An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Saint Patrick’s SNS
Drangan, County Tipperary
Uimhir rolla: 19880O

Date of inspection: 22 January 2010
WHOLE-SCHOOL EVALUATION

A whole-school evaluation of St. Patrick’s Senior National School (SNS) Drangan was undertaken in January 2010. This report presents the findings of the evaluation and makes recommendations for improvement. The evaluation focused on the quality of teaching and learning in English, Irish, Mathematics and History. 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.

INTRODUCTION – SCHOOL CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

The following table provides an overview of the enrolment and staffing in the school at the time of the evaluation:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pupils enrolled in the school</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainstream classes in the school</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers on the school staff</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainstream class teachers</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers working in support roles</td>
<td>1 shared part-time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special needs assistants</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT

1.1 Characteristic spirit, mission or vision

St. Patrick’s SNS is located in the village of Drangan in a rural community in South Tipperary. In 1985, St Patrick’s Boys school was extended to accommodate pupils from the Sisters of Mercy Convent School. The two single sex schools then restructured as two co-educational schools: St. Patrick’s Junior National School and St. Patrick’s SNS, now sharing a modern school building. The school is characterised by its welcoming atmosphere and respectful teacher-pupil relationships. The building and grounds are maintained to a very high standard. As stated in its ethos, the school promotes the development of pupils to their full potential enabling them to participate fully in society as responsible, informed, and thinking citizens.

1.2 Board of management

The board of management meets at least once per term, and more often if required. Minutes are carefully maintained and indicate that issues relating to the administration of the school are discussed in a thorough manner. Members of the board are assigned specific responsibilities, which they discharge with dedication and commitment. In recent times, some have availed of training to assist them in their roles. Finances are managed carefully and there is a clearly defined system for tracking income and expenditure. The board is involved in the whole-school planning process and ratifies school policies as they are formulated and reviewed. It welcomes the contribution of the parents to the development and review of organisational policies. In accordance with his supportive role, the chairperson maintains regular contact with the principal and staff and his support is greatly appreciated by the school community. He has been successful.
in improving facilities in the school and in accessing resources to enhance both the learning and physical environments. Recent developments include an extension to the building in 2007, resurfacing and enhancement of the playground area and replacement of the roof. More recently, Department of Education and Skills grants have been used to replace a number of windows. Plans for a staff car park to improve road safety in the immediate vicinity are well advanced. The board places keen attention on creating and maintaining a comfortable and inviting physical environment. To further enhance the very good home-school relations, the board is advised to consider producing an annual report informing parents of ongoing work of the board and of progress on relevant aspects of the school.

1.3 In-school management

The principal carries out her duties with commitment and provides effective leadership and management. Her dedication is acknowledged by the board, the staff and the parents. Her affirming leadership is reflected in the high morale demonstrated among a very motivated and industrious staff. A commitment to teaching and learning is demonstrated through her prioritisation of continuing professional development activities for teachers. She acknowledges the skills and talents of her colleagues and praises the wide-ranging professional development that they have pursued in recent years. Under her leadership, pupils’ progress is closely monitored, classroom practice is reviewed, responsibilities are delegated and staff development is promoted in a caring and encouraging manner. The school is organised in a most efficient manner.

The principal is competently supported in her role by the in-school management (ISM) team, which consists of the deputy principal and one special-duties teacher, both of whom have been assigned organisational, curricular and pastoral duties. These duties reflect current school priorities and are effectively implemented. The enthusiasm and dedication of the in-school management team is praiseworthy and ensures the smooth day-to-day administration and organisation of the school. There is a discernible sense of good order and work ethic at all times during the school day.

1.4 Management of relationships and communication with the school community

The parents’ association expresses a high level of satisfaction with the school and is particularly appreciative of the efforts of staff. Parents meet with the teachers on a formal basis on one occasion each year and consult with teachers on an individual basis when necessary. Parents participate in a Maths for Fun programme for four weeks each school year. They further support school events through the subsidisation of swimming sessions for pupils, assistance in a supervisory capacity with these lessons and provision of transport to sporting events and relevant church ceremonies. The representatives of the association exhibit an acquaintance with the school plan and have contributed to the formulation of policies such as the healthy eating, homework and Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) policies. This collaborative practice gainfully facilitates parental involvement in school-life. The staff has, in collaboration with the junior school, produced an attractive and informative booklet that is presented to the parents of enrolling pupils. The booklet outlines pertinent school policies such as discipline, homework and attendance. Parents are issued with written reports on their children’s progress at the end of each school year. In order to further develop the quality of annual reporting, it is advised that staff consider reviewing the report template to better reflect the holistic development of pupils and to provide parents with a more comprehensive report.

