An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Berrings National School
Berrings, Co Cork
Uimhir rolla: 04186N

Date of inspection: 26 February 2010
WHOLE-SCHOOL EVALUATION

A whole-school evaluation of Berrings 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

Berrings National School, a co-educational Catholic school, is located in the village of Berrings within the parish of Inniscarra. A special class for pupils with Autistic Spectrum Disorders (ASD) was established in 2005 with a further expansion of this service in 2009. Pupil attendance is high and closely monitored.

The following table provides an overview of the enrolment and staffing in the school at the time of the evaluation:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pupils enrolled in the school</td>
<td>186</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainstream classes in the school</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers on the school staff</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainstream class teachers</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Class teachers</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers working in support roles</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special needs assistants</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT

1.1 Characteristic spirit, mission or vision
The school is vested under the patronage of the Bishop of Cloyne. In its mission statement the school seeks to enable pupils develop their self-esteem and realise their full potential in a positive learning environment which is both stimulating and secure. The characteristic spirit of the school, as exemplified in school atmosphere, is one of caring inclusiveness where all pupils are cherished equally.

1.2 Board of management
The board of management provides effective leadership which contributes to the successful operation of the school. The board is properly constituted. Meetings are convened regularly, detailed minutes are maintained and financial statements are furnished. It is advised, however, that, in accordance with Section 18(1) of the Education Act 1998, school accounts be audited annually. Individual board members fulfil their assigned duties competently and have undertaken training to advance their knowledge and skill in school management.
Positive relations are in evidence between the board and staff. School management promotes professional development to good effect and a comprehensive list of qualifications obtained by various staff members has been compiled.

The board of management has been proactive in progressing a building project to its completion. Current growth trends indicate possible future development for the school. A well-ordered, stimulating learning environment has been created where the standard of maintenance and decor is very high. A commitment to maintaining a strong community spirit is clearly evident in the work of the school.

1.3 In-school management
The in-school management team comprises the principal, deputy principal and three special duties post-holders. The principal, whose position has recently changed to an administrative post, has focused effectively on the quality of teaching and learning and on the further development of the school within the community. He is very diligent in carrying out his duties and displays effective organisational skills. His style of leadership is characterised by a primary concern for the welfare of pupils and for staff members. He is actively engaged in leading the implementation of the curriculum and in promoting educational standards in the school.

The principal is ably supported by the recently appointed deputy principal who carries out her duties with enthusiasm and dedication. She is committed to making a positive contribution to the overall functioning and development of the school. The assigned areas of responsibility to post-holders include curricular and administrative elements with some pastoral areas identified. Meetings are held regularly and it is reported that communication is open and decision-making collaborative. In the further development of the in-school management team, it is advised that procedures be established to facilitate review of duties periodically. In this review further emphasis should be placed on the instructional leadership role in monitoring and evaluating the school plan. It is also suggested that each post-holder develop an annual plan of work in consultation with the principal. Staff meetings are held regularly to progress a range of organisational and curricular priorities.

1.4 Management of relationships and communication with the school community
The development of effective communication strategies among the school’s partners is ongoing. Induction meetings, complemented by the issuing of information booklets to prospective parents, are convened. Parent-teacher dialogue is promoted through written communication in the school journal. Individual consultation with parents is facilitated through annual parent/teacher meetings. Additional meetings are convened when deemed necessary. Teachers provide pupils in the special classes with daily notes. To further enhance this communication, a visual strategy would facilitate pupils’ recall of the day’s activity. Also, it is recommended that end of year school reports on pupil achievement be issued to parents in accordance with the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) guidelines. The development of the school’s website should also assist in the dissemination of information to the wider community.

The parents’ association actively supports the school with a shared sense of purpose in organising events and social occasions. The success of parents’ on-going fundraising activities has resulted in the provision of a wide range of additional resources. In partnership with the school a newsletter and a monthly calendar of upcoming events is issued. Parents have been involved in the formulation of some policies and welcome opportunities to further support curriculum delivery and policy formulation. To this end, it is suggested that more defined structures be established to further promote parental involvement in school life.
Parents’ representatives stated that they are very satisfied with the educational provision in the school and expressed sincere appreciation to staff for their endeavours. In particular, parents commented favourably on the happy learning atmosphere created for pupils. In their comments on school improvement they articulated a wish to see a more appropriate balance between sporting activities and arts education.

