pupils engage in varying degrees in policy formulation. The school plan is presented in a very user-friendly format. It encompasses administrative, organisational and curricular policies which clearly guide practice in the school. Future challenges for the school in relation to planning include clarifying the content in some curricular areas, ensuring consistent implementation of each policy at all class levels, heightening awareness among the general parent body of how parents may contribute to policy development and curriculum implementation, and facilitating appropriate levels of engagement between the partners in the school.

Confirmation was provided that, in compliance with Department of Education and Skills Primary Circular 0061/2006, the board of management has formally adopted the Department’s Child Protection Guidelines for Primary Schools (Published September 2001). Confirmation was also provided 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.

3.2 Classroom planning
The quality of classroom planning is mainly very good. All class teachers provide clear, well-organised long-term plans and maintain appropriate records of the work covered. Short-term planning effectively guides the presentation of content, the organisation of the teaching and learning activities, differentiation and the forms of assessment to be used. It is noteworthy that the short-term planning for curricular areas involving in-class support is prepared in consultation with the support teachers involved. Further refinement of classroom planning could be effected in some instances by stating objectives in terms of the learning outcomes for the pupils rather than focussing on teacher intention as regards the work to be covered.
4. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

4.1 Overview of learning and teaching

The overall quality of learning and teaching is very good. Teachers plan to use a wide range of methodologies, strategies and approaches to provide variety in the presentation of lessons and in the organisation of learning activities. Group work is a regular feature of the practice in each curricular area. Classrooms are well organised and very attractively decorated with displays of teaching materials and examples of the pupils’ work. Teachers have access to a wide range of resources which are used very effectively to stimulate interest and to engage the pupils actively in their learning. Praiseworthy efforts are made by the special education support team to ensure that all pupils can access the full curriculum.

4.2 Language

**Gaeilge**

Léiríonn na hoidí dearcadh dearfach i dtaobh na Gaeilge agus déanann siad sár-iarracht an cur chuige cumarsáideach a úsáid go héifeachtach chun na ceithre scil teanga a chur chuaidh. Ba in ann dea-struchtúr, éagsúlacht agus cruthaítheacht le cur i láthair na gceachtanna agus tugtar go coinisiasach faoi eiseamláirí d’fhéidhmhanna teanga a mhúinéadh mar chuid de gach ceacht. Bhionn idir phóst eairgí, abhair níthiúla, mím, gcéadúíocht, comhráite réamhdhéanta, drámaíocht agus cluichí in úsáid. Déantar an-chúistí d’éisteacht ghníomhach agus de réimse maith teanga a ionchuir i mórchuid na ranganna. I roinnt ranganna pléitear seanchaithe, múinteann nathanna saibhre cainte agus cuitrtear ar chumas na ndaltaí ceisteanna a chur agus a fhreagairt. Tugtar go cёмhúil faoi thuiscint a ghnóthú ar úsáid na mbriathra ag rangleibhéil éagsúla agus ag rangleibhéil an cleachtas seo a chur i láthair na gceachtanna. Múinteann na foscail mánachtaí agus scríbhneoireachta go héifeachtacht agus cuírtear ar chumas na ndaltaí ceisteanna a chur agus a fhreagairt. Fáilte an-phiúc slán a chur i bhfeidhm na hoidí le chéile i gceachtanna na ndaltaí a úsáid. Tugtar go cёмhúil faoi thuiscint a ghnóthú ar úsáid na mbriathra ag rangleibhéil éagsúla agus ag rangleibhéil an cleachtas seo a chur i láthair na gceachtanna. Múinteann na foscail mánachtaí agus scríbhneoireachta go héifeachtacht agus cuírtear ar chumas na ndaltaí ceisteanna a chur agus a fhreagairt. Tugtar go cёмhúil faoi thuiscint a ghnóthú ar úsáid na mbriathra ag rangleibhéil éagsúla agus ag rangleibhéil an cleachtas seo a chur i láthair na gceachtanna. Múinteann na foscail mánachtaí agus scríbhneoireachta go héifeachtacht agus cuírtear ar chumas na ndaltaí ceisteanna a chur agus a fhreagairt. Tugtar go cёмhúil faoi thuiscint a ghnóthú ar úsáid na mbriathra ag rangleibhéil éagsúla agus ag rangleibhéil an cleachtas seo a chur i láthair na gceachtanna. Múinteann na foscail mánachtaí agus scríbhneoireachta go héifeachtacht agus cuírtear ar chumas na ndaltaí ceisteanna a chur agus a fhreagairt. Tugtar go cёмhúil faoi thuiscint a ghnóthú ar úsáid na mbriathra ag rangleibhéil éagsúla agus an-phiúc slán a chur i bhfeidhm na hoidí le chéile i gceachtanna na ndaltaí a úsáid. Tugtar go cёмhúil faoi thuiscint a ghnóthú ar úsáid na mbriathra ag rangleibhéil éagsúla agus an-phiúc slán a chur i bhfeidhm na hoidí le chéile i gceachtanna na ndaltaí a úsáid. Tugtar go cёмhúil faoi thuiscint a ghnóthú ar úsáid na mbriathra ag rangleibhéil éagsúla agus an-phiúc slán a chur i bhfeidhm na hoidí le chéile i gceachtanna na ndaltaí a úsáid.

