Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Banteer National School,
Clonmeen Road, Banteer, Co. Cork.
Uimhir rolla: 02803B

Date of inspection: 26 February 2010
WHOLE-SCHOOL EVALUATION

A whole-school evaluation of Banteer National School was undertaken in February 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 on the findings and recommendations of the report; the board chose to accept the report without response.

INTRODUCTION – SCHOOL CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

Banteer National School is a seven-teacher, co-educational school situated on a large site in the village of Banteer. It caters for pupils from junior infants to sixth class. The school plays a pivotal role in the community and has access to a range of high-quality local amenities including an astro-turf pitch thereby ensuring very good facilities for teaching and learning in Physical Education. It is a well-resourced school and the staff work assiduously in close collaboration with management and parents to provide for the educational needs of the 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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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pupils enrolled in the school</td>
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<td>Mainstream classes in the school</td>
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<tr>
<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
The school is under the patronage of the Catholic Bishop of Cloyne. Its characteristic spirit, as stated in policy documents, is based on Christian values. Warm, caring relationships exist throughout the school and the teachers successfully create a positive climate for learning for pupils.

1.2 Board of management
The board of management is properly constituted and discharges its duties effectively. The chairperson, who has served the school with commitment over a long number of years, convenes meetings on a regular basis. Minutes and school accounts are maintained carefully. A well-prepared plan for the maintenance of the building and grounds is in place and the school presents as a bright, spacious, high-quality learning environment. A key priority for the board now is to fill the current vacancy for a principal teacher. The dedicated work of the board in the area of policy development is acknowledged. However, in order to further develop the important role of the board in promoting ongoing school self-evaluation it is recommended that curricular policies be reviewed on a more systematic basis. Also, it is advised that the board review the role of external instructors in the context of the pivotal role of the class teacher. The importance of planning for additional staff development in the area of special education was highlighted and discussed.
beneficially during the evaluation. The board employs a secretary, caretaker and special needs assistants who contribute greatly to the school.

1.3 In-school management
The acting principal approaches her work in a professional and competent manner. She deserves much credit for the positive working relations in evidence throughout the school. She promotes conscientiously the well-being of pupils and staff and is committed to the development of an open collaborative climate. She is ably supported by a dedicated staff, including an acting deputy principal and one special duties post-holder, who, between them, have considerable levels of experience and expertise. The in-school management team capably carry out a wide range of additional duties which embrace curricular, organisational and pastoral areas. In order to further develop instructional leadership in monitoring the ongoing review of curricular implementation it is recommended that the provision of action plans by in-school management would greatly clarify priorities for development and facilitate review of progress. As it is evident that some teachers have taught the same class levels for many years it is recommended that consideration be given to formulating a policy on class allocation. The school has an effective computerised administration system in place which provides ready access to a wide range of data. A review of data in relation to pupils’ attendance highlighted some areas for further attention and these were beneficially discussed during the evaluation.

1.4 Management of relationships and communication with the school community
This is a welcoming school which maintains open and positive communication with parents. School policy acknowledges clearly the importance of strong home-school links and parents give generously of their time to provide support in a wide range of areas. Many additional resources have been acquired for the school as a result of their generosity and the success of their fundraising. With support from staff and the National Parents’ Council a parents’ association was established recently to build on the good work to date in fostering home-school links. Members of the association report that parents are satisfied with the quality of education in the school and greatly appreciate the dedicated work of the staff. In keeping with good practice the teachers provide parents with written pupil progress reports and organise formal parent-teacher meetings. In order to promote the further structured involvement of parents in their children’s learning it is recommended that the school’s paired reading programme be further developed.

1.5 Management of pupils
The pupils are well-behaved and keen to display their learning. Appropriate policies to support the development of positive behavioural and learning patterns are in place and the teachers implement them skilfully with care. They successfully motivate pupils through the use of praise and well-planned routines. The school has an excellent policy on managing class size, in keeping with Department circulars, which ensures that the differential between the largest and smallest classes is kept to the minimum.

