

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**  
**Department of Education and Skills**

**Whole School Evaluation**  
**REPORT**

**St Etchen's National School**  
**Kinnegad, Co. Westmeath**  
**Uimhir rolla: 19848S**

**Date of inspection: 12 February 2014**



## 1. Introduction

St Etchen's National School is a vertical co-educational primary school which operates under the patronage of the Catholic Bishop of Meath. In response to the sustained growth of a culturally diverse pupil population, a school extension on a split campus was completed in 2008 and another extension is currently underway. Overall, attendance rates are very good for the majority of the 560 pupils. However, there has been a gradual increase in the number of pupils who are absent for twenty days or more during the school year. A review of the school's attendance policy should be undertaken, and a range of strategies should be devised to address this trend. During the whole-school evaluation inspectors observed teaching and learning in ten mainstream class settings and four support teaching settings. 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:

- Members of the board of management discharge their duties very competently to provide valuable support for the school.
- The principal provides very effective instructional and administrative leadership for the school community.
- The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in the four subjects evaluated is very good.
- Teachers in all settings capably use a range of effective teaching methodologies.
- Pupils are diligent and enthusiastic learners.
- Provision for pupils with additional learning needs is of a good quality.
- The in-school management team are very committed and hardworking.

The following **main recommendations** are made:

- It is recommended that a whole-school policy for assessment be devised to emphasise the linkage between assessment, differentiation and classroom planning.
- It is recommended that teachers ensure that long-term plans are linked to the principles of the *Primary School Curriculum* (1999) and that the plans outline a detailed scheme of work suited to the needs of the pupils.

### **3. Quality of School Management**

- The work of the board of management is very effective. Meetings are conducted according to recommended procedures and financial accounts are audited independently. The board is commended for its very active role in the development of the school's facilities. Board members expressed as a concern, the challenges posed in effectively managing a school which operates on a split campus. Members of the board demonstrate a very good awareness of their role in supporting the current priorities for school improvement.
- The principal provides very effective instructional and administrative leadership for the school community. He has successfully established a culture of collaboration and it is apparent that high levels of teamwork underpin the success of the school. He is ably assisted by a very committed and dedicated deputy-principal and in-school management team.
- A very active and well-informed parents' association is in place. The principal attends the association's meetings to discuss school activities and to seek the views of parents. The responses to questionnaires issued to some parents during the whole-school evaluation (WSE), indicate very high levels of parental satisfaction with the work of the school.
- The management of pupils is very good. The pupils are highly motivated learners and interact with their teachers and their peers in a courteous and respectful manner. Pupils' responses to questionnaires, issued during the evaluation, are very positive about many aspects of school life. A small number of the respondents agreed that they have some say in how things are done in school. There is some potential, however, to revisit this question with the greater pupil population, to ascertain how the voice of pupils could be reflected in aspects of school planning and decision-making.
- Resources are managed very effectively and teachers have access to a suitable range of teaching and learning resources. It is commendable also, how many teachers devise and create resources specific to their own teaching settings. It is evident that ancillary staff members provide very good support in their respective areas of responsibility.

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

- The quality of whole-school administrative and curricular planning is good overall. Aspects of the school's plan for Irish have been reviewed collaboratively by the staff. The setting out of a time-line to guide the completion of the review of the other strands of the Irish plan is recommended.
- Teachers' short-term planning is of a good quality overall. In a number of contexts, where very effective practice was observed, teachers had recorded specific intended learning outcomes, the range of resources and methodologies to be used, and specific strategies for differentiation. This practice should be extended. The quality of teachers' long term planning is very varied. It is recommended that teachers ensure that long-term plans are linked to the principles of the *Primary School Curriculum* (1999), and that the plans outline a detailed scheme of work suited to the needs of the pupils.
- The school's successful engagement with the self-evaluation process is evident in its work. The implementation of agreed literacy strategies is found to impact successfully on teaching and learning. To complement the variety of existing assessment practices, a whole-school approach to incrementally monitor improvements in pupils' learning should be further developed

