An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

St. Kieran's Special National School
Old Connaught Avenue
Bray
Co. Wicklow
Uimhir rolla: 19599A

Date of inspection: 23 February 2012

AN ROINN OIDEACHAIS AGUS SCILEANNA | DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND SKILLS

1. Introduction

With the adoption of inclusion as a central policy by the Department of Education and Skills, St. Kieran's Special National School is one of only two designated special schools for Traveller pupils remaining in the Republic of Ireland. The school operates under the patronage of the Catholic Archbishop of Dublin. At the time of the evaluation 67 pupils were enrolled. The inspectors note that the provision of education to Traveller children in segregated settings is no longer consistent with Department policy. In the Report and Recommendations for a Traveller Education Strategy (2006), it is recommended that "Traveller pupils should have equality of access, equality of participation and equality of outcome in a fully inclusive primary education system that respects Traveller identity and culture." This evaluation found good practice in the school's efforts to meet the needs of traveller children but the provision is now inconsistent with the delivery of an inclusive education experience for pupils. 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.

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 and staff are commended on the welcoming and supportive school atmosphere.
- The principal demonstrates very high levels of commitment and dedication in the performance of her duties. She fosters collaboration and collegiality among the staff and is very cognisant of the welfare of both staff and pupils.
- The pupils are respectful, well behaved and generally engage well in lessons.
- The school has a good range of resources and the school building and grounds are very well maintained.
- There is good willingness and ability among the staff and board members to improve the learning outcomes for pupils, particularly in literacy and numeracy, and to address the challenges facing the school in the medium term.

The following **main recommendations** are made:

- It is recommended that the school patron, in consultation with the board of management, should engage with the wider school community and the Department of Education and Skills in relation to the future of the school in the context of the recommendation stated in the *Traveller Education Strategy* of ending all segregated provision for traveller pupils.
- Given the significant challenges facing the school in terms of securing improvement in attainment levels in literacy and numeracy, attendance of all pupils and increasing parental involvement, an action-plan for addressing the school's immediate priority areas for attention should be formulated by school management.
- A review of the school's approach to assessment should be prioritised. Standardised tests in English and Mathematics should be administered to pupils on an age-appropriate basis and the results communicated to parents. Assessment data should be used to develop differentiated programmes in literacy and numeracy to meet the wide range of pupil abilities.

3. Quality of School Management

- The board of management is properly constituted and is representative of all the various stakeholders in the school community, including parents. It meets regularly and works hard in the interest of the school and its pupils. Board members are very aware of their responsibility to create a school environment that is caring and in which all individuals are valued. Board members are also aware that Traveller children should have equality of access, participation and outcome in a fully inclusive primary education system. The school building and grounds are very well maintained.

- The principal demonstrates very high levels of commitment and diligence in carrying out her duties. She fosters collaboration and collegiality among the staff and is very committed to the welfare and care of both staff and pupils. A number of areas of school responsibility have been delegated to the in-school management team who carry out their duties conscientiously. In view of the immediacy of the need to develop and implement curriculum initiatives, a review of their duties is required. To support this process, the school should actively seek support from the various support agencies such as, the *Professional Development Support Team* (PDST), *Special Education Support Services* (SESS) and the *Leadership Skills Development (LSD) programme.*

- Attendance in the school is generally good, although the school caters for a small number of pupils who have a history of absenteeism. Strategies are in place to promote regular attendance and some improvements in attendance have been noted in recent years. This is due to the school management's and staff's vigilance in implementing the school attendance policy. In the context of the significant challenges facing the school, in terms of pupil achievement, a parallel emphasis on improving individual levels of Traveller pupils' attainment in literacy and numeracy is of critical importance.

- The school has a good range of resources which is used effectively to support teaching and learning. There are five class teachers and pupils are assigned to classes on an age-appropriate basis. Four special needs assistants (SNAs) and one part-time classroom assistant make a valuable contribution to the care and involvement of pupils. There are attractive displays of pupils' work in a number of curriculum areas in classrooms and around the school. A *Headlamps* project-worker funded by the Bray Drugs Task Force liaises constructively with school staff in relation to supporting a number of pupils. A pre-school under the auspices of the *Early Childhood Care and Education* (ECCE) scheme operates at the school.

- The management of pupils is very good. The atmosphere in classes is positive and supportive. Most of the pupils engage purposefully in their lessons and achieve good standards of behaviour. In the pupil questionnaires, all pupils responded that they felt safe in class and almost all pupils responded that they could talk to their teacher if they were upset about an issue.

