Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Ballynacargy NS,
Ballynacargy,
Mullingar, County Westmeath

Uimhir rolla: 01731U

Date of inspection: 4th March 2010
WHOLE-SCHOOL EVALUATION
A whole-school evaluation of Ballynacargy National School was undertaken in March 2010. This report presents the findings of the evaluation and makes recommendations for improvement. The evaluation focused on the quality of teaching and learning in English, Irish, Mathematics and Science. 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.

INTRODUCTION – SCHOOL CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND
Ballynacargy National School is a co-educational primary school serving the educational needs of Ballynacargy village and its surrounding rural hinterland. The school participates in Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS), an initiative of the Department of Education and Science to alleviate educational disadvantage. Enrolment trends and projections are stable. The school has experienced significant staff changes recently, especially with the appointment of two new principal teachers during an eighteen-month period. Recent refurbishments of the school building have enhanced the educational environment for staff and pupils. The following table provides an overview of the enrolment and staffing in the school at the time of the evaluation:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
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<tr>
<td>Pupils enrolled in the school</td>
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<td>Mainstream classes in the school</td>
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<td>Teachers on the school staff</td>
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<td>Mainstream class teachers</td>
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<td>Teachers working in support roles</td>
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<td>Special needs assistants</td>
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1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT

1.1 Characteristic spirit, mission or vision
Ballynacargy NS operates under the patronage of the Catholic bishop of Meath. The school’s mission statement emphasises the importance of pupils’ welfare and the raising of educational standards. The holistic development of pupils is also envisaged within a caring learning environment. The respectful quality of the interaction between teachers and pupils is evidence that these aspirations are being implemented.

1.2 Board of management
The board of management is correctly constituted and actively supportive of the school. Its priorities include providing for pupil welfare and raising educational standards. Board members are well informed and committed to the school. Board meetings are convened regularly to discuss accommodation needs, school events and to develop and ratify school policies. Minutes are recorded and the board’s finances are certified by an independent accountant. The chairperson is a regular visitor to the school. Individual board members undertake roles in relation to communication, health and safety, pastoral support and fostering links with the pre-school and the wider community. Priorities are identified for the provision of teaching resources and the maintenance and enhancement of the school building. The board employs a part-time caretaker and a part-time secretary and both of these contribute effectively to the smooth running of the school.
1.3 In-school management
The recently-appointed principal provides strong and effective leadership for the school and he secures enthusiastic support from the school community. His vision for the school centres on improving educational standards and enhancing pupil welfare. It is evident that this vision is shared within the teaching staff and that it informs collaborative decision making. The principal has participated in Leadership Development for Schools (LDS), a national programme that provides professional-development opportunities for principals and deputy principals. The principal’s leadership style is collaborative and he promotes teamwork within the staff. He leads the school planning process and monitors curriculum implementation conscientiously.

The principal is ably assisted by the in-school management team, which consists of the deputy principal and the special-duties teacher. Delegated duties in the curricular, organisational and pastoral realms are identified specifically in the contracts for each member of the in-school management team. The duties are prioritised and revised for the particular needs of the school. Team members discharge their duties very effectively. Communication between the principal and the in-school management team is very good and this contributes to effective co-ordination of school initiatives.

1.4 Management of relationships and communication with the school community
Relationships between the staff, the board and the parents are well managed and very good. The school fosters valuable links with local community groups including the GAA, Westmeath Partnership, Little Blessings Community Play Group and the Caraphort Family Resource Centre. The parents’ association is newly formed and its members enthusiastically support the school. The association convenes regular meetings and its members assist the school through fundraising, support for school events and discussion of draft school policies. Parents also produce the school newsletter for the wider community in co-operation with senior pupils and the teaching staff. A newly published school information booklet informs parents about school policies and procedures. Parents expressed satisfaction about the quality of education provided by the school and reported that they are well informed about their children’s attainment levels. Annual parent-teacher meetings are convened and results of standardised tests are disclosed orally to parents.

