An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Saint Patrick’s National School
Bruskey, Ballinagh, County Cavan
Uimhir rolla: 19568M

Date of inspection: 9 June 2011
1. Introduction

Saint Patrick’s National School is a mainstream, co-educational primary school under the patronage of the Catholic Bishop of Kilmore. The sixty-one pupils are distributed equitably across three multi-grade classrooms. The school has received Green-Schools, Active School and Discover Primary Science awards. Provision for Irish, English, Mathematics and Music was evaluated. The board of management of the school was given an opportunity to comment on the findings and recommendations of the report; the board chose to accept the report without response.

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 works effectively, partaking in policy ratification and overseeing infrastructural improvements to good effect.
- The school fosters and receives very good parental support. The parents’ association is supportive.
- Engagement in planning and self-evaluation practices is positive and purposeful.
- In-school management is very good; the principal works very effectively and is supported very ably by the deputy principal.
- Classroom and support teachers work in an innovative, diligent manner and are very committed to their pupils.
- The management of pupils is very good. They participate successfully in a wide range of co-curricular and extracurricular activities.

The following **main recommendations** are made:

- **Moltar cur chuige uile-scoile níos córasaí a chur i bhfeidhm do theagasc na Gaeilge. A more systematic, whole-school approach to the teaching of Irish is recommended.**
- Further development of the pupils' learning in Music is recommended.

3. Quality of School Management

- The board of management works effectively, partaking in policy ratification and overseeing infrastructural improvements to good effect. Most recently—utilising the Department’s Summer Work Scheme—the board improved energy efficiency and water conservation in the school. This year, it will replace the heating system. As further funding becomes available, it will target improvements to the playing field, internal flooring and aspects of external upkeep.

- The parents’ association is supportive; it maintains effective communication with the school and assists with fundraising and event organisation. Into the future, the association hopes to be involved in a wider range of school-support activities. The general parent body provides very worthwhile support to school initiatives. For example, parent volunteers assist with the organic garden, green-flag work and Be Active After School Activity Programme. In questionnaires, administered as part of the inspection,
parents indicated that the school provides a well-run, safe environment in which their children are treated fairly.

- In-school management is very good. The principal, appointed in 2008, works very effectively and diligently and has a strong focus on school improvement. She balances her administrative and teaching duties in a very commendable manner. She is supported very ably and positively by the deputy principal.

- The teaching staff comprises three mainstream teachers and two support teachers. There were considerable staff changes during 2010-2011; one class teacher and both support teachers commenced their current assignments. However, there is good cohesion and staff morale is high. It is advised that a mentor be assigned to new staff and that the principal visits classrooms and support settings regularly to monitor curriculum implementation. The board employs a secretary and a cleaner/caretaker, both part-time, who provide beneficial service.

- The school provides an attractive and well-organised learning environment with most classrooms hosting exemplary displays. Plentiful teaching aids, including information and communications technologies (ICT), are available. Class libraries should be augmented and graded.

- The management of pupils is very good; clear and effective classroom routines are established. In questionnaires, the majority of pupils indicated that they enjoy school and are progressing well. However, they should be provided with more opportunities to engage in decision-making through an appropriate forum.

- School attendance levels have room for improvement; some pupils have been absent for more than twenty days in each of the last two years.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- Administrative planning is effective overall. As a next step, the development of plans for critical incidents and e-learning is advised. Whole-school review of policies for homework and relationships and sexuality education is required. A class allocation policy might be considered. Curriculum policies are comprehensive and useful. In particular, action planning for Music and English provides good guidance to teachers. Similar action plans for numeracy and Irish are recommended to support teachers in providing developmental learning experiences. Classroom planning is good overall.

- The school engages positively and purposefully in self-evaluation practices. The teachers are welcoming of advice and willing to try new strategies.

- School authorities provided evidence that, in compliance with Primary Circular 0061/2006, the board of management has formally adopted the Department’s Child Protection Guidelines for Primary Schools. Evidence was provided to show 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.
5. **Quality of Teaching, Learning and Pupil Achievement**


- In providing for Irish, satisfactory work is underway in certain areas. A positive attitude is cultivated towards the language and good use is made of resources, poetry, language games and reading resources. However, a stronger focus is needed on the development of communication skills throughout the school. Regular revision of the conversation themes is recommended also. Additional emphasis on grammar is needed in the senior classes. A good many pupils display accuracy in and understanding of their reading, especially in the middle classes. However, phonics skills should be developed across the school. Functional writing activities are undertaken regularly. From here on, more opportunities should be provided for pupils to write creatively and personally.

- Provision for English is strong overall. Talk and discussion are prioritised and pupils recite well-chosen poetry. Specific focus on discrete oral language development is needed across the school, however. The provision for emerging and early fluent reading is highly commendable. The introduction of formal reading should be delayed until senior infants. Pupils, in every classroom, experience a wide variety of text and attainment in standardised reading tests is in line with national norms. To enhance provision even further, more emphasis should be given to the differentiation of learning activities and the development of comprehension strategies. Provision for writing is good overall with worthwhile focus on creative writing. Writing folders should be introduced as appropriate. Cursive writing would benefit from a more consistent whole-school approach.

- Provision for Mathematics is good overall. The lessons observed were clear, well paced and active. Pupils show enthusiasm for the subject and results of standardised tests indicate that overall attainment is in line with national norms. Appropriate emphasis is placed on the acquisition of number facts and on mental arithmetic. Problem-solving has been highlighted by teachers as an area for further development. Closer scrutiny of pupils’ errors in standardised tests is advised.

- Provision for Music is satisfactory overall. Throughout the school, pupils listen to music, use percussion instruments and sing simple unison songs regularly. The repertoire of Irish songs should be extended. Whole-school planning for musical literacy and composition is very useful and the work undertaken the junior classroom deserves special mention. There is need now to provide a consistent, developmental programme in both these areas in every classroom. Tin whistle is taught in the middle and senior classes. Pupils perform at school concerts, sacramental celebrations and Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann.

- Provision across the curriculum is good overall. Teachers work in an innovative, diligent way and are very committed to their pupils. Team teaching of literacy in the middle classroom is commendable. There is very good co-operation in providing for Social, Scientific and Environmental Education (SESE). There is need, as aforementioned, to increase differentiated learning activities across the school. Most parents, in questionnaire responses, agree that teaching is good and that their children are
progressing well. The majority of pupils indicated that they enjoy learning and are making good progress in reading. However, their responses varied somewhat in respect of their experiences of group work, feedback on learning and consolidation of learning.

- Assessment practices are good overall. Pupil files are maintained and the tracking of pupils’ achievement is effective. Screening and standardised tests are administered and results are shared with parents. Whole-school use of pupils’ self and peer-assessment strategies would be a beneficial next step. Greater whole-school consistency is needed in the correction of copies and workbooks.

6. Quality of Support for Pupils

- Two teachers are assigned specifically to cater for pupils with additional and special educational needs. Teaching is good overall with both in-class and withdrawal intervention. Rapport between learners and teachers is very good and planning and recording are consistent. Further clarity in respect of target setting and home-school links will prove beneficial. A review of group sizes is also advised to ensure that the maximum number of pupils benefit from additional support. It is advised that should a member of the support team express an interest in undertaking accredited study in special education, this should be facilitated by school management.

- The quality of home-school partnership is very good. Regular, informative newsletters are issued and there is an open-door policy towards parents.

- Pupils participate successfully in a wide range of co-curricular and extracurricular activities in sport, music, science, quizzes and charity events.

Published November 2011