Whole-School Evaluation
REPORT

Gaelscoil Sáirséal
Bridge Street, Limerick
Roll Number: 19956V

Date of inspection: 30 September 2010
1. Introduction

Gaelscoil Sáirséal is located on temporary school sites which are rented at Bridge Street and in a hall in Mary Street in the city of Limerick. The school implements a policy of immersion education. Gaelscoil Sáirséal functions under the patronage of the Catholic Bishop of Limerick. There are 242 pupils on rolls at present and the attendance is satisfactory. This whole-school evaluation focused on the quality of teaching and learning in Irish, English, Mathematics and Social, Personal and Health Education. 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 teachers work diligently and assiduously and make a great effort to present the pupils with a learning programme that is both broad and interesting.
- The commitment of the teachers to advancing their own continuing professional development is commended and the effects of this learning are to be seen in the work of the school.
- The good behaviour, courtesy and work-commitment of the pupils are praiseworthy.
- A commendable standard has been achieved by the majority of pupils in Irish, English and Mathematics.
- The dedication of the Board to Irish and to Irish-medium schooling is commended.
- The acting principal directs the work of the school with prudence.

The following **main recommendations** are made:

- It is recommended that every endeavour should be made to solve the accommodation problems of the school as a matter of urgency.
- It is recommended that the process of communication between the partners be reviewed, so that the parents might be better informed on the activities of the Board in particular, and on the workings of the school in general. An agreed report should be circulated after each Board meeting.
- It is recommended that the implementation of the policy on learning support and special education should be reviewed. It is necessary to ensure that the progress made by pupils is recorded more clearly with reference to the learning objectives set for them.
3. Quality of School Management

- The Board applies itself diligently to the management of the school. Regular meetings are accurately minuted and school policies are developed and adopted. Financial accounts have been carefully compiled by the Board. It is recommended that all the accounts should be endorsed, in keeping with the provisions of the Education Act (1998).

- The acting Principal ably directs the work of the school. She places a praiseworthy emphasis on curriculum development. A new deputy principal is to be appointed shortly. The four post holders discharge their obligations conscientiously. While they do fulfil a variety of duties, it would now be worthwhile reviewing these so as to ensure that they are more closely aligned to the priorities of the school.

- As was recorded in the previous School Report of 2001, these school premises are unsuitable in many ways. The classrooms are too small and some of them have no natural lighting. It is extremely difficult to create satisfactorily healthy conditions for pupils and teachers in these old buildings. It is recommended that the efforts being made to solve the accommodation problems of the school should continue to be pursued as a matter of urgency.

- Despite accommodation problems, a very good effort is made to decorate the classrooms attractively with teaching aids, displays and the pupils’ work. An impressive choice of books is made available to the pupils in both languages and creditable progress is being made as regards the technological resources of the school and their use.

- An attractive learning atmosphere is cultivated in the school. The pupils willingly collaborate with the teachers and with one another. An admirable training in good manners is imparted to the pupils and this is evidenced in their behaviour.

- The parents strongly support the work of the school. They assist in the organisation of sporting activities, the collection of funds, the running of special events and in many other ways. The teachers keep the parents informed effectively on the progress of pupils by means of meetings, journals and written reports. Communication difficulties arose recently between the parents’ council, the board and the school. With a view to overcoming these difficulties, a new constitution for the council is being ratified and new elections are being organised at present. It is recommended that communication issues should be reviewed, so that the parents might be better informed on the activities of the board in particular and on the workings of the school in general. An agreed report should be circulated after each meeting of the board.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- The school community has put considerable effort into the planning process in recent years. Curriculum and organisational policies are reviewed in order of priority, as provided for in the strategic plan for the school. Each teacher accepts responsibility for a particular curricular area. It is clear that planning has a positive influence on teaching and learning in the school. The participation of parents in the planning process could be further strengthened.

- The teachers fulfil their professional planning obligations satisfactorily and have implemented agreed templates. In the case of certain teachers, good practice was observed as regards curriculum differentiation and it would be worthwhile adopting this practice on a widespread basis. In this context, it is also recommended that
more effective collaboration should be fostered between the class teachers and the resource and special education teachers.

- 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 Irish a worthy emphasis is placed in the teaching on rhymes, stories and songs and the pupils recite items from their repertoire with accuracy and enthusiasm. Communication skills are helpfully cultivated through games, dialogues and interaction with technology. A particular effort is made to gradually enhance the pupils’ standard of accuracy. A wide range of texts is utilised in order to advance reading and the pupils are afforded plenty opportunities to write in different genres. A very good standard is attained by the majority of pupils in the various aspects of the Irish curriculum. Particular praise is merited by their fluency of speech and their facility at reading and writing the language.

