Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

St Oliver Plunkett N.S.,
Loughmourne, Castleblayney, County Monaghan
Uimhir rolla: 19469K

Date of Inspection 19 January 2012
1. Introduction

St. Oliver Plunkett National School, located in the rural area of Loughmoune in Co. Monaghan, is under the patronage of the Catholic Bishop of Clogher. It currently has 180 pupils enrolled and attendance patterns are good. The school has six mainstream classes and three special educational classes for children with autistic spectrum disorder. 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 board of management supports the organisation and development of the school in a competent manner.
- The principal provides effective leadership within the school community.
- Teachers work diligently to optimise pupils’ learning outcomes.
- A warm inclusive learning environment is in evidence.
- Pupils demonstrate exemplary behaviour and high levels of motivation.
- The quality of assessment practices and school self-evaluation processes is very high.
- Focused school-improvement initiatives have impacted positively on pupils’ learning in literacy and numeracy.
- The school accommodation is of a high quality.
- The educational provision for pupils with special educational needs is very good.

The following main recommendations are made:

- Further emphasis should be placed on the incremental development of pupils’ problem solving skills in Mathematics.
- Information and communication technology (ICT) should be used more extensively to enhance the provision of differentiated programmes in literacy and numeracy for pupils of varying abilities.
- Moltar clár céimnithe a dhearadh do labhairt agus do litearthacht na Gaeilge. (It is recommended that a progressive programme be devised for oracy and literacy in Irish).
- Consideration should now be given to establishing formal communication channels between the board of management and the parents’ association.
3. **Quality of School Management**

- The quality of the work of the board of management is good. It is properly constituted and has adopted appropriate procedures to support the effective discharge of its duties. The board is commended for its provision of excellent new facilities for pupils with autistic spectrum disorder and for ongoing improvements to the original building.

- The principal provides effective leadership within the school. He promotes a positive school climate and works purposefully to enhance teaching, learning and organisational procedures. The satisfactory fulfilment of duties assigned to post-holders has contributed to the organisation and development of the school. As a means of further improving practice it is recommended that greater emphasis be placed on the monitoring of curricular implementation.

- The quality of the management of resources is good. Thirteen teachers and nine special needs assistants are deployed with due regard for the needs of the pupils. Criteria for the allocation of classes should now be agreed and included in school policy. Teaching and ancillary staff are highly commended for the conscientious and caring manner in which they fulfil their duties.

- School facilities are maintained to a high standard. Ample resources, including interactive white boards, are used purposefully to support teaching. Further opportunities should now be explored to enhance pupils’ use of ICT resources as a medium of learning.

- The quality of management of communications is good. It is reported that considerable attention has been given to enhancing communication within the school community in recent years. Representatives of the parents’ association attest to the range of opportunities provided to discuss their children’s progress. Formal communication between the board of management and the parents’ association should now include agreed statements following meetings. Questionnaires distributed to parents during the evaluation indicate a positive parental response to the quality of education provided for pupils. The long-established parents’ association has contributed significantly to the provision of resources and the organisation of seasonal events within the school community.

- The management of pupils’ behaviour is very good. Teacher-pupil interactions are affirmative and mutually respectful. Pupils are commended for the exemplary levels of behaviour and motivation demonstrated during the evaluation. Pupil questionnaires indicate that they feel safe within their school environments.

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

- The quality of the school planning and school self-evaluation process is very good. Appropriate priorities for school improvement have been identified. Suitable plans with clearly defined targets have been devised based on a comprehensive analysis of assessment data.
• The effective planning underpinning the improvement initiatives has impacted very positively on teaching and learning in literacy and numeracy with commendable progress evident.

• All teachers present long and short term planning which varies in quality from satisfactory to very good. It is recommended that the school review its current practice of recording monthly reports to facilitate the monitoring of curriculum implementation.

• 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 teagasc sa Ghaeilge go maith. Is inmholta mar atá pleán forbartha leagtha amach d’horairt na teanga. Ní mór monatóireacht rialta a dhéanamh ar chur i bhfeidhm an phlean sin, áfach. Moltar na daltaí as ucht a ndearthacht a bhaint amach agus a gcumas eiseamláiri teanga a úsáid go hoiriúnach. Is fiú go mór tógáil go cónarach ar an bfréas agus agus an t-ábhar teanga a roghnaítear a bheith ceimhité agus dúshláinach. Cuirtear leabhair Ghaeilge oiriúnacha ar fáil do na daltaí agus léann roinnt díobh le crunnaigh agus le tuiscint má an bhfuil na daltaí na ndáltaí féin le fáil. Is fiú go mór tógáil go gcuirtear leabhair Ghaeilge oiriúnacha ar fáil do na daltaí agus léann roinnt díobh le crunnaigh agus le tuiscint má an bhfuil na daltaí na ndáltaí féin le fáil. Is fiú go mór tógáil go gcuirtear leabhair Ghaeilge oiriúnacha ar fáil do na daltaí agus léann roinnt díobh le crunnaigh agus le tuiscint má an bhfuil na daltaí na ndáltaí féin le fáil.