- Behaviour plans have been carefully developed for a number of pupils who exhibit challenging behaviour and the consistent support they receive over time enables them to cope better and self-regulate their own behaviour. The school's planned implementation of the *Incredible Years Programme* should assist staff further in dealing with challenging behaviour.

- St Kieran's is designated as a special school that caters exclusively for Traveller children. In this context, the school endeavours to maintain ongoing links with local mainstream

schools to facilitate their pupils' participation in local projects and initiatives. Notwithstanding the commitment of the school's management and staff, and the good quality of teaching inputs observed, the current segregated schooling model under which the school operates does not provide the essential inclusive educational environment that would be available to pupils in non-segregated mainstream primary schoo

- It is recommended, therefore, that the school patron, in consultation with the board of management, should engage with the wider school community and the Department of Education and Skills in relation to the future of the school in the context of the recommendation stated in the *Traveller Education Strategy* of ending all segregated provision for traveller pupils.

- In the context of the gradual phasing-out of the segregated school model and to assist pupils' transition to mainstream and post-primary settings, increased links with local primary and secondary schools are advised. The school's effective management of the transition of pupils to second-level schooling is acknowledged and school management should build on this.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- The board, principal and staff have been involved in the development of a range of policy and planning documents across organisational, curricular and pastoral areas. The school has begun the process of school self-evaluation. The school's use of pupil portfolios to monitor pupils' progress through the school is commended. Self-evaluation practice should now be extended to include the formulation of an action-plan for addressing the school's key areas for attention specifically in literacy, numeracy, attendance and involvement of parents. The action-plan should outline specific targets and improvement measures to address these areas. There is good willingness and ability among the staff to develop and implement this approach.

- Confirmation was provided that the board of management has formally adopted the *Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools* without modification and that the school is compliant with the requirements of the *Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools.*

5. Quality of Teaching, Learning and Pupil Achievement

- Good efforts are made by teachers to implement a broad curriculum and pupils have access to the full range of subjects. Features of effective practice include clear explanation of concepts, purposeful use of resources, collaborative learning opportunities, meaningful connections to pupils' own experiences and good cross-curricular linkages. Generally pupils' engage well in lessons and a number of pupils are undertaking age-appropriate work. It is recommended that provision for collaborative group work be extended to all classes.

- The school's approach to assessment should be prioritised for review. The school's current practice is to administer standardised assessment tests to pupils at levels below the pupils' age and class level. While the practice is well-intentioned, it has the effect of compromising the assessment outcomes and making it impossible to compare the performance of pupils with national norms. The school is advised that standardised assessment tests in English and Mathematics should be used with the appropriate age-cohort and the results communicated to parents. In classrooms, some good assessment practice was observed including the use of pupil portfolios. Teachers should now extend

their practice to plan differentiated programmes of learning, particularly in literacy and numeracy based on assessment data.

- Cé go bhfuil an churaclam iomlán sa Ghaeilge á múineadh sa chéad agus sa dara rang, níl an churaclam iomlán á múineadh tríd an scoil. Cuirtear béim ar an nGaeilge labhartha agus déanann na hoidí sár-iarrachtaí na daltaí a mhealladh chun cainte. Tá raon maith de rannta, dánta agus amhráin ar eolas ag na daltaí agus baintear taitneamh as iad seo a chanadh. Moltar an churaclam iomlán i nGaeilge a chur i bhfeidhm.

  While the full Irish curriculum is taught in first and second class, the full curriculum is not taught throughout the school. Emphasis is placed on the teaching of spoken Irish and the teachers make very good efforts to encourage the pupils to speak Irish. Pupils know a good range of rhymes, poems and songs and they enjoy performing these. It is recommended to provide the full Irish curriculum to pupils.

- The literacy standards achieved by pupils in the school are weak and there is recognition among the staff and management that a key challenge for the school is to raise these standards. Teachers make good efforts to foster the pupils' oral language skills but significant development is still required. Specific targets for the development of discrete oral language skills should be identified and a range of appropriate strategies put in place. Pupils are encouraged to read regularly and a range of books for personal reading is made available through the class libraries. In some classes, effective use is made of graded-readers and novels to develop pupils' reading skills. A number of pupils experience difficulty with reading. To secure further improvements in reading achievement, teachers should focus on the teaching of specific reading skills in an incremental manner and on pupils' reading at an instructional level. Pupils engage in a range of functional and creative writing activities. Their work is corrected by teachers and positive feedback given.

