An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Boher National School
Boher
Ballina/Killaloe
Co. Clare
Uimhir rolla: 09190G

Date of inspection: 30 May 2011
1. Introduction

Boher NS is a co-educational primary school situated in a rural part of North Tipperary in the parish of Ballina and Boher. The school is under the patronage of the Catholic Archbishop of Cashel and Emly and has grown considerably in recent years, resulting in the majority of pupils being taught in prefabricated classrooms. Current enrolment, at 108 pupils, constitutes four mainstream classes and a class for pupils with autistic spectrum disorders (ASDs). Attendance rates are very good.

This report presents the findings of a whole-school evaluation undertaken in the school in May/June 2011. The evaluation focused on the quality of teaching and learning in English, Irish, Mathematics and Social, Personal, and Health Education (SPHE).

The board of management was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the report; a response was not received from the board.

2. Summary of Findings and Recommendations for Further Development

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

- The commitment, enthusiasm and professionalism of the teachers are highly commended.
- The principal provides dedicated leadership to the school and ensures that a focus is firmly maintained on teaching, learning and the welfare of pupils.
- Pupils are provided with a broad range of curricular experiences in a positive and affirming atmosphere.
- The overall standards of attainment, particularly in literacy, are very good.
- The meaningful inclusion of pupils with special educational needs in the full life of the school is a notable feature of practice.
- The pupils interact with adults and with their peers in a highly positive fashion.
- The school enjoys considerable support from the board of management, the parents and the community.

The following main recommendations are made:

- The school needs to review its assessment policy and clarify whole-school approaches in this area.
- The school should review and consolidate the individualised planning process and the school’s policy on autistic spectrum disorders.
- In managing the school, the board needs to review its practices in regard to decision making and, in particular, its practices around the recording of decisions made.
3. **Quality of School Management**

- The board of management is properly constituted, meets regularly and supports the work of the school in a praiseworthy manner. The chairperson adopts an active approach to management and visits the school frequently. The school's finances are audited annually. It is recommended that the board reviews its protocols in relation to meetings and the recording of minutes. Additionally, the board should review its procedures around teacher appointments and the recording of same. In this context, it is a cause of concern that not all teachers have received Teaching Council recognition for the purpose of registration as a teacher.

- The principal combines her teaching and administrative roles with great energy and enthusiasm and strives continuously to maintain collegial working relationships. She ensures that a focus is firmly maintained on teaching and learning and the welfare of pupils. The principal is ably assisted in the leadership of the school by a conscientious deputy principal. Together the two post holders have worked successfully to accommodate the diversity of learners and to promote the full inclusion of pupils with special educational needs. It is recommended that post holders’ duties be formally reviewed and agreed in line with Circular 07/03.

- Current deployment of staff affords teachers opportunities to gain experience at different class levels and in various settings. It is advised that this good practice be formalised and agreed at board level.

- Classrooms are well resourced with suitable teaching aids and the buildings and grounds are well maintained. However, at the pre-inspection meeting the board referred to the challenges it has experienced in acquiring permanent classrooms.

- The school adopts an affirming approach to managing and interacting with pupils. Worthwhile efforts are made to instil in pupils attitudes of positive self-worth, confidence and mutual respect. The outcomes of pupil questionnaires indicate that pupils have very positive attitudes towards their school experiences.

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

- The quality of the school planning and school self-evaluation process is good. Administrative policies, on a broad range of issues, have been drafted carefully with reference to relevant educational legislation and to meet the evolving needs of the school. A useful process of consultation, involving staff, the parents’ association and board of management, is being pursued in a constructive manner. Care should be taken to ensure that the board’s deliberations on policy matters are noted and recorded carefully.

- Aspects of the school’s curriculum policies are chosen for review and development on an ongoing basis. These practices ensure that learning outcomes are improved. More effective generation of reliable data from formative and summative assessments and analyses of these data, together with greater utilisation of action and strategic planning templates, should add value to this process and make it more manageable.

- The quality of classroom planning is generally good. A clear focus on specific learning objectives as outlined in the curriculum, together with the identification of appropriate methodologies, are among the noteworthy elements of good practice observed. Due
attention is directed to the recording of pupils’ progress for formative and summative purposes.

- 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 overall teaching, learning and pupil achievement is very good. The teachers utilise a range of suitable approaches and methodologies that responds to pupils’ needs and engages their interest effectively. Pupils’ work is carefully monitored and constructive feedback is provided. The outcomes of activities and observations conducted during the evaluation, together with the results of standardised tests, indicate that pupils are making very good progress in the areas evaluated. To further enhance teaching and learning it is advised that pupils be given greater access to information and communications technology (ICT) in their day-to-day learning.

