An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

St Michael’s Primary School
Cappataggle, Ballinasloe, Co. Galway
Uimhir rolla: 19506N

Date of inspection: 13 October 2011
1. Introduction

St Michael's Primary School is a co-educational school under the patronage of the Catholic Bishop of Clonfert. It is located in the town land of Cappataggle, Co. Galway. At the time of the evaluation the school had eighty-eight pupils and the staff comprised four mainstream teachers, a learning-support teacher, a full-time resource teacher, a part-time resource teacher and a special needs assistant. The school was refurbished and extended over the summer months and did not reopen until mid-September. Elements of the work were still ongoing during the evaluation.

This whole-school evaluation focused on the quality of teaching and learning in Gaeilge, English, Mathematics and Physical Education. 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:

- The school has been newly refurbished and extended.
- The board of management, staff and parent body are eager to work collaboratively to effect change and improvement.
- The school has a very dedicated staff and the standard of teaching and learning is high.

The following main recommendations are made:

- The management structures in the school should be refined and developed.
- The school plan should be reviewed and a process of whole-school self-evaluation and review should be developed.
- Provision for the support of pupils should be expanded to incorporate early intervention programmes and in-class support.

3. Quality of School Management

- At the commencement of the evaluation, the board of management was not properly constituted. The matter was resolved without difficulty.

- Significant changes are required in order for the board of management to function in an appropriate and effective manner. The board should observe the requirements regarding the number of meetings to be held annually and the role of each board member should be clarified. Clear accounting procedures should be implemented, including the provision of a statement of accounts at board meetings and the completion of an annual audit or certification of the accounts. The board should also prepare a long-term action plan to guide its work.
• Significant changes are required to enable the in-school management team to function effectively. The team comprises the principal, the deputy principal and two special duties teachers. During the evaluation, the principal and one special duties teacher were on leave. The role of acting principal was very ably assumed by the deputy principal, supported by the other special duties teacher. While both post holders very diligently carry out their duties, there is a need to review the duties so that they reflect the status of the posts and appropriately span organisational, curricular and pastoral work. The in-school management team should meet on a regular basis and should assume a leading role in fostering a culture of whole-school self-evaluation and review.

• The board of management has been instrumental in driving forward the school’s building project. On completion, the school will provide ample accommodation, including a hall for indoor physical education activities. The school site provides extensive play facilities and the school also has access to very fine local community sporting amenities. While each classroom is equipped with teaching and learning resources, there is scope to improve the range available and in particular to equip each classroom with appropriate technological resources. In relation to the deployment of staff, the board is advised to be cognisant of the conditions applying to the deployment of staff in support-teaching roles.

• The board looks positively on the engagement of staff in continuing professional development. Teachers have completed a range of useful professional development courses. In drawing up a school policy on staff development, it would be of benefit to include a specific focus on initiatives concerning the development of leadership skills and the use of technology in education.

• The management of relationships with the school community is good. The school maintains strong links with local organisations and has an active and very supportive parents’ association. Effective strategies are employed to inform parents of school events and of their children’s progress. There is a need to heighten parental knowledge of the board’s work. The board should therefore agree at each board meeting the information that can be conveyed to parents, teachers and the school community. The board should also consider adapting an issue of the school newsletter to provide an annual report on the work of the school.

• Pupils are well managed in the school. They are keenly interested in sporting activities and participate in other activities including the Green Flag initiative, quizzes, art and poetry competitions and school concerts.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

• There is scope to develop school planning and school self-evaluation. Although staff meetings have been infrequent, a school plan has been compiled. It contains an appropriate range of organisational and curricular policies that have been discussed and ratified at board level. There is a need to contextualise elements of the plan and to develop the curricular policies so that they provide clear guidance in relation to the content to the covered at each class level and the approach to be taken in the dual class settings. Greater involvement of parents in the planning process should also be encouraged and facilitated.

• All teachers prepare long-term and short-term plans and maintain a monthly record of work covered. There is no established practice in relation to using the monthly records to monitor the implementation of the school plan. It is recommended that monthly records, pupil profiles and assessment results should be analysed carefully and that a culture of whole-school self-evaluation be actively nurtured.
• Confirmation was provided that the board of management has formally adopted *the Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-primary Schools* (September 2011) without modification. The school is compliant with the requirements of Primary Circular 0061/2006. School authorities provided evidence that arrangements are being put in place to ensure compliance with the requirements of the recently published Circular 0065/2011 and *Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools* as a matter of priority.

5. **Quality of Teaching, Learning and Pupil Achievement**

• The overall quality of teaching and learning is of a high standard. A collaborative approach to whole-school planning should now be adopted in each of the curricular areas. Vigilance is required in relation to timetabling in order to ensure compliance with the suggested minimum weekly frame for each curricular area.

• Müintear an Ghaeilge go hinniúil i bhformhór na ranganna agus éirionn leis na daltaí caigheán maith a bhaint amach sna ceithre scil teanga. Tá gnéithe difríúla de dhéáchleachtas le sonrú. Ar uairíb déantar foilc chur ar bhealach an-chruthaitheach. Müintear dea-réimse teanga i gceo leor ranganna agus leagtar bheim chuí ar chruinneas gramadaí i ranganna áirithe. Müintear cnáisí deas dánta agus ámhrán i roinnt ranganna agus foghlaimiúin cuid de na daltaí conas an theheadog stáin a sheinint. Is léir gur gá an clár Gaeilge a aontú ar bhonn uile scoile chun leanúnaíchas agus forchéimniú a chintiú i ngach gné den obair. Ní mór réimse na teanga agus clár gramadaí a shocru do gach rang leabhair fhéinseach. B'fhéidir freisin a thuilleadh aiseanna litéithe a chur atá fáil agus scribhneoireacht pearsanta a chleachtadh ar bhonn rialta ó rang a dó ag aghaidh.