**Irish**

The teachers display a positive attitude towards Irish and make a great effort to use the communicative approach effectively to develop the four language skills. Good structure, variety and creativity are features of the lesson presentations and the teaching of exemplars of language functions are conscientiously undertaken as part of every lesson. Posters, concrete materials, mime, gesture, pre-prepared conversations, drama and games are used. At most class levels active listening and the input of a good range of language is very well attended to. In some classes proverbs are discussed, rich idioms of speech are taught and pupils are enabled to pose and answer questions. Developing understanding of the use of verbs is undertaken in a systematic manner at some class levels and this practice should be extended in the school. The sub-skills of reading and writing are effectively taught and the pupils are enabled to read with confidence. They develop very good accuracy in spelling and are appropriately supported in undertaking interesting writing tasks. It would be of benefit now to lay out clearer guidelines in the school plan as regards the range of language to be undertaken at the different class levels. The amount of grammar to be taught from class to class should be decided upon. It would also be of benefit to place earlier emphasis on oral reporting and on personal writing.
**English**

English is well taught in the school. All teachers place strong emphasis on the development of oral language and communication skills. Very good listening skills are apparent throughout the school and pupils are encouraged to question and enquire from an early age. Very effective use is made of puppets, attractive visual aids, visual imaging and structured questioning to engage pupils gainfully in talk and discussion. An integrated approach to language development at senior level provides the impetus for the class teacher and resource teacher to co-teach very effectively, exploring topics in History and Geography from a language perspective. Pupils are exposed to a suitably broad range of poetry at all class levels and are given regular opportunities to recite poetry, retell stories, recount events and present work orally to their peers.

A variety of strategies is used successfully to engage the pupils in the reading process. Big books and word walls are utilised to very good effect to enable pupils develop sight vocabularies. The learning-support teacher regularly works in conjunction with class teachers to implement a carefully structured phonological awareness programme, organising group work in some of the classrooms. Further refinement of the implementation of the programme should incorporate group work in each classroom. Graded texts, classroom libraries, class novels and a good range of supplementary reading materials provide opportunities for pupils to progress their reading skills. Pupils are enabled to read confidently and competently at all class levels. They capably discuss the material read and display interest in reading the works of a good range of authors.

Written work is of a very good standard in the school. Writing corners are a feature of some classrooms and there is a structured consistent approach to the teaching of spelling in the school. Pupils are provided with opportunities to write in different genres and for different audiences and their poetry and stories are attractively displayed on classroom walls or in book format. While written work is recorded very neatly it would be of value to review the implementation of the handwriting policy in order to achieve consistency in developing a cursive style.

**4.3 Mathematics**

A good variety of methodologies is used to teach Mathematics and activities are capably differentiated for groups and individual pupils. Very effective collaboration occurs in classrooms where support teachers join with the class teacher in presenting and organising activities. It would be of benefit to ensure that each teaching setting incorporates prominent displays of materials and of the language of mathematics. Early mathematical work incorporates carefully structured activities encompassing sorting, classifying, matching, comparing and ordering. Very creative use is made of song and poetry resulting in a high level of engagement on the part of all the pupils. A lovely range of games is used at other class levels to develop understanding, to consolidate learning and to enhance quick recall of number facts. Regular opportunities are provided at all class levels for the pupils to engage in practical activity and discussion, to develop estimations skills and to employ problem-solving strategies. The pupils recall number facts well at most levels, display good understanding of the topics taught and record their work neatly.

