Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Brownknowe National School
Ramelton, County Donegal
Uimhir rolla: 07464H

Date of inspection: 1 February 2012
1. **Introduction**

Brownknowe National School is a mainstream, co-educational primary school under the patronage of the Presbyterian Church. While the school has a Protestant ethos, it welcomes all children regardless of religious affiliation. The school currently caters for 41 pupils and enrolment figures look set to increase into the future. The pupils are taught in two multi-grade classrooms. Attendance levels are very good overall. Provision for English, Irish, Mathematics and Music was inspected. The board of management 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:

- Brownknowe National School provides a very caring, positive learning environment.
- The work of the board of management is very effective.
- The principal provides very good leadership to the school community.
- Teachers work in a very dedicated manner and are very committed to their pupils.
- The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement is very good.
- Pupils present as very happy and confident in their learning. They participate very successfully in a commendably wide range of co-curricular and extracurricular activities.
- Parents are actively involved in the work of the school.

The following **main recommendations** are made:

- It is recommended that assessment practices including assessment for learning strategies continue to be developed.
- Structured play and activity-based learning, with clear links to the *Aistear* framework, should be developed for junior pupils.

3. **Quality of School Management**

- The work of the board of management is very effective. Members are committed to providing a stimulating, well-equipped and safe learning environment for pupils. They monitor school attendance and pupils’ overall achievements in literacy and numeracy carefully. Meetings are recorded properly and accounts are audited regularly. It is recommended that members avail of relevant management training for their posts and that an annual report on the operation of the school be issued to parents.

- School leadership is very good. The principal works very diligently to provide a high standard of education for all pupils. She promotes an all-round education for pupils and facilitates very successfully their involvement in a range of co-curricular and
extracurricular activities. There is a very positive sense of shared responsibility, consultation and collaboration with the special duties post-holder. The special duties post-holder fulfils all assigned duties in a very committed manner.

- The staff comprises two mainstream teachers and a shared learning-support teacher. There is excellent cooperation and cohesion within the staff and all show considerable dedication to their teaching duties and to their pupils. The board employs a secretary/cleaner whose work greatly enhances the day-to-day life of the school.

- The quality of school accommodation is very good. Classrooms present as attractive learning environments and outdoor play facilities are very good. Plentiful teaching aids, including information and communications technologies (ICT), are available. Some additional resources to support the Irish curriculum are required, however. More appropriate furnishing and additional testing materials for the learning-support setting are recommended.

- The management of relationships with the school community is very good. The parents’ association works diligently to raise additional funding for school needs. Parents are actively involved in the Green-School committee. They are offered opportunities to contribute to school policies and attend many events including sports day, book fairs and seasonal activities. In their responses to questionnaires, administered as part of the evaluation, all parents agree that the school is very well run, that their children are treated fairly by the teachers and that discipline is good.

- The management of pupils is very successful. The atmosphere in both classrooms is very positive and pupils present as very happy, appropriately motivated and confident in their learning. In their questionnaire responses, the pupils indicate that they feel safe in school, that pupils behave well and that their school is a good school.

4. **Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation**

- The quality of whole-school administrative planning is very good. The use of a web site would be beneficial in further facilitating the sharing of information and policies with the parent community.

- Curriculum planning is very good and policies promote continuity and progression in pupils’ learning. Planning for English is particularly comprehensive and is having a very positive impact on pupils’ learning.

- A three-year literacy and numeracy improvement plan has been drawn up which indicates good engagement with school self-evaluation processes. As a next step, assessment data should be used to help set specific, measurable targets with regard to the progression of pupils in terms of their literacy and numeracy learning.

- Classroom planning is very good. Teachers prepare very well for lessons and excellent use is made of the school’s ICT resources.

- Confirmation was provided that the board of management has formally adopted the *Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools* without modification and that the school is compliant with the requirements of the *Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools*. 
5. Quality of Teaching, Learning and Pupil Achievement

- The overall quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement is very good. Teachers manage the needs of the multi-grade settings with particular effectiveness. Structured play and activity-based learning, with clear links to the Aistear framework, should be developed for junior pupils, however. In questionnaires, all parents agree that they are happy with the school, that teaching is good and that work is matched to the children’s abilities. Pupils indicate that that they enjoy their lessons and learning and have regular opportunities to use computers. However, their responses indicate that further input from them into the assessment of and for their learning would be beneficial.


