

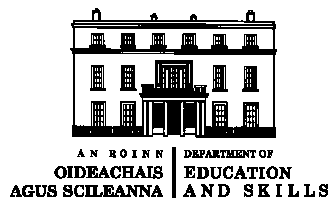
An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

**Whole School Evaluation
REPORT**

**St Bernard's Mixed NS
Abbeylara, Co. Longford
Uimhir rolla: 15122V**

Date of inspection: 11 November 2010



1. Introduction

St Bernard's NS is a three-teacher co-educational school under the patronage of the Catholic Bishop of Ardagh and Clonmacnoise. The school serves the educational needs of Abbeylara village and the surrounding rural hinterland. There are 54 pupils enrolled in the school and attendance levels are high. 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 is committed to supporting the school and to providing high quality education for the pupils in a safe and attractive environment.
- Relations between the school, the parents and the local community are very good.
- Whole-school and classroom planning impacts positively upon teaching and learning.
- The principal and in-school management team communicate high expectations and provide very good instructional leadership.
- All staff members carry out their duties very conscientiously.
- The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in English and Mathematics is very good.
- Praiseworthy supports are available for pupils with identified language, numeracy and literacy needs.

The following **main recommendations** are made:

- It is recommended that parents of pupils with low-incidence special educational needs be given a copy of the individual education plan (IEP) prepared for their child.
- To facilitate further school self-evaluation, it is recommended that the school set specific, measurable targets for pupil achievement, using the results of previous standardised attainment tests as a baseline.

3. Quality of School Management

- The board of management is committed to supporting the school and to providing high quality education for the pupils in a safe and attractive environment. The board is correctly constituted and well informed about its role and functions. Board meetings are convened regularly in accordance with best practice. Financial accounts are certified by an independent professional. The board is active in policy development and ratification.
- The principal provides high quality curricular leadership and she communicates high expectations for the school community. She articulates a vision that is centred on

continual improvement and the holistic development of pupils. The principal is ably assisted by the other members of the in-school management team who fulfil a range of curricular, organisational and pastoral duties.

- Resources are managed very effectively in the school. Duties are allocated equitably to staff members. The special-needs assistants, secretary and caretaker contribute to the smooth running of the school.
- The board is commended for working diligently to develop the school building with the assistance of Department grants. The school has a good stock of educational resources.
- Relations between the school, the parents and the local community are very good. In questionnaires administered as part of this evaluation, almost all parents reported satisfaction with the school. Despite encouragement from the school and the provision of an information meeting for parents, efforts to establish a parents association have been unsuccessful. Notwithstanding this, parents are involved in supporting many facets of the school's work.
- Overall, the management of pupils is very effective. All pupils report that they feel safe in the school and in the playground and a majority of pupils report that they like coming to school. Classroom relationships are very co-operative. Most pupils report that they have a say in how things are done in the school. This could be attributed to pupils' active roles in the school magazine, the Green School committee and the students' council.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- The quality of school planning is good and there is evidence of collaboration in the whole-school planning process. Administrative policies are relevant to the school context and curriculum plans provide valuable guidance for teachers. It is recommended that a three-year strategic plan be devised to facilitate the review of school policies according to the priorities of the school community.
- Classroom planning is very effective, especially where specific approaches to differentiation of lesson content for pupils with special educational needs are identified. Whole-school and classroom planning impacts positively upon teaching and learning in the school.
- School self-evaluation is promoted through analysis of the results of standardised attainment tests in English and Mathematics. To facilitate further school self-evaluation, it is recommended that the school set specific, measurable targets for pupil achievement, using results of previous standardised attainment tests as a baseline.