1.5 Management of pupils
The management of pupils is excellent. Pupils are very well behaved and they display pride and interest in their work. They co-operate most willingly with their teachers during all class activities. Pupils are eager to engage in discussion and they participate fully in guided and discovery-based learning. They display particular confidence in oral presentations and comprehensively recall previous learning in many curriculum areas. Much credit is due to teachers for their sensitive management of pupils during the transfer from the junior school into third class and for preparing senior pupils to transfer with confidence to post primary school.

2. QUALITY OF SCHOOL PLANNING

2.1 Whole-school and classroom planning

Whole-school planning is of a very good quality. The plans presented during the evaluation were clear and comprehensive. The practice of developmental planning is embedded in the school. Useful adaptations and refinements of curricular plans are made on an on-going basis with review mechanisms routinely built into the planning process. Innovative approaches are explored and adopted into school policy in a timely manner. A wide variety of organisational policies has been put in place in response to the evolving needs of the school. The school is commended for its strategic planning, which facilitates the identification of future priorities and ensures the translation of whole-school curricular initiatives into specific targets for all classes. The code of behaviour has been recently reviewed to provide for an appeals procedure, as required by legislation.

Individual teachers plan to a very high standard. Long-term and short-term planning documents are carefully prepared in accordance with agreed templates. Linkage to the school plan and the Primary School Curriculum features prominently, and planning is appropriately differentiated to address pupils’ individual abilities. Learning objectives are specific and achievable. Opportunities for integration are noted and the link to classroom practice is clear. Monthly progress is recorded consistently and is centrally filed under subject sub-sections to present a whole-school perspective on learning in each aspect of the curriculum.

2.2 Child protection policy and procedures

Confirmation was provided that, in compliance with Department of Education and Science Primary Circular 0061/2006, the board of management has formally adopted the Child Protection Guidelines for Primary Schools (Department of Education and Science, 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. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

3.1 Language

Gaeilge
Cothaíonn foireann na scoile dea-thoil don Ghaeilge i measc na ndaltaí. Cothaítear atmainseáil spreagúil don Ghaeilge agus úsáidtear í go rialta sna hordaithe agus mar theanga chaidrimh na
The teachers foster the development of goodwill towards Irish among the pupils. A stimulating atmosphere is cultivated and Irish is used frequently for instructions and as the language of communication in the school. Language games and paired conversation are used effectively to provide the children with opportunities to speak the language. Interesting activities are organised for every strand and suitable use is made of a wide range of resources, including: textbooks; songs; poems; CDs; computers; and worksheets. Pupils show high participation levels in these activities and they enthusiastically take part in lessons. The vocabulary and speaking power of the pupils are expanded incrementally. Pupils enjoy the work and gain pleasure from the lessons in Irish. Pupils in the senior classes reveal a broad understanding of Irish and can discuss news, pastimes, and their own circumstances with ease. Creditable differentiation is made in the teaching and pupils’ specific needs are taken into account with consideration. Reading is taught with assurance and pupils read capably and accurately. Written work is laid out neatly and clearly. Pupils’ work is regularly monitored and corrected and a high standard is achieved overall. Attention is focused on appropriate aspects of grammar. Reading and writing are linked closely to oral work. Pupils recite many poems, rhymes and songs, with creditable attention being paid to the correct phonology, pace and rhythm of the language. Irish is used consistently as the medium of communication during Irish lessons and is used extensively at other times throughout the day. A variety of teaching methodologies is employed in a most effective manner and subsequently most pupils have achieved a very high standard in Irish.

The quality of teaching in English is very high. An extensive programme in oral language is undertaken throughout the school. Pupils are encouraged to ask and answer questions and to express their thoughts and feelings using an extensive vocabulary. The acquisition of vocabulary and the development of oral language skills are suitably integrated with other curricular areas, specifically in the areas of Mathematics and History. Many senior pupils display particular competence in justifying and defending their opinions and in persuading others to support a point of view, thereby further developing their cognitive abilities through oral language. Teachers are commended for modifying their short-term planning templates to provide for the inclusion of topical issues and current affairs in the oral language classes. All pupils enjoy regular experiences of poetry, specifically chosen for each class level to broaden their language experiences and to
facilitate emotional and imaginative response. Phonological awareness is appropriately progressed throughout the school. Pupils read text material fluently from a variety of books and frequently engage with narrative, expository and representational text. They are encouraged to use the well-stocked classroom libraries. A ‘bookworm’ programme provides targeted intervention in middle classes and the use of a class novel enhances provision for reading throughout the school. Pupils benefit from the emphasis placed on comprehension strategies, as agreed in a revision of the whole-school plan in 2008. Clearly defined teaching approaches have been determined for each class level, and these are timetabled and explicitly taught in each classroom.