- The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in Irish is good. A very positive attitude is cultivated towards the language and very effective use is made of technological resources, story telling and authentic materials to awaken pupils’ interest in the language. The pupils in the junior classes have memorised a wide repertoire of poems. Most pupils are making good progress in the spoken language. The majority of the pupils have reached a good standard of reading and understanding. Speaking, reading and writing activities are integrated very satisfactorily in the senior classroom. The pupils’ written work is praiseworthy. Progress is assessed regularly. From now on, the Drumcondra Irish Test should be used to assess learning standards.

- The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in English is highly commendable. Excellent work is carried out in the junior classroom in terms of developing the pupils’ early reading, writing and oral language skills. This work is built upon very effectively in the senior classroom. Results of standardised assessments indicate the there is very good progression in the pupils’ reading skills. Pupils have very regular opportunities to write in a range of genres across the curriculum. The quality of the pupils’ handwriting is highly commendable.

- Teaching, learning and pupil achievement in Mathematics is very good. Lessons observed were very well structured and had very satisfactory learning outcomes. There was excellent use of the interactive white board and concrete materials to support and consolidate the pupils’ conceptual development. Pupils enjoy active learning experiences and are confident in their learning. Standardised test results indicate that pupils are performing very well in Mathematics and that there is appropriate progression in their learning.

- The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in Music is good. Appropriately varied opportunities are provided in song-singing, instrumental work, percussion work, literacy and musical appreciation. The pupils sing unison songs tunefully and dynamically. Further Irish songs should be learned in the junior classes, however. The standard of the pupils’ tin-whistle performance is very good. Some pupils play using note names. The development of literacy skills to include reading music from staff notation is recommended.
• The quality of assessment is commendable. Written work is very well monitored and pupils are given very good direction in how to improve their work. Screening and standardised tests are administered and results are shared with parents. Pupils engage in individual target setting in both classrooms and this is very good practice. It is recommended that teachers use further assessment approaches, including checklists and peer and self-evaluation strategies, to monitor and promote learning.

6. Quality of Support for Pupils

• Provision for pupils with additional educational needs is very good. There is commendable understanding of the pupils’ priority learning needs. Planning and recording of work are consistently comprehensive. Parents are given copies of individualised education plans and are invited to contribute to them. Teaching approaches are very successful and include group and individual support.

• There is excellent collaboration and communication between the support teacher and classroom teachers. Early identification and intervention procedures are working very well. Peer reading is managed very effectively with junior pupils. The learning-support teacher works very successfully, alongside the class teacher, in support of targeted pupils in the classroom.

• Communication with parents is very good. End-of-year reports are very comprehensive. Additional supports for parents could be organised to give them a greater understanding of their children’s literacy, numeracy and ICT programmes.

• The school facilitates a wide range of co-curricular and extracurricular activities including the MS Readathon, local history competitions, Grandparents’ Day, visits of historians and artists and charity events. Highly commendable attention is given to environmental awareness and the school has received four green flags in the Green-Schools programme.

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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 were extremely satisfied with the report. We thank the inspector for her professional approach throughout the WSE and the care and attention given to all aspects of the inspection. The Board of Management would like to acknowledge the dedication and commitment of the teaching staff in maintaining the high quality of preparation, teaching and pupil achievement. The report also affirms the excellent work of pupils, ancillary staff, parents and our school community.

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 found the recommendations to be helpful and practical. We have taken these recommendations on board. Staff members have attended an Assessment Course and the school will continue to develop its assessment practices. The Drumcondra Irish Test has been purchased and will be a useful test to assess learning standards. The junior teacher appreciates the value of structured play and activity-based learning and is going to complete the Aistear Summer Course to familiarise herself with the Aistear Framework. This programme will prove more appropriate as only infants will be in the Junior room in the coming years.