2. QUALITY OF SCHOOL PLANNING

2.1 Whole-school and classroom planning
The quality of whole-school planning documentation is good. The whole-school plan contains policies on each of the curricular areas and on a comprehensive range of organisational areas. These documents provide many good guidelines for the development of effective practice. A number of these have been reviewed recently and in addition a Health and Safety policy is currently under review. The considerable work which individual teachers have undertaken in the area of policy development is acknowledged. The school has identified a range of policies to be
reviewed over the next two years. In carrying out this work, it is recommended that greater use be made of data arising from pupils’ assessments and the monthly progress records to inform review of curricular policies and the implementation of specific action plans. It is also recommended that a more structured approach to the planning process be adopted in order to promote more continuity in pupils’ learning. Furthermore it is advised that a greater emphasis be placed on a whole-school basis on developing structured play for learning and active learning approaches and that the number of workbooks in use by pupils be reduced.

All teachers comply with Rule 126 governing written preparation. Many classroom plans are well-thought out and include long-term and short-term schemes of work. Teachers’ planning is particularly effective where the learning intentions for pupils are outlined clearly. It is recommended that this good practice be adopted by all teachers. The considerable time and energy which many teachers devote to preparing and organising resources especially Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is acknowledged. This valuable work ensures the provision of attractive and engaging learning environments for their pupils. Monthly progress records are maintained by all teachers. As a point of development it is recommended that teaching staff consider further the structure of the monthly progress records and devise an agreed approach in order to enhance their usefulness in promoting ongoing improvement in teaching and learning.

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; It is advised that a copy of the procedures be provided to all staff (including all new staff); and that management further 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.

3. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

3.1 Language

Gaeilge

I múineadh na Gaeilge, cuirtear béisín ar an rangtheagasc don chuid is mó. I gcuid de na ranganna baintear úsáid éifeachtach chomh maith as modhanna múinte eile, obair bheirte, ról-imirt agus cluichí teanga san áireamh. B’fhíud anois béisín ar leith a chur ar na modhanna seo a chleachtadh i ngach rang tríd an scóil. Cé go bhfuil stóir mó ríochta ar eolas ag na daltaí b’fhíud breis béime a chur ar an gceart chuige cumarsáide agus ar dheiseanna a thabhairt dóibh an teanga atá foghlamtha acu a úsáid chun a gcuid lófaracht a thabhairt.

Bunaítear an léitheoireacht ar an iomlán ar théacsleabhair agus ar leabhraí saothair. Tá sé ar chumas na ndaltaí na leabhraí sin a léamh go réasúnta cruinn. Tá gá, afach, lena dtuiscint ar an téacs a thabhairt mar léighir roinn mháith do daltaí easpa tuisceana ar an ábhar léite nuair a ceistiodh iad ina leith. I roinn ranganna baintear úsáid as téacsanna breise seachas téacsleabhair. Moltar an dea-chleachtas seo a leathnú ar fud na scoile.

Scribhneoireacht theidhmíúil bunaithe ar leabhair shaothair don chuid is mó atá á cleachtadh. Déantar cúram ceart den litriú. B’fhíud féiniarracht na ndaltaí a lorg agus a chothú a thuilleadh sa
Irish

In the teaching of Irish, whole-class teaching features prominently. In some classes other methodologies including pair-work, role-play and language games are also used effectively. It is recommended that greater emphasis be placed on the use of these approaches throughout the school. While pupils have acquired a broad vocabulary extra attention should be given to the communicative approach and the provision of more regular opportunities for them to use the language learned in order to develop their fluency.

In general, reading lessons are based on the class textbooks and on workbooks. Most pupils can read these with a reasonable degree of accuracy. Their comprehension skills require further development however, as many demonstrated a limited understanding of the texts during oral questioning. In some classes teachers provide pupils with supplementary reading material. It is recommended that this good practice be extended throughout the school.

Most writing is functional and based on workbook activities. Due emphasis is placed on the development of spelling. It is recommended that a greater emphasis be placed on the development of pupils’ independent writing skills. To this end, it is advised that pupils be given more opportunities to write a variety of texts.