1.5 Management of pupils
The quality of pupil management is very good. Effective policies have been ratified in relation to attendance, safety, discipline and positive behaviour. The pastoral-care system successfully promotes positive behaviour and attendance. Staff members convey high expectations for pupils and there is an agreed approach to praising and rewarding good behaviour. Classroom rules are implemented fairly and consistently in all rooms. The relationships between staff and pupils are cordial and respectful. A buddy system has been introduced successfully in the playground to encourage senior pupils to care for infant pupils. The provision of a variety of specific sporting activities for pupils in the playground has been beneficial in improving pupils’ social interaction.

2. QUALITY OF SCHOOL PLANNING

2.1 Whole-school and classroom planning
The quality of whole-school planning is very good. All policies required by legislation are ratified and implemented. It is evident that the administrative and organisational policies were drafted through a consultative process to reflect the particular needs of the school. The school has engaged with the Primary Professional Development Service (PPDS) in relation to the curriculum planning process. The use of a planning diary and action planning demonstrates a praiseworthy commitment to self evaluation by the school. Many of the curriculum plans, including the Science plan, commendably outline a two-year cyclical approach for balanced implementation of the
strands. The plans for English, Mathematics and Irish provide valuable guidance for class teachers. Further clarification of agreed mathematical language and procedural approaches would enhance the effectiveness of the Mathematics plan. It is praiseworthy that each teacher has been provided with an electronic copy of the school plan and this assists greatly with classroom planning.

The quality of classroom planning is very good. All teachers use a common approach to presenting long-term and short-term planning and monthly reports. Long-term plans are guided by the school plan and relevant curriculum objectives. Short-term objectives are outlined with clarity and most teachers indicate how lesson content is to be differentiated for specific pupils with special educational needs. It is recommended that this good practice be implemented in all classrooms. Monthly reports are collected and monitored by the principal.

2.2 Child protection policy and procedures

Confirmation was provided that, in compliance with Department of Education and Science Primary Circular 0061/2006, the board of management has formally adopted the *Child Protection Guidelines for Primary Schools* (Department of Education and Science, September 2001). Confirmation was also provided 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.

3. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

3.1 Language

*Gaeilge*

Tá cáilíocht an teagaisc agus na foghlama sa Ghaeilge go maith. Forbraítear foclóir na ndaltaí go céimneach tríd an scoil agus tá cúmai labhartha maith ag alán daltaí. Baintear feidhm inmholta as raon acmhainní oiriúnacha chun suim na ndaltaí a mhúscailt agus ábhar na gceachtanna a léiriú. Úsáidtear an Ghaeilge le haghaidh cumarsáide sna ceachtanna agus ag amanna eile i rith an lae agus is léir go bhfuil dearadh dearfach ag na daltaí ina leith. Ar an iomlán úsáidtear straitéisí agus modhanna teagaisc a thugann deiseanna cainte d'obair na ndaltaí. Moltar grúpobair agus obair bheirte a leathnú ar fud na scoile chun ábhar na gceachtanna a chleachtadh agus liofacht na ndaltaí a chothú.


*Irish*

The quality of teaching and learning in Irish is good. Pupils’ vocabulary is developed incrementally through the school and many pupils can speak well. A praiseworthy range of resources is used to awaken pupils’ interest and to illustrate lesson content. Irish is used communicatively during lessons and at other times during the day and it is clear that pupils are
positively disposed towards the language. Overall, strategies and teaching methods that provide opportunities for pupils to speak are used. It is recommended that pair work and group work be extended throughout the school to practise lesson material and to promote fluency.

Early reading is developed systematically in the junior classes. Pupils in the middle and senior classes make appropriate progress in reading and they display understanding of what they have read. Grammar is taught effectively and this contributes to pupils’ accuracy. In the middle and senior classes, writing skills are developed appropriately and good examples of pupils’ work are to be seen. It is now recommended that pupils should be given opportunities to write in a broader range of genres. Pupils recite a fine collection of poems and rhymes with enjoyment.