**4.4 Social, Environmental and Scientific Education**

**History**

The activities organised in History elicit a very high level of interest among the pupils. A good balance between knowledge and skill acquisition is achieved. Commendable use is made of photographs, drawings, story, poetry, drama, music, mime, hot-seating, talk and discussion to aid the pupils in their exploration of topics. The work in History is very astutely integrated with other curricular areas at most class levels and judicious use is made of textbooks. Early emphasis is placed on the exploration of personal and family histories in the infant classes while the reading
of myths and legends captivates the imagination of the pupils in the junior classes. Attractive time-lines and enjoyable sequencing activities are created to develop the pupils’ understanding of chronology. More sophisticated time-lines are used in the middle and senior classes. The approach to historical investigation is to be commended in particular at senior level. Specific themes and topics are explored through the perspective of language in collaboration with the resource teacher. A wide variety of strategies is employed and the pupils display in-depth knowledge of the work covered. The school plan clearly identifies the themes and topics to be explored at some class levels. Further development of the plan will be required in order to clarify the content and guide the practice for the whole school.

**Geography**
The teachers adopt an integrated approach to the teaching of Geography with a clear focus on the local environment. There is great variety in the approaches used to explore recurring topics such as weather, homes, the local community and the local natural environment. Attractive classroom displays support the work in each of the classes observed. Very effective use is made of poetry, story, role-play, drama, song-singing, visual aids and concrete materials. The pupils gain early experience in observing aspects of the local environment, picturing places and constructing models before proceeding to trace routes and use mapping symbols in later classes. Praiseworthy emphasis is placed on developing understanding of positional language during these activities. Simple studies of natural features, flora and fauna are then skilfully extended in the older classes to include discussion and exploration of the interrelationship of the natural environment with the lives of people. Pupils are enabled to foster an appreciation of how they themselves can actively engage in caring for the environment through the school’s participation in the Green Schools Initiative. To ensure that pupils experience the full breadth of the geography curriculum in a spiral and developmental way, the school plan should be developed further and should incorporate a clear outline of the programme with specific targets for the strands at all class levels.

**Science**
There is good progression in the scientific activities experienced by the pupils as they move through the school. Nature and investigation tables, classroom displays, worksheets and copybooks reflect a broad range of activities and are used appropriately to consolidate learning. Pupils are provided with opportunities to view demonstrations and to engage in hands-on scientific enquiry individually, in pairs or in groups. The activities are well structured and paced. Very good questioning techniques are employed to establish the pupils’ initial level of understanding and to challenge their ideas. Seasonal change, the yearly cycle and plant growth are creatively approached in the junior and middle standards with pupils’ awareness of change in their immediate environment being enhanced through observation, discussion, nature walks, manipulation of materials and practical investigation. Designing and making receives praiseworthy attention in the higher classes. Pupils enthusiastically and confidently present and discuss their creations and display a firm understanding of scientific concepts as they refer to work on display and recount previous investigations and project work. Further development of the school plan should focus on directing the planned progression of activities from class to class and should indicate clearly how science is to be managed in the single and dual-class situations.

4.5 Arts Education

**Visual Arts**
The quality of teaching and learning in this area of the curriculum is of a very high standard. The activities completed at each class level observed reflect appropriate balance across the strands and regular integration. Very attractive classroom displays, individual portfolios of work and
scrapbook collections indicate careful nurturing of skills and individual creativity. Pupils are enabled to explore a broad range of media and techniques as a means of developing their understanding of the elements of art. The pupils are also provided with valuable opportunities to explore and investigate the visual elements in their local environment. Group activities are very well managed with pupils being skilfully guided to discuss and plan their work and to choose suitable materials. The pupils engage readily in discussing their own work and can speak about the work and lives of reputable artists. It would be of value to identify the language of the visual arts and to include it in the school plan as a guide to enriching the pupils’ visual vocabulary.

Music
The teaching and learning activities in music are very well structured and paced. Appropriate emphasis is placed on developing listening skills and on enabling the pupils to respond to music physically, emotionally, verbally and cognitively. Very enjoyable activities are organised to engage the pupils in composition and in the exploration of vocal sounds and body percussion. The standard of singing is very good in general and songs are appropriately pitched at most class levels. It is noteworthy that an appropriate range of Irish songs is taught throughout the school including well known traditional songs.

The musical activities are fruitfully integrated with other curricular areas and the manner in which language development opportunities are availed of is to be commended. Good quality commercially produced tuned and un-tuned percussion instruments are available in the school in addition to some home-made instruments. This collection should be added to over time so that music areas may be established in each classroom and ready and easy access may be provided to basic percussion instruments. The pupils play the tin-whistle from first class onwards and they learn to play a repertoire of tunes very musically. While aspects of music literacy are addressed during the activities, the teachers should now aim to structure a music literacy programme from junior infants onwards which incorporates the use of hand signs and pentatonic music and which is closely linked to both the song-singing and the instrumental programme at each class level.

