An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Ringaskiddy Lower Harbour NS
Ringaskiddy, Co. Cork
Uimhir rolla: 20049S

Date of inspection: 03 February 2012
1. **Introduction**

Ringaskiddy Lower Harbour NS has DEIS status and is under the patronage of the Catholic diocese of Cork and Ross. It is a mixed school in a rural setting but close to the satellite town of Carrigaline and the major industries of Cork Harbour. This is a welcoming school with a pro-active approach to special needs pupils for whom resources are accessed willingly. The main school structure was built in 1898 and over the past 15 years successive boards of management have sought to build a modern school in the area. The last major evaluation of the work of the school took place in 2002 and at that time 89 pupils were enrolled and currently, there are 84 pupils on roll. 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 board and its predecessor have worked conscientiously on all administrative and governance matters concerning the school.
- The principal is committed to upholding the strong tradition of primary education in Ringaskiddy.
- The in-school management team members cooperate willingly for the good of the school.
- The 1898 building has been maintained in good decorative order.
- The parents’ association is very active on behalf of the school.
- Sa Ghaeilge, múintear amhráin agus dánta go suntasach beocht. *Irish poems and songs are taught with impressive accuracy.*
- Special programmes in English are being implemented beneficially.
- The emphasis on practical approaches to Mathematics is highly commendable.
- The teaching of History is characterised by a stimulating variety of approaches.
- An effective blend of in-class support and withdrawal is implemented by the support team.

The following **main recommendations** are made:

- External certification of accounts should be arranged annually.
- The options regarding accommodation needs, as discussed at the post-evaluation meeting, should remain a priority for the new board.
- Free writing should be undertaken in English and Irish and a more systematic approach to English writing *genres* should be adopted.
- Closer liaison between class teachers, SNAs and the support team is encouraged to ensure continuity in the practice of fine motor skills.
3. Quality of School Management

- A new board was established prior to the commencement of the WSE and members are to be complimented for duties undertaken willingly in a spirit of voluntary service. Both the present and previous boards have worked diligently and conscientiously on all administrative and governance matters concerning the school and minutes of previous board meetings document these conscientious efforts. There is a report on financial matters at every board meeting but external certification has not been sought and it is now recommended that such certification is arranged annually. The chairperson visits the school regularly and seeks to deal with administrative and governance matters most conscientiously in tandem with the principal and the board.

- The principal has taught in the school for the past 17 years and was appointed to his present role in 2007. His dedication to his duties is recognised by parents and board as he strives to uphold the strong century and a half tradition of education in Ringaskiddy LH NS. The principal oversees very open channels of communication within the school community. He encourages parents to assist in the work of the school by means of their involvement in a range of initiatives. The principal receives strong support from the board and from the other members of the in-school management (ISM) team, comprising the deputy principal and a post-holder, who perform their duties in a diligent and conscientious manner. The ISM team oversee the implementation of programmes in English such as Literacy Lift-off, Reading Recovery, Peer Tutoring and Building Bridges. Meetings of the in-school management team are held monthly outside school hours.

- The main 1898 school building is very well maintained and boards of management down through the years have made wise use of summer works funding to maintain the building in good decorative order. The board does not have a written maintenance plan and this should be addressed within the overall plan for future accommodation. There are two permanent classrooms in the main school building and two temporary classrooms in the playground. The temporary classrooms reduce the playground space which is deemed inadequate. At present the school has no general purposes room, no principal’s office and the staff room doubles as a meeting room. It is unsuitable for conducting private meetings and immediate steps should be taken to rectify this matter. At the post-evaluation meeting with the board a number of options regarding the school’s accommodation needs were explored and the new board should continue to prioritise discussion of these options.

- The parents’ association meets once a month in the school. The association is very active and people are very involved in a number of tasks on behalf of the school and the association. Fund raising for interactive whiteboards for all classes has been undertaken and it is now planned to help the school purchase a batch of netbooks. The association also supports classes for cookery, the garden committee, music teaching, religious events and the Christmas concert.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- The school is engaging diligently in the planning process and has prepared a comprehensive school plan. Parents have access to policies and it is advised that plans should be submitted to the parents’ association for observations before they are finally discussed and ratified by the board.

- Mainstream class teachers prepare for their work in a dedicated manner. Teachers prepare very useful short-term plans and the long-term plans give clear guidance as to the work for the term. Teachers also prepare their classrooms well with neat and attractive areas for English, Mathematics, Irish, Art, and SESE. The staff should now
seek to devise a more helpful system for recording the monthly report. In the support context, overall policy is drafted by the SEN team and discussed at staff and board levels. The process to develop IPLPs and IEPs involves parents, teachers and the principal and during the WSE instances of very comprehensive plans were noted. Guidelines have been formulated on how SNAs should support pupils.