Irish is competently taught in most classes and the pupils attain a good standard in the four language skills. Different aspects of good practice are in evidence. Sometimes vocabulary is input in a very creative manner. A good range of language is taught in many classes and appropriate emphasis is placed on grammatical accuracy in certain classes. A nice collection of poems and songs is taught in some classes and some pupils learn to play the tin whistle. It is obvious that there is a need to agree the Irish programme on a whole-school basis so that continuity and progression in each aspect of the work is ensured. The range of language and a grammar programme should be decided for each class level. It would also be of benefit to provide more reading materials and to practise personal writing on a regular basis from second class onwards.

• The quality of teaching and learning in English is good. While some very effective practice was observed in relation to the teaching of oral language and poetry, there is scope to develop a whole-school approach to these areas. Various strategies are used to promote interest in reading. Pupils develop firm understanding of the letter-sound relationships and the majority read with expression and fluency. Comprehension and higher-order thinking are very competently addressed in some instances through skilful questioning and the use of drama. Pupils are provided with regular opportunities to write. They are competent spellers and they learn to present their work in a neat cursive style of writing. It is recommended that a broader sight vocabulary be developed at infant level and that the novel be introduced at an earlier stage. Further library resources should be provided.

• The mathematics curriculum is very successfully taught at most class levels and this is reflected in the results of standardised tests. Considerable effort is expended on the creation of maths-rich classroom environments. Available resources are very effectively used in many instances to support group work and activity-based learning. Mathematical language and numeracy skills are conscientiously addressed. The provision could be
enhanced by structuring early mathematical activities more carefully, by investing in additional materials and by developing discrete maths-activity areas in each classroom.

- The quality of teaching and learning in Physical Education is of a very high standard. The school programme currently incorporates swimming and a range of outdoor pursuits including small games, basketball, football, camogie and hurling. Activities are very well paced and purposefully structured. Praiseworthy emphasis is placed on skills development and the use of Irish is a feature of the practice at some class levels. The teachers are commended for the manner in which they work collaboratively with visiting coaches. The completion of the school hall will provide opportunities to expand the programme.

6. **Quality of Support for Pupils**

- Very careful attention is given to pupils identified with learning difficulties or special educational needs. Comprehensive individual programmes of work, informed by diagnostic tests and professional reports, clearly outline the educational and care needs of the pupils and the manner in which they are to be addressed. Pupils are withdrawn from class and engage in well planned and suitably challenging activities specific to their needs. The provision should be expanded to incorporate early intervention programmes and in-class support.

*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 very much welcomed the visit of the Department of Education and Skills Schools Inspector to St. Michael's National School, Cappataggle for a week on 3rd October 2011. We saw it as an opportunity to comprehensively review our teaching and learning practices, to review our organisational policies and to examine closely the relationships between pupils, teachers, parents and school management in order to ensure a safe and fruitful learning environment and to ensure each pupil is catered for physically, spiritually, emotionally and academically. We would like to thank the Inspector for her professional and considerate approach to the evaluation and for being positive and constructive throughout all elements of the evaluation. We are very proud of the performance of the pupils in our school and we are very appreciative of the high levels of effort shown by all members of staff, teaching and ancillary staff. The significant role of parents in the school, in the children’s learning and with regard to sporting, spiritual, musical and other events is developing to be a central facet in the life of our school. The Board of Management plays an important part in providing a safe learning environment for all staff and pupils. The Board is encouraged that the evaluation found that, “the overall quality of teaching and learning is of a high standard”, that “the quality of teaching and learning in English is good”, and that, “the mathematics curriculum is very successfully taught”, also that, “this is reflected in the results of standardised tests”.

We note the praiseworthy emphasis placed on the development of skills and the use of Irish in teaching and learning in Physical Education, highlighting the quality and commitment of our mainstream teachers and ancillary visiting coaches, with the support of wider community groups. We are very fortunate that we are supported strongly by the wider community in Cappataggle and this positive link which has been identified in the report has benefited the school and its pupils enormously over the years.

We are encouraged that the report acknowledges the fact that pupils are well managed, are highly motivated in sporting, drama activities, Green Flag, quizzes and art and poetry events. We note also the specific mention of our very good support for pupils with additional learning needs highlighting the quality of our learning support, resource teachers and our special needs assistant.

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

In the immediate months following the completion of the evaluation a new properly constituted board of management has been installed. The new board is undertaking the required number of meetings, to be held annually and the role of each board member has been clarified. An especially designated financial accounting board member presents a statement of accounts in print at each board meeting. The board is in the process of preparing an action plan.

We note the recommendations regarding the in-school management team, which we plan to implement. We appreciate the constructive comment on our school’s building programme, site and adjacent amenities. We were pleased to receive grant aid in support of our IT programme. Plans are at an advanced stage to substantially equip each classroom with appropriate technological resources, namely laptop computers, projector access, whiteboard technology and ancillary equipment.

We acknowledge the recommendations made by the Inspector to develop curricular policies and we wish to build on the development of relationships with parents to further develop their collaborative role regarding policy planning. A more formal and more regular approach has been adopted with regard to staff meetings. Minutes are recorded and reviewed.
We note the recommendations made by the Inspector in certain curricular areas and as we continuously review these subject areas, we plan to implement these recommendations, and all will form a basis in future school planning.

We look forward to continued progress in all aspects of our school’s development.