Drama
Very purposeful activities are organised to engage the pupils in exploring aspects of life through drama. There is a high level of awareness among the staff of the desirability of maintaining the ease at which young children can enter into make-believe and engage naturally in dramatic activity. Poetry, story, songs and games are used very successfully to create the context for drama. Props are very creatively used to assist the pupils in entering into role and character. Teachers competently enter into role to guide the action and to initiate improvisation. Music is used to very good effect in some instances to enhance the atmosphere of the drama. It is suggested that the staff should explore how the pupils’ own musical compositions could also be used for this purpose. Commendable levels of collaboration between mainstream and support personnel occur at some class levels. This facilitates an integrated thematic approach to the structuring of drama lessons with particular emphasis on language and on catering for the individual learning needs of specific pupils. Praiseworthy attention is given at each class level to reflecting on the dramatic experiences.

4.6 Physical Education
Good provision is made for the teaching of all aspects of the physical education curriculum. The school’s hard-surface play area, a community centre adjacent to the school grounds and a nearby community pitch are used to implement a programme of carefully planned activities for each class level. A range of equipment is available and appropriate attention is given to safety issues during the organisation of activities. Lessons commence with age appropriate warm-up activities including a series of delightful games at infant level. Station work is regularly organised and very
The ethos of the school strongly supports the principles of the SPHE curriculum. In addition, teachers use a combination of discrete time and an integrated approach to foster personal development, health and well-being, citizenship and social relationships. A number of different programmes suitably inform the planning of activities for the various class groupings. Regular opportunities are provided for pupils to reflect on situations, to make decisions and to discuss consequences. Teachers very ably stimulate discussion through presenting interesting and realistic situations and by posing challenging and thought provoking questions. Poetry, story and drama are used to very good effect. Group activities, paired work and circle time are very capably managed with strong emphasis being placed on the development of listening and communication skills. Pupils participate in the activities with earnestness and interest, taking turns and respecting the contributions of their peers. A corridor display board is purposefully used to celebrate pupil achievements and reflects the pupils’ engagement in a wide variety of activities both in school and in the local community.

4.8 Assessment
The teachers are very cognisant of the purposes and benefits of both assessment of and assessment for learning. A broad range of informal and formal assessment modes is used to monitor and assess pupil progress across the different curricular areas. Checklists, profiles, indicators, observations, teacher questioning, teacher-designed tests, analyses of written tasks and self-evaluation procedures are among the modes in use. Samples of work are also maintained and of late digital folders have been set up to facilitate this practice further. The Middle Infant Screening Test and standardised tests are used appropriately to select pupils for early intervention programmes and for supplementary teaching. Considerable work has been done on inputting the results of standardised testing in English and Mathematics so as to aid the analysis and interpretation of results and support the tracking of individual pupil progress. Very clear records of progress and achievement are maintained for pupils identified with special educational needs. While parents receive oral reports on their children’s progress during parent-teacher meetings convened during the first and last terms of the school year, the school is advised to proceed with its plans to issue written reports every year.

5. **Quality of Support for Pupils**

5.1 Pupils with special educational needs
The special education support team comprises a learning-support teacher, a full-time resource teacher, a part-time resource teacher, a full-time special needs assistant and a part-time special needs assistant. A commendable variety of strategies is used to provide for the individual needs of the pupils and to support the pupils in accessing differentiated programmes across the curriculum. Provision encompasses early intervention programmes in literacy and numeracy, cross-curricular in-class support and supplementary teaching sessions organised on a withdrawal basis. The special needs assistants diligently and ably support specific pupils with the benefit of guidelines prepared by the support team in consultation with the principal and class teachers.
The members of the team collaborate frequently and plan conscientiously to provide for the individual needs of the pupils. An individual learning programme or an education plan is prepared for each pupil in consultation with parents and class teachers. The planned programmes are informed by the results of standardised testing, diagnostic testing and appropriate professional reports. The planning in some instances is particularly comprehensive and incorporates detailed realistic time-bound targets which clearly inform the organisation of the teaching and learning activities, the choice of materials and how pupil progress may be assessed and evaluated. The manner in which some pupils are involved in the design of their programmes and in the evaluation of their progress is also very worthy of note. It would be very valuable to extend the existing good practice and as a team to adopt a uniform approach to planning, consultation and reporting. Consideration should also be given to detailing pupils’ strengths and competencies very clearly as a means of establishing a distinct baseline from which the programmes commence.