- Very good provision is made for the development of the pupils’ oral language and listening skills in English. A wide range of contexts are provided for pupils to develop speaker-listener relationships and their ability to respond to poetry at an imaginative and emotional level is deserving of particular mention. A comprehensive reading programme is consistently implemented at all levels and reading standards are high. The attention afforded to the development of the pupils’ functional and creative writing skills is praiseworthy. Co-operative group work and an emphasis on the writing process are significant features of practice. The quality of some of the writing workshops observed during the evaluation was particularly high.

- A high standard is achieved in the teaching and learning of Mathematics. A broad and balanced curriculum is taught in order to meet the needs of the various class levels. A commendable emphasis is placed on mental work and care is taken with the teaching and learning of the language of Mathematics. Interactive white boards are used, as well as suitable resources and concrete materials, in order to elucidate and consolidate the understanding of concepts. The pupils record their work neatly and their written work in copybooks is appropriately supervised.

- Considerable care is taken with Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) in every class, whether on a whole-school basis or as separate class-lessons. Active teaching methods are utilised and programmes such as Stay Safe, Relationships and Sexuality Education and Misneach are drawn on in order to reinforce the self-confidence and self-respect of the pupils. It is recommended that the Monthly Reports would be reviewed with a view to determining whether consistency and continuity are realised in the use of the various programmes. It is also necessary that a specific policy on Relationships and Sexuality Education would be agreed among the school partners and ratified by the Board of Management.

- Some of the teachers have carried out action research on the school staff, as part of their continuing professional development. This work has influenced the teaching and learning, especially as regards the use of technology. Very good practice is to be observed in the work of some of the teachers and good practice in that of the others. As indicated by questionnaires, parents are very satisfied that a high standard of teaching prevails in the school.
In the school year 2007/’08, a policy on assessment was drawn up in which a commendable emphasis is placed on assessment for learning and the assessment of learning. Records of the outcomes of assessment tests and standardised tests, together with check lists and work samples, are kept on file by each teacher. This approach is commendable. This good beginning can now be built upon, by tracking and recording the individual pupil’s progress from year to year.

6. Quality of Supports for Pupils

- At the time of the evaluation, the support team comprised one full-time teacher and one part-time teacher and responsibility for the care of pupils is systematically shared between them. The major part of the support is given by withdrawing pupils in groups or for individual teaching, although some in-class work is done in infants as part of the school’s early intervention policy.

- Standardised tests and diagnostic tests are used in order to identify pupils with learning difficulties. However, there is great variation to be noted as between the individual programmes set down for the pupils and in the quality of teaching and learning. The learning objectives recorded in the learning programmes would need to be set down in more detail and better matched to the learning needs of the pupils. There is no satisfactory record available of the attainments of individual pupils. It is now essential that accurate records be kept of the progress being made by pupils with reference to the learning objectives set for them.
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 welcomes this report that recognises the high standard of Irish-medium education that is being provided by Gaelscoil Sáirséal to the pupils of the Northside of Limerick City. We are especially pleased by the acknowledgement of the emphasis that we place on planning and teacher professional development as a means of providing a varied and stimulating curriculum for our pupils, and that the excellent behaviour, manners and work ethic of our pupils has been recognised.

The Board of Management diligently attempts to keep the school community informed of school and Board events through a newsletter, information meetings, text messaging service, homework diaries, notes and our school website. An agreed report of each Board of Management meeting is published on the school website.

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

1. An efficient, cooperative Parents’ Council was elected in October 2010 that follows the guidelines set out in the Constitution of the Parents’ Council that was ratified by the Board and the parents.
2. A professional accountant prepares the school accounts and all accounts from 2009 onwards have been certified by an independent accountant.
3. The implementation of the Special Education Policy was reviewed during the Spring Term 2011. The “Reading Recovery” Programme will be implemented in the school from 2011/2012 on. The Learning Support Teacher will receive training as part of this programme and the Resource Teacher is registered for the Postgraduate Diploma in Special Education 2011/2012.
4. A Deputy Principal has been appointed and the duties of the postholders have been aligned with the school’s priorities.
5. The staff are currently drafting a policy for Relationships and Sexuality Education which will be presented to the school community during the first term 2011/2012.
6. A Student Council has been established in the school.