• Good standards are achieved in teaching and learning in Irish. It is commendable that a strategic plan has been devised for language development. Continuous monitoring of the implementation of this plan is required, however. Pupils are commended for their good efforts in structuring sentences and their appropriate use of certain language exemplars. It would be very worthwhile to systematically build upon this learning and ensure that language content selected is both appropriately graded and challenging. Suitable reading material is provided for pupils and some read with accuracy and understanding. It is now timely that a whole-school literacy programme be devised and reading skills be taught systematically on a whole-school basis. Various strategies are employed to enable pupils to write different texts. Further opportunities for independent writing should be afforded pupils.

• The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in English is very good. Appropriate attention is given to the incremental development of pupils’ oral language skills throughout the school. A wide range of reading material aligned to pupils’ abilities is used purposefully. Literacy skills are developed in a systematic manner throughout the school. Pupils’ learning outcomes in reading are commendable. Teachers have introduced a whole-school approach to writing and pupils are becoming confident in a range of genre. Appropriate emphasis is placed on the development of spelling strategies within a meaningful context.

• The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in Mathematics is good. Teachers have successfully introduced a number of interventions in recent years to improve pupils’ learning outcomes in Mathematics which includes greater emphasis on mental arithmetic, the acquisition of basic facts and the use of manipulative equipment. To further improve teaching and learning in this area it is recommended that additional
opportunities be provided to facilitate the incremental development of problem solving skills throughout the school. Greater use of the environment and cross-curricular linkage is required to further enrich pupils’ mathematical learning.

• Provision for Music is good overall. Pupils are afforded opportunities to explore aspects of all strands of the curriculum and their interrelated musical elements. They perform a repertoire of songs tunefully and respond imaginatively to a range of musical genres in a variety of ways. Pupils display some knowledge of the rudiments of music literacy. In some classrooms various approaches are employed to facilitate pupils in composition. The school plan should be further developed to ensure a comprehensive developmental programme and a range of assessment techniques for each class grouping. Pupils’ participation in school concerts and external performances enhances their musical experiences.

• The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement is good overall. Teachers communicate high expectations to pupils regarding their engagement in learning and affirm their achievements. Lessons are well-structured and stimulating. A variety of learning methodologies is effectively deployed. Group work is well established in all classrooms and there is considerable awareness of the need to differentiate for pupils of varying abilities. A commendable range of assessment strategies is used purposefully to monitor pupils’ progress and to inform teaching and learning.

6. Quality of Support for Pupils

• The quality of provision for pupils with special educational needs is very good. A comprehensive policy and a detailed pupil-register supports the effective implementation of a staged approach.

• Supplementary tuition is provided by withdrawal and through in-class provision in accordance with pupils’ prioritised needs. Considerable emphasis is placed on early identification of learning difficulties. A suitable range of early interventions is undertaken including the effective implementation of the Reading Recovery Programme. A commendable range of team teaching models has been devised and is continuously reviewed in accordance with pupils’ needs in literacy and numeracy.

• The overall quality of supplementary teaching and learning is very good. Lessons observed during the evaluation were well-structured and aligned to pupils’ needs. A range of resources is used to support teaching and learning. However it is recommended that greater use be made of ICT for pupils with special educational needs.

• Individual educational plans are developed in consultation with teachers and parents for pupils in receipt of supplementary tuition. In some instances, targets outlined in individual educational plans need to be more specific to ensure progression in pupils’ learning.

• Provision for pupils with Autistic Spectrum Disorders is of a very high quality. The extensive, purpose-built facility provides excellent accommodation, including three classrooms, a general purpose room and other ancillary rooms, for twelve pupils of pre-school and primary school age. Staff-pupil interactions are very affirmative. Routines and procedures are clearly outlined and implemented with great consistency to establish a calm, well-ordered holistic learning environment for pupils.

• Individualised educational programmes are drawn up and reviewed in consultation with the relevant partners for all pupils with Autistic Spectrum Disorder. Pupil progress is closely monitored across all domains. A suitable combination of teaching methodologies
is used effectively to address the triad of impairments and meet the individualised needs of pupils. Effective use of resources including ICT was observed during the evaluation. The school community is commended for providing speech and language therapy for pupils. Suitable opportunities are afforded to pupils in this unit to integrate with their peers in mainstream classes.
Appendix

SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

Submitted by the Board of Management
Area 1: Observations on the content of the inspection report

- The BoM would like to thank the Inspectorate for the courteous and professional manner in which both inspectors affirmed and acknowledged the numerous strengths of the teaching staff, support staff, pupils, parents and BoM during the recent WSE.

- The BoM is particularly pleased with the high levels of pupil motivation, assessment and educational provision for pupils with special educational needs within a warm, inclusive, learning environment highlighted in the report.

- The BoM is eager to develop and improve our school and welcome the recommendations within the report which will become a focused element of the school strategic plan for the future.

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 school staff is working collaboratively to implement a structured approach to problem solving in Mathematics.

- ICT within the school continues to be developed.

- Sa phlean Gnímh tá an foireann ag iarraidh plean céimnithe do labhairt agus do lithearthacht na Gaeilge a chur i bhfeidhm.

- The BoM is conscious of the need to involve the parents in the life of the school and is keeping them at all times informed and aware of the activities on-going in the school.