**English**

The quality of teaching and learning in English is good in all classes. The school’s assessment approach has identified specific literacy challenges for a number of pupils and realistic targets and strategies have been devised to raise attainment levels for these pupils. In all classrooms, oral-language development is facilitated through the use of class discussion, word games and graded language programmes. While there is a good focus on pupils’ listening and speaking skills, further emphasis could be placed on enhancing oral comprehension levels in some classes. The teaching of reading is addressed methodically at all levels. Classroom displays are print-rich and pupils have access to a wide range of attractive, age-appropriate reading material. Large-format books are used effectively with the junior classes to foster an interest in reading. Pupils in all classes display good knowledge of relevant sight vocabulary. The school’s current approach to phonological awareness assists pupils in developing word-attack skills. The paired-reading methodology is employed beneficially in many classrooms. Class novels are explored effectively in the middle and senior classes. Handwriting skills are developed incrementally throughout the school. Pupils are encouraged to write in a wide variety of genres at most levels but the range of genres could be expanded in some classrooms. The writing process is explained and modelled for pupils in most classrooms to help them to plan and organise their ideas. Pupils’ writing demonstrates appropriate mastery of grammar, spellings and the conventions of writing. The school engages with the Write-a-Book and Write-a-Poem competitions to bring pupils’ writing to a wider audience. At all levels, poetry is explored and recited for enjoyment and for understanding.

**3.2 Mathematics**

The quality of teaching and learning in Mathematics is good throughout the school. While assessment information identifies specific numeracy challenges for a number of pupils, it is evident that effective teaching methods, support teaching and realistic target setting are addressing these challenges. Classroom displays regarding number, shapes and measure are stimulating and attractive. Mathematical concepts are often related to pupils’ experiences and to the local environment. Lessons in Mathematics frequently feature the use of concrete materials and discovery-learning methodologies to help pupils to acquire concepts and develop skills. Good practice observed included the use of collaborative groupwork and the differentiation of lesson tasks for pupils with special educational needs. The Maths-for-Fun programme is implemented very successfully in the junior classes by the class teacher, the home-school-community liaison co-ordinator and a number of parent volunteers. Early mathematical activities are explored beneficially in the junior classes. Mathematical games and oral challenges are used effectively for speed and accuracy at all levels and pupils recall tables and mathematical facts accurately. To enhance clarity in pupils’ understanding of mathematical concepts, it is recommended that the use of uniform mathematical language throughout the school be agreed and that the agreed language be disseminated to parents as a support for homework. Pupils generally demonstrate accuracy in
computational tasks and good ability in the skills of estimation and measurement. While many pupils respond well to problem-solving tasks there is scope to focus on pupils’ reasoning as they explain the strategies used in arriving at their answers. Systematic ongoing classroom assessment of Mathematics is recorded in some classrooms and there is scope to extend this good practice to the remaining classrooms.

3.3 Science
The quality of teaching and learning in Science is good. A two-year approach ensures balanced delivery of the content strands. Science lessons are presented through a variety of suitable methodologies to facilitate experimentation and discovery learning. Due emphasis is placed upon developing pupils’ scientific skills during the lessons. Pupils’ ideas are frequently used as the starting point for lessons and there is evidence that pupils are encouraged to research topics independently in some classrooms. Science resources are displayed throughout the school and pupils observe plant growth on their nature tables. Some very good designing and making activities have been undertaken in the middle classes and the extension of this good practice throughout the school would provide further opportunities for the practical application of scientific concepts and skills. Pupils’ written work in Science is presented neatly and their oral responses demonstrate good age-appropriate mastery of concepts and a clear understanding of fair testing as an investigative technique.

3.4 Assessment
Provision for the assessment of pupils’ learning in this school is good. Standardised, screening and diagnostic tests are administered as appropriate to identify the learning needs of pupils. The comprehensive assessment records maintained by support teachers are particularly useful for early-intervention support. This assessment information assists with decision making in relation to allocation of supplementary teaching. While standardised test results are analysed to ascertain the attainment levels of each class, it would be beneficial to analyse and track individual pupils’ test scores in literacy and numeracy over time and to compare attainment levels with the pupils’ scores in the Non-Reading Intelligence Test. All mainstream class teachers utilise a range of formal and informal assessment techniques within their classrooms and observational records are maintained. Assessment information is shared between teachers and disclosed to parents at the parent-teacher meetings and in the written reports.