The support teachers develop very good rapport with the pupils. The teaching and learning activities are carefully structured and in most instances are very effectively paced. Individual folders of work are maintained for each pupil and serve as a valuable link between support and mainstream teachers. Pupils are praised and affirmed regularly for their efforts and they benefit substantially from the different models of in-class and cross-curricular support provided in the school.

6. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT
The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- The school has a very supportive board of management whose members are developing confidence in their role.
- There is a high level of commitment and cooperation among the staff. Teachers are very open to extending their practice to explore and adopt new methodologies and approaches.
- The day to day organisation of the school is efficiently managed by the principal, supported by the in-school management team.
- Parents are very supportive of school activities and are willing to become actively involved in the work of the school.
- The pupils are achieving good standards in all curricular areas and are commended for their diligence, courtesy and friendliness.

As a means of building on these strengths and to address areas for development, the following key recommendations are made:

- There is a need to develop the school premises further in order to cater for increasing enrolments and staff numbers.
- Further development of the school plan is required to guide curriculum implementation.
- The board of management should establish mechanisms to foster the involvement of all the partners in policy formulation and review, and in school self-evaluation.
- The support team should work as a team to share the existing good practice and to develop an agreed approach to planning, consultation, assessment and reporting.

Post-evaluation meetings were held with the staff and board of management where the draft findings and recommendations of the evaluation were presented and discussed.

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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 Newcastle N.S. thanks the inspector for the courteous and professional manner in which she carried out the Whole School Evaluation. We are particularly pleased that the report acknowledges the warm, inclusive and collaborative school culture; the commitment of the staff, board and parents to the educational and holistic development of every pupil and the high level of community involvement.

The Board of Management welcomes the acknowledgement by the inspector of the high standards of education being achieved throughout the school. It is a true reflection of the dedication of the principal and staff who are committed to achieving the school vision clearly articulated in the school plan. The school community: pupils, teachers and parents are proud of the praise for the children and positive teacher–pupil relationships.

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

A number of recommendations have been made by the inspector. The Board of Management is pleased to relate that significant progress has been made in relation to these recommendations:

Recommendation:
There is a need to develop the school premises further in order to cater for increasing enrolments and staff numbers.

Action:
Planning permission has been granted to erect two mainstream classrooms and a waste treatment system and funding has been granted by the DES for these developments.

Date:
Planning permission received 23 November 2010. Works will commence January 2011.

Recommendation:
Further development of the school plan is required to guide curriculum implementation.

Actions:
Further development of the school plan will be undertaken on an on-going basis to guide curriculum implementation in SESE as recommended.

Gaeilge. Clear guidelines have been put in place in relation to the teaching of grammar from class to class.

English. The handwriting policy is being reviewed in order to achieve consistency in developing a cursive style.

Classroom planning has been further refined by stating objectives in terms of the learning outcomes for the pupils rather than focusing on teacher intention as regards the work to be covered.

End of year school reports were sent out to all parents at the end of the school year, 2009/2010 and will be available annually. Results of standardised tests are on the report.
**Recommendation:**
The board of management should develop mechanisms to foster the involvement of all the partners in policy formulation and review and in school self-evaluation.

**Actions:**
Draft policy statements are issued directly to the committee of the parent association prior to their consideration at board level.

Annual report for parents from the board of management on the operation of the school.

**Date:**
A detailed report was presented to parents and staff on 22 June 2010 detailing works carried out since board of management took office in December 2007. Accounts for 2008/2009 and 2009/2010 were presented.

**Recommendation:**
The support team should work as a team to share the existing good practice and to develop an agreed approach to planning, consultation, assessment and reporting.

**Actions:**
The Special Education teachers have developed an agreed approach to planning, consultation, assessment and reporting.

**Other recommendations:**
* It would be of value now for the Deputy Principal to participate in the Tanáiste programme.
The Deputy Principal will participate in the Tánaiste programme on 4th & 5th July 2011.

The duties attached to individual posts should be reviewed regularly in the light of the changing prioritised needs of the school and the specific support needed by the principal for the effective day-to-day running of the school.

**Action:**
A review of the duties assigned to post holders was carried out and some new duties included for the 2010/2011 school year.

* Ensure there is an adequate supply of basic mathematical equipment permanently located in classrooms and support rooms and that, over time, the school’s range of maps, globes and musical instruments is augmented.

**Action:**
A selection of maps, globes, musical instruments, maths resources and other equipment have been purchased.