Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Bohermore National School
Bohermore, Ballysimon, Co. Limerick
Uimhir rolla: 08342V

Date of inspection: 19 September 2011
1. Introduction

Bohermore National School, a primary school under the patronage of the Catholic Archbishop of Cashel and Emly, serves a rural area approximately 10 kilometres south of Limerick city centre. There are two mainstream class teachers on the school staff. A shared learning-support/resource teacher, based in a neighbouring school, supports pupils with special educational needs. 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.

Enrolment figures have fluctuated somewhat in recent years and currently stand at 25 pupils. Good attendance is actively promoted and attendance levels are commendable. This report presents the findings of a whole-school evaluation undertaken in the school in September 2011. The evaluation focused on the quality of teaching and learning in Irish, English, Mathematics and Drama.

2. Summary of Findings and Recommendations for Further Development

The following are the **main strengths** of the work of the school:

- The board of management discharges its duties effectively and in a manner which is very supportive of the best interests of the pupils.

- The Principal leads this learning community with very high levels of professionalism and commitment.

- The staff of the school is hardworking and exhibits a deep sense of care for the holistic development of every pupil.

- The analysis of the questionnaires administered during the evaluation process, indicates exceptionally high levels of satisfaction among parents on a broad range of issues pertaining to the functioning of the school and its board of management.

- Pupils present as confident, courteous and caring of each other.

- The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement is commendable with a particular strength evident in Mathematics.

The following **main recommendations** are made:

- It is recommended that school self-evaluation practices be further developed to include the setting of realistic and specific targets for improvement and the evaluation of the effectiveness of the interventions implemented in the school.

- Further augmentation of reading materials in both English and Irish is advised.

- In meeting the needs of pupils with special educational needs (SEN), it is recommended that the possibilities for in-class support be explored and that the current caseload of the support teacher be re-examined to ensure compliance with Department of Education and Skills circulars 24/03 and 02/05.
3. Quality of School Management

- The board of management fulfils its responsibilities and statutory obligations in a diligent and committed manner. The chairperson and board members support and facilitate the work of the school in a commendable fashion. Individual board members have assumed responsibility for particular aspects of management and efforts should be made to further extend this good practice. Carefully recorded minutes of meetings together with properly maintained and certified school accounts were made available for inspection. In order to further enhance the work of the board, consideration should be given to the publication of agreed reports after meetings.

- The principal, who was appointed in the autumn of 2009, leads the work of the school with very high levels of professionalism and dedication. She displays an admirable commitment to the overall welfare of the pupils and to ongoing improvement of the learning experiences available to them. She also prioritises successfully the promotion of harmonious working relationships across the school community. In this work, the principal is well supported by a conscientious deputy principal who puts her own particular strengths to effective use in the school.

- Pupils enjoy a well-resourced, well-maintained and attractive learning environment which has undergone upgrading and modification in recent times. The school has a spacious playing-field at the rear of the building and pupils also have access to the adjacent indoor handball alley.

- During the evaluation pupils were courteous, friendly and very well behaved. Their positive attitudes towards their teachers, their peers and school generally are reflected in the responses to questionnaires administered to middle and senior classes.

- The school has an active and dedicated parents’ association which assists in harnessing the goodwill and support of this close-knit community for the benefit of the school. The analysis of parent questionnaires indicates exceptionally high levels of satisfaction among parents on a broad range of issues pertaining to the functioning of the school and its board of management.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- An effective system for tracking the development and review of both curricular and administrative policies has been put in place by the principal. A schedule of policies reviewed since 2009, policies under current review and those due for consideration in the short-term, facilitates a manageable and sustainable approach to this work. Yearly action plans indicate that a significant body of planning is undertaken on an on-going basis. The involvement of the board of management and the parents’ association in policy formation and review is commended.

- School self-evaluation practices are developing satisfactorily. Evidence of performance in some areas of provision, such as literacy and numeracy, is gathered and analysed with a view to effecting improvement. Further development of this work is recommended, particularly in the collection, analysis and use of data. Realistic and specific targets for improvement should be agreed and implemented and the effectiveness of any interventions carefully evaluated.
The teachers engage conscientiously with their classroom planning responsibilities. They carefully align their individual planning to meet the requirements of agreed policies in the various curriculum areas. Some common approaches and strategies have been discussed and agreed and further work is planned in this area.

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, learning and pupil achievement is good overall. Some exemplary use of recommended methodologies was observed, particularly in the teaching of literacy, numeracy and Drama at senior class level. Collaborative pair and group work is promoted throughout the school with a commendable emphasis on older pupils assisting their younger peers in reading. Good use of information and communications technology (ICT) was observed in the teaching of phonics in the junior classroom and in the writing process at middle and senior class level. The teachers monitor pupils' work carefully and provide constructive feedback. The outcomes of activities and observations conducted during the evaluation indicate that pupils are making good progress in the areas evaluated as well as in their holistic development. The majority of pupils achieve commendable standards in standardised tests. The teachers are commended for their commitment to continuous professional development in their efforts to address identified developmental priorities, particularly in literacy, numeracy and assessment.

Irish is taught with commitment and skill and praiseworthy efforts are made to ensure that enjoyment is central to pupils' experience of Irish classes. Pupils' ability to communicate is developed through the practice of common phrases at daily assemblies and through the integration into teaching of rhymes, songs, drama and language games. Reading skills are carefully nurtured and in order that pupils may broaden their experience of reading it is advised that they be provided with more real books in Irish. Helpful opportunities are provided for pupils to develop their personal writing skills and it would be worthwhile extending this practice also.

The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in English is of a high standard. Pupils' confidence in their receptive and expressive skills in oral language is developed through a range of strategies, including talk and discussion, collaborative group work and drama. A commercial phonics programme is effectively taught in the infants and junior classes using the interactive white board. Very creative approaches to language development and the writing process were observed in the middle and senior classes.
Pupils in these classes are encouraged to read a broad range of stimulating reading material. This approach should be extended to the infant and junior classes.

- The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in Mathematics is very good. The teachers skilfully explore concepts with the pupils through adroit questioning, structured mental Mathematics sessions and practical activities. Strategies deployed to solve problems in the senior classes were observed to be very effective and this aspect of the curriculum has been designated by the teachers for further exploration and development. Parents and teachers have co-operated successfully in encouraging pupils’ interest in Mathematics through engagement with an online tutoring programme called Mathletics.

- The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in Drama is very good. A range of effective strategies is used by the teachers to enable the pupils to engage with life issues and themes and to creatively represent their work in a collaborative way. In both classrooms, pupils have the facility to safely and freely explore their ideas, feelings and experiences. The infants and junior classes were observed developing skills of non-verbal communication and explore different emotions. The middle and senior classes worked very successfully at creating dramatic improvisations of poetry and music.

6. Quality of Support for Pupils

- The needs of pupils with special educational needs are well provided for in a supportive and inclusive manner. The learning support/resource teacher, who provides support to pupils with both high incidence and low incidence needs, has made significant progress in a role to which she was but recently appointed. Planning is carefully co-ordinated to ensure specific needs of pupils are clearly analysed and appropriate interventions identified. Support is currently provided on a withdrawal basis. It is recommended that the possibilities for in-class support be explored and that the current caseload be re-examined to ensure compliance with Department of Education and Skills circulars 24/03 and 02/05.

Published, March 2012