1.5 Management of pupils
The management of pupils is very effective. Pupils are well-behaved, display a positive attitude to learning and engage eagerly in school activities. They demonstrate high levels of confidence and self-esteem which contributes notably to the quality of school life. Interactions between teachers and pupils are sensitive and affirming. Staff members actively promote the full participation and inclusion of all pupils. To build on these good practices, it would be beneficial to display school rules in an easily understandable visual format that meets the needs of pupils in particular classes.

2. QUALITY OF SCHOOL PLANNING

2.1 Whole-school and classroom planning
The school engages in whole-school planning on a systematic basis. The school plan is devised through a collaborative process. Policies and plans are considered and ratified by the board. Productive work has been undertaken in developing a wide range of statutory, curricular and organisational policies. Some policies now need to be reviewed. In particular, further refinement of the code of discipline and enrolment policy is required. Useful curricular plans have been devised. While all policies are readily available in the school, it is necessary to ensure that hard copies of these documents are signed and dated. In the review of curricular plans the staff should ensure that spiral developmental learning underpins all programmes of work. Consideration should also be given to establishing systematic review procedures in order to purposefully inform and guide self-evaluation.

All teachers devise useful plans to support the implementation of the curriculum. Most long-term plans are comprehensive and reflect the content of the school plan. In general, short-term schemes of work are informative and clearly documented. Planning could be further enhanced by the delineation of focused teaching objectives and expected outcomes of learning. Consideration should also be given to differentiation of work for more able pupils. An effective approach to recording monthly progress of work has been established. Regular appraisal of these reports would provide valuable information to aid school self-evaluation. In some instances there is an overemphasis on the use of workbooks to promote teaching and learning. It is advised to review this practice on a whole-school basis.

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**


Úsáidtear straitéisí oiriúnacha chun forbairt a dhé anamh ar scileanna éisteachta na ndaltaí. Léiríonn siad tuiscint an-mhaith ar an teanga. Múintear réimse leathan rann agus amhrán i mórán ranganna chun fuaimeanna agus rithim na teanga a chur ar chluasa na ndaltaí. B’fhiú cur chuige uile-scoile a aontú maidir le feidhmi na scéalaíochta agus na filiocht a bhfoghlaim agus i saibhriú na teanga. Chuige sin, moltar réimse níos leithne d’e leabhair scéalaíochta agus ábhar léitheoireachta oiriúnach a sholáthar.

Tá cumas an-mhaith cumarsáide ag na daltaí sa Ghaeilge. Baintear leas éifeachta chuschúch, ról-imirt, drámaíocht agus as obair le puipéid chun eiseamláiriú teanga a mhúineadh agus chun floclóir agus struchtúir na teanga a dhaingniú. Tá sé ar chumas na ndaltaí ceisteanna a chur, a fhreagairt agus abairtí iomlánach. Léiríonn formhór na ndaltaí tuiscint mhaith ar an ábhar léitheoireachta agus léann siad go cruinn agus le lóifacht. Chun cur lena gcumas léitheoireachta b’fhiú, anois, abhár agus leabhair níos dúshlánaí a sholáthar do na daltaí.

Múintear an léitheoireacht go céimnithe. Baintear úsáid den chuid is mó as leabhair saothar mar théacs don léitheoireacht agus i roinnt ranganna as fíorleabhair. Léiríonn formhór na ndaltaí tuiscint mhaith ar an ábhar léitheoireachta agus léann siad go cruinn agus le lóifacht. Chun cur lena gcumas léitheoireachta b’fhiú, anois, abhár agus leabhair níos dúshlánaí a sholáthar do na daltaí.

Tá dul chun cinn creidiúnach le sonrú i saothar scríofa na ndaltaí agus is léir go bhfuil forás céimniúil ag teacht ar a gcuíid scileanna cumadóireachta sa Ghaeilge. Cleachtann siad táéscanna éagsúla scríbhneoireachta go cumasach. Baintear úsáid as straitéisí múinteoirí go éifeachtach, scátháil san áireamh, chun forbairt a dhaéamh ar a gcuíid scileanna. Ar mhaith le héifeacht na hoibre a chinntiú, b’fhiú a thuilleadh forbartha a dhéanamh ar a scileanna neamhspleáchacha scríbhneoireachta. Leagtar bheim fhónta ar mhúineadh na gramadaí agus déantar monatóireacht chabhrach ar an saothar scríofa.

**Irish**

A whole-school plan for the teaching and learning of Irish is presented. The further development of this plan should incorporate all aspects of the Irish programme, documented in a clear developmental manner on a whole-school basis. A positive attitude to Irish is purposefully fostered among pupils. Creditable use is made of incidental Irish in classrooms and in the teaching of some subjects. Suitable emphasis is placed on print in Irish in the environs of the school.

