An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Ballinspittle NS
Kinsale, Co. Cork
Uimhir rolla: 00467B

Date of inspection: 1 April 2011
1. Introduction

Ballinspittle NS is a co-educational school under the patronage of the catholic Bishop of Cork and Ross. It has a current enrolment of 147 pupils. 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 contributes positively to the overall work of the school.
- The school enjoys the trust and support of the local community.
- All staff members are committed and dedicated professionals who provide a broad range of expertise and experience in support of the school aims and objectives.
- The school is well resourced and well maintained.
- The standard of general pupil attainment is very good.
- The principal has played a key role in the successful creation of a positive and supportive learning environment.
- The pupils are articulate and confident and display high levels of self-esteem.

The following main recommendations are made:

- It is recommended that the instructional leadership capacity of the teaching staff be expanded, within the constraints of current middle management structures, and in line with Departmental guidelines and the identified strengths of individual staff members.
- It is recommended that good practice in teaching and learning be further disseminated throughout the school.
- A more focused subject driven whole-school approach to the planning, implementation and review of practice in each curricular area is recommended.
- It is recommended that a more consistent approach to the development of pupils’ handwriting skills be implemented. A review of language teaching practices to include a more integrated approach with a language experience focus would help in this regard.

3. Quality of School Management

- The board of management is properly constituted and plays a supportive role in the general work of the school. Members give generously of their time. The school building has been improved considerably over the years and the external spaces of the school are well developed and maintained. The financial affairs of the school are effectively
managed by the board through a treasurer appointed in a voluntary capacity. Relationships are good within the school community. Parental questionnaire responses indicate that the school has a good reputation in the community (94%) and that all of the parents (100%) consider it to be a well run school.

In order to further develop management practices it is recommended that the board have schools accounts certified, annually, in line with Department guidelines and best practice. It would also be worthwhile to examine the possibility of producing an annual school report for dissemination to the local community.

- The formal in-school management team is comprised of the principal, deputy principal and two special duties teachers. They contribute to the effective running of the school, although the range of assigned duties needs to be broadened to include curricular as well as administrative and pastoral responsibilities. Other teaching staff members are empowered to lead and manage aspects of the work of the school and their identified strengths are used to good effect, in some instances, in support of agreed school aims and objectives. In order to improve existing good practice, it is recommended that leadership roles be linked, more directly, to whole school planning and to curriculum implementation. More formal reporting structures should also be put in place to monitor outcomes.

- The school is reasonably well resourced in support of teaching and learning and targeted investment has occurred in specific areas. For example, investment in technology is at an advanced stage and good use is made of the newly installed interactive whiteboards as a key teaching resource. Questionnaire data indicate that most parents (85%) consider school facilities to be good. It is recommended that current resources are audited in order to facilitate the identification and prioritisation of specific future areas of investment. In that context, unused or incomplete resources should be discarded. The school should continue to allocate funds in support of the purchase of books and other reading materials in both English and Irish.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- The board, the principal and staff display a willingness to engage with school planning and school policy documents are evolving and changing in line with Departmental guidelines and best practice. This is a collaborative venture which will benefit from more formal curriculum leadership structures as advised earlier. Generally, policies are clear and unambiguous statements and, in almost all cases, accurately reflect current school practices.

- In order to facilitate school self-evaluation as a key cornerstone of school improvement, it is recommended that school curricular policies continue to be systematically reviewed and discussed at middle management meetings and at staff meetings. Teaching staff with particular expertise should be given whole-school leadership roles in this process. The process will, ideally, lead to continuity and development in all curricular areas which will be underpinned by clear and unambiguous whole-school planning documents and policies.

- All teaching staff members complete long-term and short-term plans in respect of all curricular areas and record progress on a monthly basis. A variety of templates and styles are used. It is therefore recommended that a strategic plan be put in place with a specific target of developing agreed school templates for classroom planning which are outcomes focused and linked to whole-school aims and objectives.
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. It is now recommended that, within the constraints of existing in-school management structures, procedures are put in place to ensure that these guidelines are provided to all staff (including all new staff) in order to ensure 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 overall quality of teaching is very good in the school. Standards of pupil achievement are, generally, impressive. Most pupils (83%) consider their lessons to be interesting and all parents (100%) believe that their children are doing well in school. In addition, the board of management and the representatives of the parents’ association expressed their support for the school and their satisfaction with the general level of pupil attainment.

Many examples of good practice in the teaching and learning of Irish were noted. Various pupils were observed to use new language communicatively with confidence in certain classes. The effective use of ICT and the manner in which pupils were encouraged to participate in classes were praiseworthy. Drama and rhyme are used to good effect in certain classes to expose pupils to good quality language. Good work is also done under the umbrella of ‘Seachtain na Gaeilge’. Throughout the school the efforts of the staff were commendable and although the active participation of pupils can be further developed and more attention can be given to the three phases of language lessons, the standard of learning was age-appropriate in the case of the majority of pupils.