English

In English, teachers skilfully promote talk and discussion at whole class level. Well-chosen stories and poetry feature prominently. At a variety of class levels pupils can recite a selection of rhymes and poems with understanding and expression. Many pupils display a good ability to express their views and report on aspects of their work. In the interest of progression, greater emphasis on the development of pupils’ oral language skills is recommended especially in the early years as part of play-based learning.

Throughout the school, teachers create a classroom environment which supports the reading process through the provision of suitable print and well-stocked libraries. Where particularly effective practice was observed books were organised in a manner which catered for various levels of ability and strategies were in place to promote progression in pupils’ reading experience. The extension of this good practice is necessary. In addition to a graded scheme pupils are provided with class novels and a range of other suitable material for formal reading classes. Effective methodologies noted during the evaluation include a focus on the development of pupils’ phonological awareness, sight vocabulary and comprehension skills. While many pupils read fluently it is apparent that a more systematic development of group teaching approaches with focused attention on differentiated instruction in specific reading skills would greatly enhance pupils’ attainment levels. Also, it is evident that at the emergent reading stage the development of pupils’ reading skills needs to be grounded more firmly in extensive oral language work and more integrated with writing activities. It is recommended that the introduction of formal textbooks be delayed in order to provide pupils with a broader range of reading and writing experience and increase standards. A greater emphasis on the use of language experience charts and active learning methodologies would be of particular benefit.

The standard of writing is very good at many levels. Effective practice in the cultivation of pupils’ writing skills include specific skill development in various genres, the specification of a broad range of independent writing experiences, project work, use of a cursive style, careful
correction of pupils’ work and provision of feedback for improvement. However, in some instances pupils’ progress is restricted by an overemphasis on workbook activities. In order to build on existing best practice it is recommended that there is a need in these instances to consistently link writing, reading and oral work and to model penmanship. Attractive displays of pupils’ written work in classrooms and circulation areas greatly enhance the quality of the pupils’ learning environment.

3.2 Mathematics
Many examples of good practice in the teaching and learning of Mathematics were observed during the evaluation. Teachers involve the pupils in their own learning by sharing the learning intentions with them at the start of lessons in an effective manner and recapping on previous learning. High levels of pupil participation are sustained through the use of purposeful whole-class, interactive teaching and skilful use of a variety of resources. In many classrooms creditable opportunities are provided for pupils to explore concepts, predict, reason, estimate and explain, using appropriate mathematical language. Also, there was good emphasis in many classrooms on linkage of concepts to real life practical experiences and on the development of mental strategies. Many pupils readily engage and sustain interest in a broad range of appropriate learning activities. It is evident that many are making creditable progress in developing a knowledge and understanding of concepts that are age appropriate. Their work is corrected carefully. However, in order to cater further for those pupils experiencing difficulty and raise attainment levels there is a need throughout the school to develop a more systematic approach to differentiation. In this context it is recommended that greater emphasis be placed on active learning strategies and that the manner in which mathematical equipment is organised be reviewed. Greater attention should also be given to developing pupils’ problem solving strategies. As pupils progress through the school they are well trained to present their written work to a high standard.

3.3 Science
Science lessons, in general, were well-prepared and presented in a structured manner. The teachers used a variety of methodologies effectively, including talk and discussion, teacher demonstration, experimentation and the use of concrete materials. The most effective teaching observed was when pupils were actively involved in thinking through and carrying out scientific enquiry. In all classes a range of resources was used and the pupils worked collaboratively in groups or pairs. In general, the pupils undertook experiments that were linked to the topics planned by the teacher. Opportunities for pupils to design their own experiments could now be availed of further in order to extend their ability to work scientifically. Designing and making is included in the programme and this work is integrated effectively with the Visual Arts. Pupils display a good understanding of the concept of a fair test in most classrooms. It is recommended that this be developed in all classes. During the lessons emphasis was given to developing scientific skills. In all lessons some emphasis was placed on acquiring scientific language and science concepts were explained with care. It is recommended that additional emphasis be given to developing the language of science at all class levels. A school garden has been developed and pupils grow their own vegetables annually. The school has devised a user-friendly nature trail booklet which pupils use when exploring the local environment.