Appropriate strategies are judiciously used to develop pupils’ listening skills and they display a very good understanding of Irish. A wide range of poems and rhymes is taught to familiarise
pupils with the sound and structure of the language. The importance of story and poetry in the acquisition and enrichment of language should be considered at a whole-school level. To this end, a wider range of story books in Irish and other suitable reading material should be provided.

Pupils demonstrate very good communicative competence in Irish. Language games, role play, drama and puppetry are used effectively to consolidate learning. Pupils display an ability to ask and answer questions and structure sentences competently. Fluency in language is gainfully promoted. Commendable emphasis is placed on the teaching of phrases. To further develop this work exemplars should be delineated in planning documents to further enhance pupils’ language ability. It is advised that every opportunity be presented to pupils to speak Irish in a range of communicative contexts.

Reading is systematically taught. For the most part, excerpts from workbooks and in some classes real books, are judiciously used to develop reading skills. Most pupils read accurately and with understanding. To further promote their competence in reading, a more challenging range of reading material should be provided. An early literacy programme should also be delineated and implemented.

It is evident that pupils’ writing skills are being progressed consistently and that they are exposed to a wide range of writing experiences. Effective teaching strategies, including scaffolding, are used purposefully to develop pupils’ writing skills. Pupils’ ability to write independently could be further promoted. Appropriate emphasis is placed on the teaching of grammar and monitoring of pupils’ work is undertaken carefully.

English
A detailed plan had been devised for English. It is, however, timely to review this policy to accurately reflect current good practice and to provide additional guidelines with regard to emergent reading skills, the use of the novel and the promotion of process writing.

The teaching of English is carried out in a proficient manner with pupils achieving very good standards across all strands. In some classes, team teaching has been successfully implemented to further develop pupils’ language skills. Oral language advancement is conscientiously promoted across a range of curricular areas. Due emphasis is placed on the development of oral skills through the discrete oral language lesson in most classes and judicious use is made of a range of productive strategies. Pupils’ higher-order thinking skills are developed purposefully through talk and discussion. Debating, storytelling and dramatic activities are also employed effectively to augment oral competencies. Particularly noteworthy is the use of the topic copy where pupils prepare a topic for oral presentation. Such strategies provide valuable opportunities for pupils to articulate their views and extend their oral language skills. Pupils in the senior classes display a growing competence in presenting and supporting arguments and in speaking articulately. Pupils imaginatively explore a varied repertoire of poetry and create their own poems. Memorisation and recitation of poetry could be a more prominent feature in some classrooms.

Emergent reading skills are gainfully developed in the junior classes. Suitable emphasis is placed on reading readiness activities including knowledge of the conventions of print, basic sight vocabulary and word identification strategies. Song, rhythm and good visual material is used effectively in supporting the development of pupils’ phonological awareness. Pupils are exposed to print-rich environments where high-frequency words are purposefully displayed.
Pupils demonstrate a keen interest in reading and very positive reading standards, appropriate to pupils’ ability, are in evidence. Opportunities are provided for pupils to engage in collaborative reading activities using visually appealing large-format books and shared reading experiences with peers and with parents. Class readers are supplemented well by graded reading schemes. At the emergent reading stage, it is suggested that more informal reading activity precede the introduction of a formal reading programme. Pupils read with a high level of accuracy and fluency. Reading skills are systematically developed in most classes. Novels and library books are used prudently. It is advised, however, that pupils be exposed to a wider range of novels, particularly in the higher classes, where reading standards are very good and where pupils would gain considerably from further challenging material. There is evidence of differentiated reading material to cater for the needs of pupils in some classes. This good practice should be extended to all classrooms.

Early writing is stimulated through the teacher acting as scribe and model while writing. Suitable scaffolding frameworks are explored in supporting the development of pupils’ narrative, descriptive and creative writing skills. Pupils are provided with worthwhile opportunities to write and in many instances are systematically taught specific strategies to facilitate their creative writing development. Process writing is purposefully cultivated and pupils write in a wide range of genres and for a variety of purposes. Written work is monitored regularly and affirming constructive comments are included.

A keen emphasis is placed on the development of pupils’ letter formation and handwriting abilities. Examination of copybooks indicates that pupils’ skills are being developed in a progressive manner. However, clarification with regard to the formation of some letters may be necessary at particular class levels. The quality of presentation of written work is very good and pupils are encouraged to observe the conventions of writing. There is potential to further integrate information and communication technology (ICT) into the process writing approach.