Strategies used in the development of writing focus on fostering the pupils’ impulse to write and on enabling them to write competently, confidently and independently. Pupils engage in a range of writing activities through which their writing skills are suitably developed. Pupils are encouraged to produce assignments where both creative writing and functional writing are presented to a high standard. Pupils’ work is monitored consistently by teachers and samples are displayed attractively and celebrated in all classes. Opportunities for pupils to draft and edit their own writing are facilitated by the use of computers and Information Communication Technology (ICT).

3.2 Mathematics

The teaching of Mathematics is undertaken in a most competent manner. Pupils display a very positive attitude towards Mathematics and engage enthusiastically in their learning. An appropriate range of mathematical equipment is available in the school and these materials are used effectively to enhance pupils’ learning. A stimulating mathematics-rich environment has been developed with specific areas for mathematics allocated in each classroom. Pupils are encouraged to present their written work to a high standard and this work is monitored consistently by teachers. Pupils in middle classes display an appropriate understanding of place value including place value in decimal numbers, and concepts are consolidated through frequent opportunities to purposefully engage with concrete materials. Teacher-designed charts and commercial posters are used to good effect. These resources supplement samples of pupils’ mathematical work in creating stimulating environments in all classrooms. To complement the class setting, it is recommended that mathematical trails now be used more extensively so that the school grounds and building can be better utilised to support teaching and learning. Curriculum strands are linked and pupils can readily transfer their learning on lines and angles to the manipulation of clock faces. Pupils’ mathematical language is consistently developed from third class, and senior pupils use a very broad and impressive vocabulary when engaging in oral work. A notable and praiseworthy feature in the provision for Mathematics is the continuity and progression from class to class supported by the frequency and quality of teachers’ professional discourse on pupil attainment.

Pupils in middle classes demonstrate good ability in composing and recording number stories and in performing age-appropriate mental and written computation. Pupils’ skills of reasoning, estimating, predicting, calculating and problem-solving are extended appropriately in senior classes. Senior pupils displayed good competence in their approaches to problem-solving, manipulation of shape and spatial awareness, as well as in applying relevant mathematical language to explain processes used. In line with best practice, the teaching and learning in the Mathematics lessons observed centred on discovery learning, through teacher-guided exploration with concrete materials. Practical and written tasks are prudently chosen, proficiently organised and suitably paced. Focused discussion and purposeful questioning direct pupils’ activities and sustain a high level of engagement by most pupils.
3.3 History

Very good quality learning experiences are provided for pupils in History. Teaching methodologies have been appropriately selected in order to develop the pupils’ skills in working as historians. Pupils in middle classes have explored personal and family histories with particular emphasis on change and continuity in primary school experiences for themselves and for their parents. Exploration of school artefacts, including a primary certificate, textbooks from the 1950s and old copybooks provide an effective stimulus for discussion on this aspect of history. Engagement in family history is progressed as pupils move through the school and conduct interviews with grandparents, orally and through the use of a questionnaire. The school’s rural context is further reflected in topic selection whereby pupils are enabled to learn about changes in farming and rural industry over time. In senior classes a deepening understanding is facilitated through exploration of cause and effect and dramatisation of historical events in order to explore the motivations and actions of key historical characters.

The immediate school environment supports teaching and learning. Timelines feature in all classes and are used to develop pupils’ understanding of time and chronology. Pupils in middle classes record personal timelines highlighting significant personal events, while senior pupils exhibit a deeper understanding of eras from the Stone Age to modern times. All pupils have undertaken historical trails in the village and enthusiastically recall their visits to significant historical sites. Photographic records of local trails are displayed in classrooms and pupils demonstrate knowledge and understanding of places visited. Pupils’ engagement in lessons is gained and maintained through teachers’ use of attractive visual stimuli, active methodologies and appropriate selection of topics for in-depth study at each class level.