- Achievement in Mathematics requires attention. Some effective mathematics teaching was observed including the purposeful use of concrete materials, clear explanations, appropriate pitching of content and engagement by pupils in problem-solving activities. Where a sense of achievement was experienced, pupils display positive attitudes to Mathematics. A small number of pupils are completing age-appropriate work. To improve attainment in Mathematics, a whole-school approach should be put in place incorporating, specific strategies derived from programmes such as *Maths Recovery* and *Ready Set Go Maths*. Once agreed, the whole-school approach should be implemented, monitored and reviewed consistently.

- There is good quality teaching of the Arts in the school and pupils display good levels of interest in lessons. There are some fine examples of the pupils' work in the Visual Arts displayed in classrooms and around the school. In addition to being taught as a discrete subject, Drama is integrated purposefully with other curriculum areas. Pupils enjoy their experience of classroom Music and lessons include song singing in Irish and English, percussion work and listening and responding to Music.

- A broad programme is implemented in Social, Environmental and Scientific Education. Lessons are well structured and pupils are afforded opportunities to develop skills of observation, prediction and recording across the three areas. Generally, pupils display good levels of knowledge of the topics covered. To further develop pupils' sense of environmental awareness and care, consideration should be given to participation in the *Green School's Initiative*.

- There is a good range of equipment and facilities in place for Physical Education and a broad programme of activities is provided. Pupils have access to swimming lessons and coaching in football is facilitated through a number of outside tutors. Consideration should

be given to achieving the appropriate balance between competitive and co-operative games in the programme provided.

- In the teaching of Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE), teachers make good use of a range of appropriate methodologies such as circle time, story and scenarios relevant to the pupils' own lives. Overall pupils engage purposefully in lessons and they contribute well to class discussions.

6. Quality of Support for Pupils

- Staff demonstrates high levels of commitment to the welfare of pupils. Individual education plans (IEPs) have been devised for all pupils assessed as having an additional learning need. Some of the IEP's contain very clear and specific learning outcomes for pupil achievement, while in other plans the outcomes are more general. In planning for these pupils, teachers should ensure that the outcomes are specific and attainable. The achievement of these outcomes should be regularly monitored and reviewed.

- The school operates an open-door policy to parents. A group of parents met with inspectors during the evaluation and reported high levels of satisfaction with the educational provision for their children in the school. In the parent questionnaires all parents responded that they were happy with the school. To assist parents in supporting their children's education, consideration should be given to extending parental involvement in a number of in-school activities, including the curriculum areas. There is no formal parents' association, although many efforts have been made over the years to establish one. In view of the pressing need to consult with parents regarding the future of the school, the board should endeavour to establish a parents' association at the earliest opportunity.

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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 acknowledges the professional manner in which the Inspectorate carried out the WSE and the valuable recommendations contained therein.
- The Board validates the work being done in St. Kieran's and feel that the school is providing a high level of support to children who might otherwise fail to benefit from a fully inclusive primary education.
- We believe that the high transfer rate to post primary and the extra support given to past pupils now in post primary reflects positively on the work being carried out in the school.
- The Board feel, on the issue of attendance, that the present procedures are effective and we recognise the importance of keeping our attendance policy under review.

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

- In line with the directives from the Department of Education, time allocated to Numeracy and Literacy has been increased. A literacy power hour has been introduced and the staff hope to begin a numeracy power hour shortly.
- "Maths Fun Day" has commenced on a weekly basis.
- The time allocated to the teaching of Irish has been increased and the Irish School Plan is to be reviewed yearly to achieve the phasing in of the full Irish Curriculum.
- 2011-2012 assessments were given on an age appropriate basis and our assessment policy is being updated.
- We are currently awaiting our Incredible Years training with NEPS.
- The school has had its initial visit from a member of Wicklow County council with regard to the schools participation in the Green Schools Programme. We are hoping to get the parents involved in this initiative.

- A paired reading programme, with interested parents, has been introduced.

- With regard to our PE programme every effort is made to achieve appropriate balance between competitive and co-operative games. We believe that our policy encourages all of our students to lead active lives. We have begun the process of obtaining an Active Flag.

- Efforts will continue with regard to the setting up of a Parents Association. This year we have decided to run a series of evening talks for parents based on topics we feel will be relevant for them and might open the door to the formation of a more formal Parents Association.