Teachers in the special classes pay particular attention to the development of pupils’ oral language skills and meaningful communication in social contexts. Productive use is made of news-time, circle time, play activities and story-telling strategies to foster pupils’ receptive and expressive language abilities. Appropriate emphasis is placed on the expansion of pupils’ contributions in verbalising their views. Pupils are provided with opportunities to use communication in a variety of supportive contexts. Additional opportunities, however, could be constructed to assist them further in communication. The inclusion of some pupils in language lessons in the mainstream setting provides appropriate peer role modelling and exposure to a wider linguistic experience. As the school may enrol non-verbal pupils with ASD in the future, consideration should now be given to training staff in alternative and augmentative communication systems such as Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS).

The reading programme in the special classes is well planned and effectively implemented. It is based on an individualised approach and incorporates pre-reading activities, the development of phonological and phonemic awareness, the teaching of sight vocabulary and the use of appropriate reading schemes.

### 3.2 Mathematics
Attractive mathematical environments are a commendable feature of all classrooms and a wide range of resources is provided. Early mathematical activities are carefully taught underpinned by purposeful use of rhyme, mathematical games and the immediate environment. The regular and focused use of concrete material augments pupils’ understanding of concepts. The implementation of station teaching greatly enhances the delivery of the Mathematics programme.
In most instances lessons are paced skilfully. Activity-based methodologies expose pupils to learning cooperatively. Cross-curricular activities are also used effectively to support and consolidate pupils’ understanding. Good emphasis is placed on the development of mathematical language in most classes. In general teachers give clear explanation and address content through challenging questioning. Prediction and estimation skills are keenly developed. In some classes pupils’ oral competency and problem solving ability are systematically developed through guided discussion. This good practice should be extended to all classes. Greater attention should also be paid to the differentiation of work to meet the needs of pupils who may be experiencing difficulties or who may need to be further challenged. Increased emphasis on the consolidation of concepts through recording in copybooks is also advised. Teachers monitor pupils’ written work carefully and test results testify to high standards of achievement in Mathematics.

In the special classes, concrete materials are gainfully used to assist in the generalisation of concepts. A wide selection of suitable equipment is used effectively. Pupils are purposefully involved in experiential manipulation of a variety of objects. Considerable emphasis is placed on basic number operations and pupils display good ability in measurement and in identifying a range of shapes in the environment. Differentiation is successfully implemented individually and in group activities.

3.3 Science
The Science programme succeeds in the development of a broad range of skills, the cultivation of key attitudes and the acquisition of scientific knowledge and concepts. A wide variety of topics is explored through skilful use of appropriate methodologies. Adept use is made of a variety of resources, including ICT, teacher-made materials and the local environment. Field trips, science week, the school garden, participation in competition and in the Green-Schools initiative adds considerably to the range of pupil experiences. The use of group work, discussion and visits from experts greatly enhances pupil learning.

Valuable opportunities to engage in simple experiments across a variety of strands are afforded to pupils. Many pupils exhibit a keen understanding of scientific concepts and a good ability to work scientifically. Their sense of achievement in carrying out scientific tasks adds considerably to the enjoyment of lessons. Consolidation of learning is facilitated through regular structured approaches to recording. As a developmental issue consideration should be given to the sharing of teacher expertise through team teaching approaches.

In the special classes, teachers aim to give pupils a range of opportunities to develop their knowledge and understanding of the world. Teachers are fully aware of their role in generating curiosity in pupils who may not be naturally inquisitive about the world around them. The observation of seasonal and climatic changes and participation in sensorial exploration of materials are noteworthy features of science lessons. Activities and routines are carefully structured and visual prompts and clues are given to aid pupils’ understanding. Pupils are sensitively supported through activities they find challenging and subtly guided to form hypotheses and conclusions.

3.4 Assessment
A very positive feature of classroom practice is the wide range of assessment strategies in use throughout the school. Constructive feedback, both oral and written, feature prominently in the monitoring of pupils’ written work. The compilation of samples of pupils’ work, from a range of curricular areas, for parents to view, further enhances home-school partnership. In some classes pupils engage in self-assessment by choosing work to include in portfolios. Teachers maintain comprehensive records of individual pupil achievement and reflections on pupils’ progress
generate a rich source of assessment information. Assessment results are usefully shared among teachers as pupils progress from class to class. To build on these good practices, a more co-ordinated whole-school approach to assessment in all subject areas would be beneficial.

