An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Ballyvongane N.S.
Aghinagh, Coachford, County Cork
Uimhir rolla: 04578H

Date of inspection: 11 February 2011
1. Introduction

Ballyvongane National School is a two-teacher co-educational primary school under the patronage of the Catholic Bishop of Cloyne. This rural school, situated in the parish of Aghinagh, plays a central role in the community it serves. There is a current enrolment of 40 pupils whose attendance levels are excellent. 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 school is characterised by a community that nurtures the holistic development of pupils in a stimulating learning environment.
- The board of management actively supports the work of the school. Board members are to be commended for procuring additional accommodation that is maintained to a very high standard.
- The teaching staff work collaboratively to ensure high standards of pupil achievement.
- Pupils are commended for their excellent behaviour and their enthusiastic participation in learning.
- The successful functioning of the school is gainfully enhanced by the support of the parents’ association.

The following main recommendations are made:

- It is recommended that more formal structures and practices be established to support the work of the in-school management team.
- It is recommended that organisational policies and curricular plans be reviewed and disseminated among the school community. Greater parental involvement in policy design and review is also advised.
- It is recommended that assessment data, standardized tests and questionnaires be used to further advance school improvement.
- A review of special education provision, to include the implementation of in-class support, is recommended.
3. Quality of School Management

- The quality of the work of the board of management is very good, particularly with regard to the development and maintenance of school facilities. Meetings are convened regularly and minutes recorded carefully. Detailed financial statements are furnished and accounts are audited externally. The board plays an active role in the school planning process which contributes notably to the successful operation of the school.

- The principal promotes an inclusive co-operative atmosphere and inspires a shared sense of purpose among staff. The cultivation of collaborative decision-making, open communication and mutual respect are praiseworthy features of his leadership style. The special duties’ post-holder undertakes assigned responsibilities with diligence and makes a positive contribution to school development. Regular review of duties, the introduction of formal meetings and the recording of work carried out would further enhance the in-school management structure.

- Stimulating and orderly learning environments are created and a wide range of resources, including English library books, are purposefully employed to support curriculum delivery. The use of information and communication technology (ICT) is well advanced in the school. A part-time secretary and cleaners contribute commendably to the efficient maintenance of the school.

- Positive relations are in evidence among all partners of the school community. Parents are most supportive of the work of the school and are commendably involved in some school activities. The development of a school website has been gainfully progressed with parental support. Parents are afforded regular opportunities to discuss pupil progress and expressed satisfaction with the high standard of education provision. Further analysis of the Department of Education and Skills (DES) questionnaires may positively contribute to addressing parental concerns. As a means of promoting good communication, the opportunity for parents to contribute to the current newsletter is suggested. In addition, more formal procedures for officers of the parents’ association to liaise with the school should be considered.

- Pupils are very well behaved, display a positive attitude to learning and engage enthusiastically in school activities. Interactions between teachers and pupils are affirmative. The recent establishment of a Green Schools Initiative committee will provide pupils with an opportunity for more active involvement in school activities.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- Whole-school planning has been gainfully progressed through the collaborative activity of staff and board of management. Clear procedures have been commendably established to ensure the ongoing development of the school plan. It is now recommended that parents be more involved in policy formulation and review. Organisational policies should also be reviewed and disseminated to parents. Most curricular plans are developed, though some may need additional information to facilitate their systematic implementation.

- Teachers consistently prepare schemes of work. It is advised, however, that greater use be made of the school plan to inform long-term planning. Monthly progress reports are carefully maintained and teachers’ own personal reflections of their teaching and pupils’ learning are invaluable. These good practices can now be further explored to assist in the development of systematic self-evaluation processes.
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; 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.