- 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

- This school implements DEIS programmes in literacy and numeracy faithfully and beneficially. The school makes good use of standardised tests to examine progress and these tests reveal a steady improvement in performance over the past four years in both literacy and numeracy. The results of these tests should henceforth be shared with the board of management.

- In infants and junior classes, the language is taught actively. Rhymes and songs are taught regularly and vocabulary is taught in the context of full sentences. Good use is made of games to practise informal Irish and formal dialogues are practised beneficially with the aid of the interactive whiteboard. Work is presented neatly in copies and it would be worthwhile to develop facility in free writing. In the middle and senior classes, very good teaching of Irish was observed and challenging poems and songs were taught with impressive accuracy. Sentences and verbs are taught systematically. Dialogues are practised in a lively manner with the aid of equipment and the interactive whiteboard. The language is reinforced through group practice activities. Again, it would be worthwhile to develop facility in free writing in these classes.

- Direct teaching of reading in the infants and junior classes using the interactive whiteboard is proving very successful. Pupils have been trained to write neatly and the use of free writing as part of classroom strategies is now encouraged. The concept of a poem a day is a very good strategy and additional use of mechanisms in the Building Bridges of Understanding programme to discuss poetry is very good practice. A lot of work in writing has been undertaken and the wide variety of poems and stories on
display, demonstrate neatness of presentation. In middle and senior classes good practices are in place whereby poems are read, discussed and learned regularly. Free writing should be encouraged in these classes and a more systematic approach to the genres of writing should be undertaken. In line with best practice in DEIS schools, special programmes such as Literacy Lift-off, paired reading, peer tutoring and readers’ theatre are being used in a beneficial manner. For the Literacy lift-off programme, it is advisable to have four groups with SNA support and to include free writing as one of the activities.

- Throughout the school, Mathematics lessons begin with mental tables practice and oral arithmetic. This is supplemented by an emphasis on problem solving strategy which is written into all plans. The use of copies should be developed in the infants and junior classes. Practical approaches are employed with pupils working in pairs/groups using equipment and during the WSE there was an emphasis on measures and practical real life Mathematics throughout the school. Ongoing practical activities with whole classes and with groups included: pupils using clocks when learning about time, real money in classroom shopping activities and measuring instruments for outdoor and indoor measurement. Work on graphs also had a practical bent and overall, the approach to Mathematics in this school is rooted in good practice.

- The teaching of History in this school is characterised by a stimulating variety of approaches which include: teacher in role, use of artefacts, illustrations on the interactive whiteboard, inviting a grandparent to talk about life in the old school in Ringaskiddy and looking at the old roll books and old school photos in order to develop a greater understanding of life in the past. This very interesting whole school approach to History was designed to give the pupils a thorough appreciation of the past. During the WSE an excellent History assembly took place where special needs pupils worked to prepare a video and give a talk on the historical aspects of a local castle.

6. Quality of Support for Pupils

- Practical resources were used appropriately in this setting and the judicious blend of in-class support using beneficial programmes and withdrawal is successful. For in-class support, programmes include Literacy Lift-off in infants and junior classes and peer tutoring in middle classes. For individual and group withdrawal a very beneficial Reading Recovery programme is undertaken. Much of the work in resource teaching is provided in a withdrawal context either with individuals or groups. Good examples of sound individual teacher practice were observed and included work where the practical approach of mainstream lessons in Mathematics was reinforced in the support context and where, for literacy, individual needs as outlined in the IPLPs were catered for by an emphasis on patient discussion to develop understanding.

- Overall, the support section of the school plays an important role and provides valuable support for pupils with diverse needs. The work is coordinated diligently by a member of the ISM team and the teachers who work with special needs pupils do so with commendable patience as they seek to develop the pupils’ skills by appropriate steps. Guidelines have been formulated on how SNAs should support pupils and the SNAs provide a valuable support to pupils with very serious conditions.

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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 of Ringaskiddy Lower Harbour N.S. would like to thank the Inspectorate for conducting our recent WSE. We felt the school was highly commended for many of the good practices already in place. The recommendations made were very helpful and will benefit teaching/learning in the school.

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

Furthermore, we would see the accommodation issue as very important and will undertake to explore and secure more suitable accommodation. As Board of Management we will continue in our endeavours to provide a holistic education for the children in our care in the years ahead.