To further improve the standard, it is recommended that the observed good practice is further disseminated throughout the school. It would be worthwhile to draw up a strategic plan for Irish containing specific objectives and to link this work to staff development and curriculum leadership. In that context, it is recommended that a staff member with experience, interest and the relevant skills be identified and supported in leading this work.

English is taught effectively in the school. The results of standardised tests (Micra-T) indicate very good standards with regard to the overall reading ability of pupils. Pupil
questionnaires also indicated that almost all pupils (91.2%) have positive self-images with regard to their ability to read. A key strength in this regard is the effective use of novels in the middle and senior classes and the wide variety of graded reading material available throughout the school. These promote a lively interest in reading among pupils of all ages. There was clear evidence of good planning, and effective teaching of discrete oral language was also observed. Language enrichment activities were impressive in many classes. Some very good samples of pupils’ writing were observed in some genres and there is a strong emphasis on process writing in specific classes. It is recommended that this good work be extended to include the development of writing skills across a wider variety of writing genres, whilst placing a suitable emphasis on presentation and penmanship without compromising on pupil creativity or interest.

The school should continue the language experience approach to teaching, should further develop the print-rich environments in and outside the classrooms and prioritise the purchase of books as key resources. Time-bound reading interventions, participation in new projects or involving parents in shared reading projects in order to underpin the importance of literacy as a key cornerstone of learning would also be worthwhile.

- Mathematics teaching is effective in the school and standardised test results (Sigma-T) indicate above average results in almost all of the percentile bands. Almost all parents (99%) believe that the school is helping their children to progress in mathematics. Most pupils (78%) also believe that they are doing well at Mathematics. Pair work and group work occurs during lessons, and there is constant reinforcement of key concepts and skills through structured oral work and effective consolidation. Mathematics classes provide pupils with opportunities to apply their mathematical knowledge and skills through problem-solving activities and the exploration of Mathematics in the environment. Appropriate resources, including ICT and calculators, are effectively used. The specific language of Mathematics is emphasised in lessons and undue reliance on textbooks is avoided.

In order to further enhance the good practice observed, it is recommended that the staff continue to link Mathematics with the environment and to develop Mathematics trails, where possible, within the school environs. It would also be worthwhile to conduct an audit of school equipment and develop an agreed approach to the relevance of or the need for specific items. This would inform future investment in mathematics equipment and be a suitable focus for additional staff meetings under the terms of circular 0008/2011.

- A strong tradition of Music exists in the area. Music lessons observed included song singing, music appreciation and composition. Music was successfully integrated with other curricular areas in some classes and participation levels were high. A highlight of the evaluation was the performance by senior pupils, under the direction of National Concert Hall personnel, of an original story set to music. In order to further improve provision, it recommended that the school continue to build on the local musical tradition by implementing whole-school approaches to planning and implementation which are developmental and progressive. This would, ideally, incorporate a core repertoire of songs for each class. It is also recommended that the school consider the feasibility, within existing staff resources, of providing instruction in instrumental music and incorporate short daily performance periods into school routines as a means of providing all pupils with the ability to enjoy music with their peers.

6. Quality of Support for Pupils

- Pupils with special educational needs are supported by one full time teacher and two part time teachers with an allocation of fifteen hours and three hours respectively. Two special
needs’ assistants (SNAs) are employed to support a number of pupils with specific needs.

- A wide variety of teaching approaches are employed successfully for pupils with special educational needs. These include withdrawal in groups or individually, in-class support, and team teaching. Good collaboration occurs between support staff and mainstream class teachers. The emphasis is, primarily, on literacy and only a minority of pupils receive support in Mathematics. Early intervention is emphasised and good diagnostic testing and assessment practices are used to inform the internal school decision-making process. Very good practice was observed in a number of settings during the course of the whole-school evaluation with respect to addressing the needs of pupils with a high incidence or low incidence learning difficulty.

- The quality of outcomes and progression of pupils with special educational needs is satisfactory, though, in some specific cases, there is a need to further engage with other relevant service providers in order to ensure that best practice is being adhered to.

- Although eighty-nine percent of parents were happy with school reporting procedures, it is recommended that future reports include written records of standardised test scores in line with current NCCA guidelines and best practice. The existing school policy should be reviewed in that context. It is also recommended that, above and beyond the need to liaise with relevant partners and relevant professionals, care is taken to maximise contact time with pupils in need of additional help.
Appendix

SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

Submitted by the Board of Management
Area 1  Observations on the content of the inspection report

*Ba mhian leis an mbord buíochas a gabháil leis an gcigireacht as ucht an cabhair agus an tacaiocht a thugadar i rith an mheastóireacht scoile uile. Táimíd fior-bhuioch as ucht an comhairle agus na moltaí agus cuirfear i bhfeidhm iad sa scoil amach anseo.*

The board wishes to thanks the inspectorate for the help and support they provided during the whole-school evaluation. We are very grateful for the advice and the recommendations and they will be implemented in the school from now on.

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

Following our Whole School Evaluation this year action has been taken to expand the leadership capacity of the teaching staff, with middle management becoming more involved in Whole School planning curriculum implementation. Staff discussion has been initiated on the topic at penmanship and strategies for improvement are being investigated.