5. Quality of Teaching, Learning and Pupil Achievement

The quality of teaching and learning in this school is very good. Lessons are carefully structured and a variety of effective methodologies used. To optimise pupils’ potential, there is a need to implement a more differentiated, group-based learning programme to cater for the varying abilities across the different class levels. A useful system in tracking pupils’ individual progress in standardized tests has been established. To build on this good practice, consideration might now be given to the creation of pupil profiles. Staff are encouraged to conduct deeper analysis of standardized test results as part of the school’s self-evaluation programme. The opportunity for teachers to share their expertise in each others classrooms should be considered. This may facilitate ease of transition of pupils, for example, to the senior classroom.

Very good standards are achieved in the teaching and learning of Irish. A wide range of rhymes and poems are skilfully taught in the junior classes. Greater emphasis on the use of story would enrich pupils’ language. To this end, a wider range of story books in Irish and other suitable reading material should be provided. Pupils display very good understanding of Irish. Language input is taught systematically and a range of purposeful strategies are used effectively during lessons. Pupils are capable of structuring sentences accurately. It is advised, however, that further opportunities be presented to pupils to practice the language taught in a communicative context. Pupils are enabled to read certain texts with accuracy and they demonstrate a good understanding of the reading material. Consideration should now be given to a whole-school approach to the teaching of Irish reading. Writing skills are diligently taught. Pupils achieve a satisfactory standard in writing, but further opportunities for free writing should be provided.

The overall quality of teaching and learning in English is very good. Pupils’ oral language skills are purposefully developed and they communicate confidently across a range of themes. Pupils’ response to and appreciation of poetry is actively nurtured. A compilation of suitable poems for all class levels would further promote poetry recitation. The
development of pupils’ phonological and phonemic awareness is systematically progressed. Pupils' literacy skills are effectively developed and many achieve a very high standard in reading. Early introduction of the novel might be considered as a means of further challenging pupils who are competent readers. Some very good examples of process writing across a variety of genres are in evidence. It is recommended that teachers provide further opportunities for pupils in the junior classes to experience the creative writing process. While pupils’ handwriting skills are being appropriately developed, it is suggested that a whole-school approach to the further progression of penmanship should be considered. 

- The quality of teaching and learning in Mathematics is very good. Pupils’ numeracy skills are effectively developed and achievement levels are high. Mathematical activities are favourably underpinned by purposeful use of hands-on approaches. Suitable resources are adeptly employed and attractive mathematical environments are created. Oral computational and problem-solving skills are, commendably, a regular feature of lessons. To further promote numerical competence, attention should now be directed to engaging pupils in discussion of mathematical concepts. Every opportunity for pupils in junior classes to record in copybooks would further advance mathematical learning. 

- In Drama, a safe environment is strategically created to enable pupils enter the fictional world with ease. Story is used to good effect to engage pupils in appropriate activities that foster spontaneity and creativity. A range of other appropriate strategies are imaginatively used to facilitate pupil participation. Pupils display an ability to role-play and improvise with confidence in small group scenes. Reflections on the dramatic activity are well developed among pupils. Drama is gainfully employed to enhance learning in other curricular areas. The drama curriculum is supplemented by a six-week programme given by an external tutor.

6. Quality of Support for Pupils

- The school currently has the services of one shared learning-support teacher and a part-time resource teacher. Plans are carefully devised and reviewed periodically. Learning targets are clearly identified. However, the recording of achieved targets is recommended. The emphasis on oral language development as part of the early intervention programme is commendable. Extended use of in-class support would greatly augment the support programme, particularly in multi-class settings where a wide range of pupil ability exists. To ensure the successful implementation of in-class support, formal opportunities for collaboration between mainstream class teachers and support teachers are required. In considering the use of a wider range of methodologies in some of the support settings, the potential of ICT should also be explored.
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 would like to thank the inspector for the courteous way in which the WSE was conducted. The report is an accurate reflection of the hard work and high standards of the teaching staff and parents. We are very proud of the extraordinary levels of achievement reached by our pupils.

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 Board of Management will take on board the recommendations in order to maintain and further develop the excellent standards of attainment recognised in the report.