- Múintear an Ghaeilge go héifeachtach sa scoil seo. Cuirtear na ceachtanna i láthair go bríomhar taraingteach. Úsáidtear áiseanna fóinteacha, cluichí teanga, dánta, amhráin agus an drámaíocht go córasach chun liofacht agus muinín a chothú sa teanga labhartha. Moltar cumas cuid mhaith daltaí an Ghaeilge a thuiscint agus a dtaileann cumarsáid a dhéanamh go nádúrtha. Forbraítear na scileanna léitheoireachta go sásúil tríd an scoil. D’fhéadfáí cur leis na scileanna seo trí fíorleabhair ar bhonn níos leithne. Breathnaitear cumas inmhola sa saorscribhneoireacht i measc cuid mhaith de na daltaí sna hardranganna. Chun dul chun cinn breise a chur i gcrích sa Ghaeilge, moltar measúnú caighdeánach a úsáid chun miondalú eolais a sholáthair ar an bhforbairt sna scileanna éisteachta, tuisceana agus léitheoireachta agus pleanáil a dhéanamh dá réir.

Irish is taught effectively in this school. Lessons are presented in a lively and engaging way. Helpful resources, language games, poems, songs and drama are systematically used to foster pupils’ fluency and confidence in the spoken language. The ability of a good number of pupils to understand Irish and their willingness to communicate naturally is praised. Reading skills are developed satisfactorily throughout the school. These skills could be enhanced through greater use of real books. A praiseworthy ability to engage in free writing is noted among many pupils in the senior classes. To achieve further progress in Irish the use of standardised assessment is recommended so that the development of listening, understanding and reading skills can be analysed and planned for accordingly.

- Standards of teaching and learning in English are very good overall and all students are appropriately supported in developing their literacy skills. Pupils throughout the school demonstrate commendable expressive language skills. Particularly suitable rhymes and poems are carefully chosen by teachers to foster pupils’ enjoyment of language. Innovative approaches to organising reading classes were observed and these merit discussion and dissemination on a whole-school basis. Class libraries and a visiting library service are used effectively and the pupils are confident readers. Pupils write successfully in a wide variety of genres and their writing is suitably displayed and used to form attractive compilations for further reading. Additional work in developing provision in
English should examine the whole-school approach to handwriting and the adoption of a multi-sensory approach to teaching spelling.

- The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in Mathematics is good. New concepts are taught through well-guided talk and discussion, active learning and the constructive use of concrete materials. The majority of pupils demonstrate a high level of skill acquisition as well as a keen understanding of concepts of the curriculum. Analysis of standardised tests by curriculum strand should enable teachers to address in a more concerted way the learning needs that pupils may have in Mathematics.

- The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in Social Personal and Health Education (SPHE) is very good. Discrete lessons are organised and the teachers and other members of staff place very good emphasis on the promotion of a positive school climate and atmosphere.

6. Quality of Support for Pupils

- There are many positive features in the school’s provision for pupils with ASDs. The key feature in the effectiveness of this provision is the extent to which pupils with ASDs are included in mainstream classes and enabled to meaningfully access the curriculum during periods of inclusion. In the ASD class, the social, communicative and rigidity of thought and behaviour differences associated with the triad of impairments are considered and accommodated. Staff-pupil interactions are affirmative and supportive and an unambiguous language of instruction is employed. The classroom environment is well structured and organised. Personal hygiene and care needs are addressed and pupils’ independence in these areas is cultivated.

- Notwithstanding the above, there is scope for development in certain aspects of practice relating to provision for pupils with ASDs. An approach to the teaching of reading was observed in the ASD class that was inconsistent with the approach being adopted in the school. Curriculum planning and implementation in all curriculum areas and individualised planning in the ASD class should be directly linked with mainstream practice in order to ensure consistency in provision for pupils with ASDs in the school. School management should ensure that the teacher in the ASD class is systematically supported by the principal and staff in providing for the holistic development of pupils through the approaches outlined in the curriculum. The school’s policy on ASDs should detail both the generic and ASD-specific teaching methods that are used and staff should be encouraged to access available ASD-specific continuing professional development.

- A collaborative and staged approach to the provision of support for pupils with special educational needs is evident. Mainstream and support teachers regularly consult with each other regarding the individual needs of pupils and a focus is maintained on addressing pupils’ holistic needs. Pupils are supported through a combination of withdrawal and in-class models, utilising both one-to-one and group systems of organisation. A variety of approaches such as direct-teaching, guided-discovery, games, structured questioning, play-based learning, information and communication technology and stories is used and these effective strategies maintain pupils’ attention to their respective tasks.

- The individualised planning in place for pupils with special educational needs is good and demonstrates a concern to maximise pupils’ outcomes through identifying and addressing pupils’ priority learning needs. A variety of formats of individualised planning is in place and streamlining this process would further enhance provision in this area. Teaching and learning strategies and assessment should be clearly stated and the involvement of parents/carers and pupils in the individualised planning process should be prioritised.
The teachers encourage parents to have regular and frequent contact with the school. Parent-teacher meetings are held twice yearly and written reports are issued annually. The parents’ association supports the work of the school in a variety of practical ways as well as offering advice on matters of policy. Questionnaires returned prior to the evaluation indicate very high levels of satisfaction with the school on the part of parents.