Standardised tests are administered on an annual basis from first to sixth classes. The Middle Infant Screening Test (MIST) is purposefully used to identify pupils who may be presenting with learning difficulties. The school pays particular attention to the tabulation and analysis of test results. Results of standardised assessments could be further utilized to inform group teaching particularly with regard to the needs of more able pupils. The special education team gainfully uses additional assessment and diagnostic instruments to assist in the design of specific learning programmes for individual pupils. The wide range of assessment strategies in use throughout the school greatly supports the mediation of the curriculum. When reviewing the school policy on assessment, consideration should be given to the inclusion of criteria for the discontinuation of pupils from supplementary support.

4. QUALITY OF SUPPORT FOR PUPILS

4.1 Pupils with special educational needs

Staff members have developed detailed policies to support the special education provision in the school. Procedures for screening, programme planning and implementation appropriately reflect the staged approach to assessment. A wide range of methodologies is consistently deployed within the ASD classes such as TEACCH, Social Stories and elements of ABA. These could be profitably included in planning documentation.

Support is provided for those pupils who are experiencing learning difficulties through withdrawal for individual or group tuition, or through in-class support or whole-class instruction. The school has creatively developed an innovative model of intervention, *Sonás an Lae*, for pupils from the special classes and those with designated resource teaching hours. This programme appropriately focuses on the development of pupils’ motor, social and language skills through a range of activities which includes music and drama. The programme is suitably structured to incorporate pupils’ identified needs in activities that are best delivered in a social context. Planning, teaching and recording of this programme are of a high quality. It is recommended, however, that the school review provision for more able pupils to ensure that they benefit fully from appropriate teaching approaches including group teaching and differentiation. They should also be facilitated to pursue challenging independent learning opportunities that enhance their educational experiences in the classroom.

Systems are in place to enable the special class teachers to liaise effectively with external support teams. Individual Education Plans (IEPs) and Individual Profile and Learning Programmes (IPLPs), which are informed by clinical assessments, are drawn up in close collaboration with class teachers. Parents are gainfully consulted in the formulation of IEPs and structures are created to ensure regular feedback. To further develop provision, pupils in the senior classes with special educational needs could be involved in the identification of their own learning targets.

There is an established system in place for classroom teachers to share their short-term planning with support teachers. This practice could be profitably extended to include the special classes as pupils with ASD are included in mainstream classes for a range of subjects. The positive commitment to inclusion in the school is highly commended.
Planning for such inclusion presents a range of challenges when pupils from the special classes are integrated for aesthetic, creative and physical aspects of the curriculum. The identification of optimum timetable periods for inclusion for both special and mainstream classes is an organisational challenge for the school.

Detailed records of pupil progress are maintained. Recording practices could be beneficially extended to play and group work for pupils with ASD. As these pupils have considerable difficulty in generalising from one situation to another, it is advised that teachers ensure that content assessed as acquired in one context is also capable of being transferred and generalised to other situations.

Special needs assistants (SNAs) are properly deployed to ensure that targeted pupils receive necessary support. They work conscientiously under the guidance of teachers and are provided with plans and records that appropriately guide their work. SNAs contribute helpful written feedback on the inclusion of pupils in the mainstream setting. Occasional use of SNAs during support tuition for objective recording of a pupil’s contributions is suggested. This would allow the support teacher to conduct an error analysis on verbal contributions that might not be possible to record concurrently during a reading session. The establishment of work stations in classrooms would also assist in the further development of pupils’ independence.

4.2 Other supports for pupils: disadvantaged, minority and other groups
Discrete provision for pupils at risk of disadvantage or for minority groups is not currently required in the school. However, as a proactive measure, it might be beneficial to include in school planning documentation strategies that may be adopted in facilitating the full inclusion of such pupils.

5. CONCLUSION

The school has strengths in the following areas:

- The school is characterised by a welcoming caring and inclusive school community where pupils enjoy learning and where their holistic development is fostered.
- The board of management and parents are very supportive of the work of the school and are committed to its development.
- All teaching and ancillary staff are dedicated to the provision of high quality educational experiences for pupils.
- Pupils are very well-behaved and demonstrate positive attitudes to learning.
- Effective methodologies contribute significantly to pupils’ high levels of attainment in literacy and numeracy.
- The school has succeeded admirably in providing a quality service to pupils with special educational needs.

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

- A review of in-school management structures and responsibilities is recommended in addressing the priority needs of the school and in developing the instructional leadership role of post-holders.
• A systematic review of the school plan is recommended.
• Moltar plean céimniúil uile-scoile do thús na létitheoireachta a dhearadh le béim sa bhreis ar fheidhm na scéalaíochta. *It is recommended that a whole-school plan for Irish reading be devised with particular attention to the introduction of reading and the use of stories for language enrichment.*
• It is recommended that further provision be made for more able pupils.

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, September 2010*