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

- Overall, the quality of teaching and learning is good. Lessons are structured effectively and appropriate teaching methods are employed to involve pupils in discovery learning. In response to the Inspectorate questionnaire, most pupils stated that they enjoy their lessons and that teachers' explanations are clear. A majority of pupils found their lessons interesting. Almost all parents commented favourably about the quality of teaching in the school.
- Tá cáilíocht an teagaisc agus na foghlama go maith sa Ghaeilge. Baintear úsáid as cur chuige cumarsáideach. Sa chleachtas is fearr, tugtar deiseanna labhartha do na daltaí san obair bheirte agus sa ghrúpobair. Úsáidtear ríomhairí agus acmhainní eile go forleathan chun suim na ndaltaí a mhuscailt sa Ghaeilge. Tá foclóir maith ag tromlach na ndaltaí agus léiríonn siad tuiscint inmholta sa chomhrá. Tá caighdeán na léitheoireachta agus na scríbhneoireachta go maith. Baineann na daltaí sult as na himeachtaí filíochta tríd an scoil.
- *The quality of teaching and learning in Irish is good. The communicative approach is used. In the best practice observed, pupils were given opportunities to speak during group and pair work. Computers and other resources are widely used to awaken the pupils' interest in Irish. Most pupils have good vocabulary and they demonstrate understanding in conversation. The standard of reading and writing is good. Pupils enjoy poetry activities throughout the school.*
- The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in English is very good. Oral language is developed systematically in all classrooms and most pupils contribute articulately to discussion. A paired-reading initiative is successfully implemented. Results of standardised attainment tests indicate that most pupils are reading well for their ability levels. Creative writing is addressed particularly well in the school. The guidance and structure provided for pupils in planning written exercises contributes to the quality of written work. Poetry is composed, recited and explored purposefully.
- The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in Mathematics is very good. Results of standardised attainment tests in Mathematics reveal a very good standard for the majority of pupils. There is a strong emphasis on mental mathematics and accurate use of mathematical language in all classrooms. Pupils are regularly afforded opportunities to work collaboratively with concrete materials to promote discovery learning.
- Pupils undertake problem-solving activities regularly and demonstrate suitable strategies in response to challenging tasks. It is commendable that Mathematics trails have been devised to integrate Mathematics with exploration of the school environment. Support teaching for Mathematics is targeted effectively.
- The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in Drama is very good. At all levels, Drama contracts have been devised to ensure that pupils understand the context of role-play and that they can safely enter and exit the fictional experience. This is evident from the credible cross-curricular scenarios observed, during which teachers and pupils assumed roles to seek deeper understanding and to create empathy.

6. Quality of Supports for Pupils

- School policy and practice facilitate full access to school activities for pupils with special educational needs and pupils with English as an additional language. Additional resources are targeted proactively within the school and prudent use is made of assessment, screening and diagnostic data in this regard. Support teachers maintain accurate plans and records and these are useful in sharing information with class teachers and parents.
- Praiseworthy supports are available for pupils with identified language, numeracy and literacy needs. Support teaching is provided very successfully through the in-class-support model and the withdrawal model. Stimulating teaching resources and methodologies are employed.
- Targets in individual profile and learning programmes (IPLP) are agreed through consultation. Evidence shows that pupils receiving additional support teaching are making sustainable progress in relation to their targets and ability levels. It is recommended that parents of pupils with low-incidence special educational needs be given a copy of the individual education plan (IEP) prepared for their child.
- Standardised attainment tests, screening tests and diagnostic assessments are administered effectively. Assessment results are analysed for the purpose of resource provision and programme planning. Classroom assessment practices are effective. It is commendable that results of standardised attainment tests in reading and Mathematics are communicated and explained to parents.
- The quality of home-school partnership is very good. The school communicates very effectively with parents through newsletters and a text service. In response to the Inspectorate questionnaire, most parents commented favourably about the arrangements for parent-teacher meetings and about the quality of information provided in pupils' reports.

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 St. Bernard's N.S. would like to thank the Department of Education inspector for his courtesy, professionalism and guidance throughout the WSE process.

The board is very happy with content and findings of the report.

These findings reflect the high standards of teaching and learning in the school. It affirms the dedication and commitment of the principal and all the staff members. It recognises the excellent relationship between the school, the parents, the Board of Management and the local community. We are encouraged to see our safe and positive learning environment reflected in the responses to the questionnaires from parents and pupils.

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 recommendation from the inspectorate regarding written liaison with parents of children with low-incidence special education needs has been implemented.

Standardised testing scores have been analysed and learning targets are agreed for pupils/classes using previous years test results as a baseline.