3.4 Assessment
A good range of assessment tools is used to determine pupils’ understanding of concepts and the knowledge they have acquired. In all classes teachers closely observe pupils during activities and monitor their work. Records of individual pupils’ progress based on teachers’ observations are maintained in some classes. The *Micro-T* and *Sigma-T* standardised tests are administered to pupils in English and in Mathematics. Suitable diagnostic tests are administered to pupils experiencing learning difficulties. A deeper analysis of assessment results is required to inform
provision of differentiated programmes in mainstream classrooms. Also, it is recommended that assessment for learning across the curriculum be developed further in line with the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment guidelines.

4. **QUALITY OF SUPPORT FOR PUPILS**

4.1 **Pupils with special educational needs**

The special education support team consists of one full-time learning-support teacher, one shared learning-support resource teacher and a visiting teacher who provides additional resource hours. These teachers approach their work in a very professional manner and have developed positive, caring relationships with the pupils in their care. The support rooms present as stimulating, well-organised learning environments. The teachers make use of a good variety of assessment tools to identify pupils with learning difficulties and to inform the provision of Individual Education Plans (IEPs). Support is provided in both literacy and numeracy. More emphasis on ongoing formative assessment to further clarify the exact nature of pupils’ learning difficulties would greatly enhance the effectiveness of the individual education planning. In the implementation of pupils’ IEPs the teachers demonstrate a high level of commitment to the pupils’ learning and make use of a range of appropriate methodologies and resources. While there is evidence that many pupils make good progress it is apparent that in some instances there is a need to review the individual programmes in place in order to identify learning and teaching approaches which are more responsive to pupils’ personal learning styles. Pupils are withdrawn for supplementary teaching either in small groups or individually. In order to provide a more co-ordinated approach to catering for pupils’ special needs, in accordance with the intentions expressed in the school plan, it is recommended that models of in-class support be developed. During the evaluation some well-planned approaches to differentiation within mainstream classrooms were observed. It is recommended that this good practice be adopted by all teachers so as to further ensure that teaching and learning approaches are responsive to pupils’ special needs in both mainstream and support contexts. While the school has developed a worthwhile special education needs policy, which provides many sound guidelines for the development of effective practice, it is advised that it be reviewed in the context of Circular 02/05.

4.2 **Other supports for pupils: disadvantaged, minority and other groups**

This school is not situated in a designated area of disadvantage.

5. **CONCLUSION**

The school has strengths in the following areas:

- The school has committed and experienced teaching staff who demonstrate considerable levels of expertise in a range of areas.
- The acting principal works effectively in close collaboration with all partners to lead the school.
- The pupils are well-behaved, highly motivated and eager to display their learning.
- The teachers successfully create a positive climate for learning and a warm, caring ethos permeates the work of the school.
- The school has formulated many good quality policy documents which provide sound guidelines for the development of effective practice.
- The board of management discharges its duties in an effective manner.
• Parents provide impressive levels of support in a range of areas and the school has excellent links with the local community.
• The ancillary staff members contribute significantly to the school.
• This is a well-resourced school with a high-quality learning environment.

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

• It is recommended that more use be made of the information arising from pupils’ assessments and from teachers’ monthly progress records to inform whole-school review of curricular policies and the implementation of specific action plans.
• It is recommended that at the emergent reading stage the development of pupils’ reading skills be grounded more firmly in extensive oral language work and be more integrated with writing activities.
• It is recommended that greater emphasis be placed on assessment for learning and that the data arising from assessment be used in a more effective manner to inform differentiated learning programmes in mainstream classrooms.
• Moltar cur chuige cumarsáideach i dteagasc na Gaeilge a fhóraíodh a thuilleadh agus breis deiseanna a thabhairt do na daltaí réime sa bhéagumba í eagsúla a léamh agus a scríobh. (It is recommended that a communicative approach to teaching Irish be developed further and that pupils be given further opportunities to read and write a broader range of texts).
• It is recommended that a more co-ordinated approach to catering for pupils with special education needs be developed.

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.