3.4 Assessment

The school plan documents a very wide array of assessment strategies, which are well reflected in the teachers’ long-term and short-term planning. Teacher observation, teacher-devised tasks and the careful questioning of pupils are employed to very good effect. In addition, teachers maintain samples of pupils’ work in portfolios and a photographic record of learning across many curricular areas. To further enhance the provision for oral language, teachers are advised to consider the use of oral language indicators at each class level. Such a practice would allow the school to more readily quantify and record the high standards reached by most pupils with a view to providing parents with a more comprehensive report on pupils’ oral language attainment.

The Drumcondra Reading Test and the Sigma-T Mathematics Test are administered annually to pupils from third class to sixth class. Test results are carefully analysed and whole-school achievement is presented on graphs and plotted against national norms. This analysis shows impressive attainment throughout the school. The effective management of this assessment information results in the implementation of targeted strategies and activities to enhance pupils’ learning. A very good range of assessment modes and, in some instances, diagnostic tests is used to support and inform future teaching.

4. QUALITY OF SUPPORT FOR PUPILS

4.1 Pupils with special educational needs

The quality of provision for pupils with special educational needs is very good. The school plan includes detailed policies on the admission, enrolment and participation of such pupils and these
policies are informative and are in accordance with the school’s caring ethos. The staged approach to assessment, identification and programme implementation is utilised appropriately. The special-education team in the school consists of a part-time resource teacher and a shared learning-support teacher who provides support to selected pupils in literacy and numeracy. The school employs a part-time special needs assistant who provides valuable support to two pupils under the careful guidance of the class teachers. Provision is carefully balanced between withdrawal and targeted in-class support. In-class intervention strategies in numeracy and literacy are a regular feature of practice in middle classes and pupils benefit from the quality of this provision. Support teachers plan well for their lessons and their record keeping is of a very high standard. Focussed programmes of work are prepared for individual pupils in collaboration with class teachers. Individual education plans (IEPs) are characterised by a significant degree of detail and relevance and are prepared on the basis of a careful diagnosis of each pupil’s strengths and needs. Plans include specific learning targets and a clear timeframe for review is identified. Parents are invited to meet with the support teachers at the beginning of the instructional term and when reviewing the IEP. Lessons observed were very well structured and teachers ensured that pupils engaged in suitable learning activities. Pupils were appropriately challenged and they engaged purposefully in the tasks set. The interactions observed between teachers and pupils receiving supplementary teaching were very affirming and most encouraging of the pupils. It is recommended that parents of pupils in receipt of support teaching be supplied with a copy of their child’s IEP in order to facilitate more effective home-school collaboration in the provision of support for these pupils.

4.2 Other supports for pupils: disadvantaged, minority and other groups

At present there are no pupils from minority groups attending the school. There is a tradition in the school of providing discreet support for pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds. The respectful, open relationship between parents and staff facilitates this practice.

5. CONCLUSION

The school has strengths in the following areas:

- The school is characterised by very positive and affirming relationships among all the stakeholders.
- The school has an active and supportive board of management which has established excellent working relationships with the staff. Members of the board expend considerable time and effort in the management of the affairs of the school.
- The school building and grounds are maintained to a very good standard.
- The principal provides visionary leadership and efficient management of all aspects of the school.
- The school adopts consistent and progressive approaches to planning at whole-school levels and at individual class levels.
- There is a wide variety of expertise among teachers and they display a strong professional commitment to teaching and learning.
- All members of the teaching staff are committed to the provision of high quality education for pupils with special educational needs.
- The behaviour of the pupils is exemplary.
• The parents are actively supportive of the work of the school and demonstrate a keen interest in their children’s education. Home-school-community links are effectively fostered.
• The school achieves commendable standards in English, Mathematics, History and in Irish. High academic standards are particularly noted in the area of Irish conversation where there is a systematic, motivational use of the language throughout the school day.

The following key recommendations are made in order to further improve the quality of education provided by the school:

• It is advised that the template for reporting pupils’ progress to parents be reviewed to better reflect the holistic development of pupils and provide parents with a more comprehensive report.
• It is recommended that parents of pupils in receipt of support teaching be supplied with a copy of their child’s IEP in order to facilitate more effective home-school collaboration in the provision of support for these pupils.

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

Published November 2010.
Appendix

School response to the report

Submitted by the Board of Management

Area 1: Observations on the content of the inspection report

The school community wish to thank the inspector for the courteous and professional manner in which she carried out the Whole School Evaluation. We are pleased that the report highlights the high standard of teaching and learning in our school and we have noted the recommendations.