4. QUALITY OF SUPPORT FOR PUPILS

4.1 Pupils with special educational needs
The quality of support for pupils with special educational needs is very good. Effective communication between mainstream class teachers and the special-education team contributes to the co-ordinated approach evident in the school. Additional support teaching is provided by the full-time learning-support teacher and the part-time resource teacher. Support is provided for pupils in literacy and numeracy through a combination of withdrawal and in-class interventions. The school’s learning-support policy reflects the principles outlined in the Department of Education and Science publications Learning-Support Guidelines and Special Educational Needs – a Continuum of Support. Assessment information is used for the early identification of learning needs and a staged approach is used to provide for early intervention. Intensive use of station teaching, especially in relation to phonological awareness, oral language, comprehension and sight-vocabulary acquisition should be considered as a prevention strategy in junior classes. Individual profile and learning programmes (IPLP) and individual education plans (IEP) contain realistic targets, which are set and reviewed through consultation with class teachers and parents. Support classrooms are print-rich and educationally stimulating. Lessons are presented through a range of commendable teaching methodologies and resources. The quality of interaction between
support teachers and their pupils is co-operative and productive and pupils are progressing well in relation to their ability levels. Effective progress records are compiled for all pupils receiving support.

4.2 Other supports for pupils: disadvantaged, minority and other groups
The quality of supports for disadvantaged pupils is very good. The school’s DEIS action plan is based on specific and realistic targets. Good communication with the local playschool and other agencies assists with the early identification of pupils’ needs and supports transition into the primary school. Attendance levels are monitored proactively. A shared home-school-community liaison co-ordinator visits the school on one day each week and she has helped to foster effective links with parents and local agencies.

5. CONCLUSION
The school has strengths in the following areas:

- The board of management is committed to the school and has prioritised pupil welfare and educational standards.
- The school fosters effective community links and encourages parental involvement in education.
- The principal provides strong and effective leadership for the school and he is supported by a committed in-school management team. All members of the teaching and ancillary staff carry out their duties very conscientiously.
- The quality of pupil management is very good.
- The quality of teaching and learning in English, Irish, Mathematics and Science is good.
- The quality of support for pupils with special educational needs and disadvantaged pupils is very good.

The following key recommendations are made in order to further improve the quality of education provided by the school:

- Moltar grúpobair agus obair bheirte i dteagasc na Gaeilge a leathnú ar fud na scoile chun ábhar na gcéachtanna a chleachtadh agus liofacht na ndaltaí a chothú. It is recommended that groupwork and pair work in the teaching of Irish be extended throughout the school to practise lesson content and to improve pupils’ fluency.
- Further attention should be focused on developing a variety of writing genres, process writing and oral comprehension throughout the school.
- Further emphasis should be placed on teaching problem-solving strategies in Mathematics.

Post-evaluation meetings were held with the staff and the board of management where the draft findings and recommendations of the evaluation were presented and discussed.

Published, December 2010
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. Brigid’s National School, Ballynacargy would like to acknowledge the very professional and courteous manner in which the inspector conducted the WSE in our school. It was a very thorough process and we are very pleased that the final report affirms so many positive aspects of our school.

The Board is pleased that the report reflects the high standard of teaching and learning in our school. We are particularly pleased with the manner in which the report recognises the efforts which the staff put into the raising of educational standards in the school.

We welcome the recognition that “the quality of pupil management is very good” within the school and that the report recognises the contribution of the staff to the effective running of the school.

We value the recognition that the standard of teaching and learning in English, Irish, Mathematics and Science is good. We also value the recognition given to the staff and the Board of Management for the support given to pupils with special educational needs and those of a disadvantaged background.

We welcome the recognition given to the school’s very effective management team and the acknowledgement of positive relations which exist between Board of Management, staff, parents’ association and the wider community.

The Board takes this opportunity to acknowledge the input of staff, parents and pupils into the effective day to day running of the school.

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 report has been studied carefully by the staff and Board of Management. The constructive recommendations will be used as a basis for ongoing school improvement.

A greater emphasis has been placed in all classes on “grúpobair agus obair bheirte i dteagasc na Gaeilge” and all teachers are also emphasising the teaching of problem-solving strategies in Mathematics.

The Principal has contacted Primary Professional Development Services (PPDS) with a view to the staff receiving further professional development training in “developing a variety of writing genres, process writing and oral comprehension”. The Board of Management feels that this will assist the staff to build on existing good practice in this area.