An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

St. Patrick’s NS,
Saula, Achill, Co. Mayo.
Uimhir rolla: 16052I

Date of inspection: 13 September 2010
1. Introduction

St. Patrick’s national school is situated in Saula on Achill Island in west Mayo. The Catholic Archbishop of Tuam is the school patron. Pupil attendance is very good. This is a Gaeltacht school although English is the first language of the majority of the pupils. This presents teachers with a challenge in providing appropriately for pupils’ learning needs while at the same time ensuring that Irish is the language of communication of the school. The school participates in the Department’s support programme DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools). 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 of management provides significant support to the school.
- All teachers work diligently and there is a strong spirit of learning in the school.
- Praiseworthy work is undertaken in English and Mathematics and a high standard is achieved.
- The quality of teaching and learning in this school is very good.
- The school fulfils its duties to nurture and raise the status of Irish in the school.
- The good behaviour, courtesy and efforts towards learning of the pupils are praiseworthy.
- The teachers receive significant support from the local community in school events.

The following main recommendations are made:

- It is advised to direct an even greater focus on Irish to develop its Gaeltacht status in every aspect of the school.
- Irish as the language of instruction could be further extended in co-operation with the parents to ensure their support in this work.
- Self-evaluation in the school needs to be developed.

3. Quality of School Management

- The board ensures that the school is well run overall. The board is deserving of commendation for the level of support given to the staff in the provision of resources for the school. The business of the meetings is usually conducted through English and during the evaluation, many of the meetings with the board were conducted through English, at the request of the members. Some of the board members have fluent Irish and all members know some phrases in Irish. The board is advised to develop its skills so that school business could be conducted through Irish.

- The quality of in-school management is very good. The principal directs the work of the school effectively and energetically and she demonstrates management skills that are open and understanding. She creates a positive atmosphere throughout the school.
• The school is maintained to a high standard. The building is neat, tidy and attractively presented. The yard and school grounds are also maintained to a high standard.

• The management of pupils is very effective. A strong work ethic is inculcated in the pupils and respect is evident between the pupils and teachers and amongst the pupils themselves.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

• Comprehensive administration policies are available. They are clearly written in both languages, they give lucid guidance to the school community and are generally suitable for this particular school context.

• Curricular plans are based on the structure of the Primary School Curriculum and overall are of a good standard. In Irish it is recommended that clarification be provided on the various strategies that are suitable to develop the communicative approach for the different classes. It is also recommended that a greater emphasis be placed on regular review and self-evaluation of what has been achieved and what has yet to be implemented.

Child protection policy and procedures

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

• The quality of teaching and learning in this school is very good. The teachers use school resources effectively to provide pupils with opportunities to develop their skills. The professionalism of the teachers was highly praised at the pre-evaluation meeting and the parents and the board of management confirmed their satisfaction with how the school is run. Also, pupil responses in the questionnaires confirm that the majority of them enjoy their lessons.

• Although this is a Gaeltacht school, Irish is not widely spoken in the area and English is the mother tongue of the pupils starting school. Emphasis is placed on the fostering of communication skills in a structured manner. The success the pupils achieve in functional communication in Irish is praiseworthy. Despite this, one does not regularly hear Irish spoken in the yard or hallways of the school. The staff is advised to make a greater effort to encourage the pupils to use Irish as a medium of communication. Pupils read fluently and with accuracy. Written work is neatly presented. The work is regularly corrected and a high standard is achieved in general. It is clear that there is very satisfactory progress being made in Irish on a whole school basis.

• The majority of pupils in St. Patrick’s NS achieve a high standard in English. The teachers place an appropriate emphasis on oral language development. Pupils’ reading skills are developed systematically, appropriate reading activities are undertaken to practise these and pupils read confidently and with enjoyment. Writing skills are very well
developed. It is advised that greater use be made of technology to publish the pupils’ work.

- The majority of pupils achieve a very satisfactory standard in Mathematics. An emphasis is placed on mental maths as a regular element of the programme as well as a focus on the language of mathematics in both languages. English language textbooks for Mathematics are in use in all classes except the infant classes at present. The school is advised to introduce Irish language Mathematics textbooks on an incremental basis.

- Music is taught competently throughout the school and the pupils enjoy and benefit from their participation in these lessons. The pupils sing an attractive selection of songs and the teaching of the tin whistle in the senior classes is praiseworthy. The school choir celebrates special occasions musically.

6. Quality of Supports for Pupils

- Support for special educational needs is effectively implemented. Individual education plans are based on test results and specialist reports. Class teachers and parents participate in this process. Early intervention programmes are used at the infant level.

- A satisfactory standard is achieved in the learning activities that are provided. A reading programme is provided with an emphasis on the development of phonological awareness in a discerning manner.

- Very good work is undertaken by the DEIS co-ordinator in the school in the provision of opportunities for parents to be involved in the education of their children. The school receives a high level of support from the local community. The board of management intends to establish a parents’ association in the school.

Published, March 2011
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 and staff of Saula N.S. wish to thank the inspector. She gave us support, good advice and encouragement. She inspired us with her professional advice and earnestness.

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

We accept the recommendations and guidance given. We are making every effort to act on them. We are doing our best to develop Irish and to progress it in every aspect of the school with the support of the parents.