- 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

- Teaching, learning and pupil achievement in the settings observed is of a very high quality. Lessons are carefully structured, well resourced and delivered with a lively pace. A variety of teaching methodologies is deployed including effective whole-class teaching, group and pair work and activity-based learning tasks. In questionnaires completed by the pupils in fourth and sixth classes, the majority of pupils reported that their teachers explain things clearly and that they enjoy their lessons and learning.
- Tá caighdeán na múinteoireachta agus na foghlama sa Ghaeilge an-mhaith ar an iomlán. Úsáideann na múinteoirí raon leathan stráitéisí éifeachtacha chun scileanna éisteachta agus labhartha na ndaltaí a chothú agus a leathnú. Tugtar ionchur teanga mhaith do na daltaí, agus is inmholta an chaoi ina thugtar deiseanna dóibh na frásaí nua a chleachtadh le chéile i suímh réalacha. Tá béim chuí ar úsáid na mbriathra agus ar abairtí a chumadh. Léiríonn na daltaí dearcadh dearfach i leith na Gaeilge agus léann siad go muiníneach agus le tuiscint. Cuirtear tascanna oiriúnacha ar siúl sa scríbhneoireacht dóibh agus tá caighdeán ard le feiscint in obair neamhspléach roinnt de na daltaí.
- *The overall standard of teaching and learning in Irish is very good. Teachers use a broad range of effective strategies to foster and extend pupils' listening and speaking skills. Good language input is provided to the pupils and the manner in which pupils are given opportunities to practise the language in realistic settings is praiseworthy. There is appropriate emphasis on the use of verbs and on the construction of sentences. Pupils demonstrate a very positive attitude to the language and they read with confidence and understanding. They are provided with suitable writing tasks and there is a high standard to be seen in some pupils' independent work.*
- The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in English is very good. The school successfully implements a range of strategies to foster a love of reading among the pupils. In addition, there is a praiseworthy approach by teachers to the explicit and systematic teaching of a wide range of reading skills across the school. In each class visited, there is worthwhile emphasis on talk and discussion, and the teachers model very suitable language usage. There is scope in some classrooms to increase pupils' confidence in using language for different functions and in particular contexts. All teachers should ensure that the breadth of oral language objectives underpins pupils' oral language activities. A review of the pupils' written work confirms very good standards. Pupils write competently in a range of genres, and the consistent implementation of the school's policy on penmanship and presentation is highly commended.
- Very high standards are achieved in the teaching and learning of Mathematics. Where very effective practice was observed, it was characterised by the explicit teaching of concepts and skills and the linking of mathematics to the pupils' own environments. Pupils can apply relevant mathematical terminology accurately, and it is evident that pupils' problem solving skills are afforded careful attention. Many pupils can successfully apply the strategies being taught.

- The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in Visual Arts is very good. The programme encompasses a developmental approach. There is an appropriate balance between making art and responding to art. Pupils derive enjoyment and benefit from the programme. The integration of Visual Arts with other curriculum areas is a successful feature of the work of the school.
- The quality of assessment approaches is commendable overall. In contexts where practice was highly effective, checklists, pupil profiles, pupils' self-assessment strategies and teacher-designed tasks and tests were observed. To further develop the positive impact of assessment it is recommended that a whole-school policy be devised to emphasise the linkage between assessment, differentiation and classroom planning. Pupils' written work is carefully monitored.

## **6. Quality of Support for Pupils**

- Provision for pupils with additional needs is of a good quality. Commendable leadership is evident in the planning of additional supports for pupils. This support is characterised by a flexible, pupil-centred approach, and underpinned by an aim to promote inclusivity and continuity for the pupils.
- The development of the current approaches to team-teaching and in-class models of support is evidence of the spirit of collaboration that exists within the school. To further refine current programme delivery, support-teachers are advised to focus on a smaller number of realistic targets that are more closely related to the priority learning needs of the pupils. The special-needs assistants are supportive of pupils' independence and discharge their duties very effectively.
- The recent introduction of a book rental scheme is commended. The incremental expansion of this scheme is now advised as a means of reducing the cost of books for the overall population of parents in the school.

# **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 (BOM) of St Etchen's welcomes the findings of the WSE report.

The BOM is pleased that the report acknowledges and affirms the very high quality teaching, learning and pupil achievement evident in the school.

The BOM believes that this report is a tribute to the commitment and dedication of the school staff, parents, pupils and BOM members both present and past.

#### **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 BOM and staff welcome and acknowledge the recommendations of the WSE. These are being systematically addressed as part of our ongoing process of continuous improvement.