An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Ballymacelligott No. 1 N.S.,
Flemby, Tralee, Co. Kerry
Uimhir rolla:09782I

Date of inspection: 23 March 2010
WHOLE-SCHOOL EVALUATION
A whole-school evaluation of Ballymacelligott No 1 N.S. was undertaken in March 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 History. 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.

INTRODUCTION – SCHOOL CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND
Ballymacelligott No. 1 N.S. is a mainstream, co-educational school situated in the townland of Flemby in the parish of Ballymacelligott. It is one of four schools serving the pupils of the parish and the surrounding area. There are a significant number of new-comer pupils enrolled in the school. Pupil attendance is carefully monitored and is, in general, of a very high standard.

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pupils enrolled in the school</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainstream classes in the school</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers on the school staff</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainstream class teachers</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers working in support roles</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special needs assistants</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT

1.1 Characteristic spirit, mission or vision
Ballymacelligott No. 1 N.S. is a Catholic school under the patronage of the Bishop of Kerry. The school has formulated a mission statement which outlines its aim to “provide a well-ordered, caring, happy and secure atmosphere where the intellectual, spiritual, physical, moral and cultural needs of the pupils are identified and addressed” and its’ school motto is “Ní neart go cur le chéile”. It is recommended that this statement and policy be displayed in a prominent area and that it be communicated to the parents of the pupils attending the school.

1.2 Board of management
The board of management is properly constituted and it meets on a regular basis. The dates of all board meetings are identified in advance and it is reported that these, and an agreed report, are communicated to parents. Finances are prudently managed and accounts are certified annually. Individual board members have attended training events organised by the diocese. The principal provides a written report at each meeting. These good practices are praised. The board and its chairperson are supportive of the work of the school. However, members of the board have limited involvement in the drafting of whole-school plans and policies. Only three of the organisational policies have been ratified, signed and dated. It is therefore recommended that the board’s role in the whole-school planning process be significantly increased. It is further recommended that the views of parents be sought when the school reviews aspects of its curriculum, organisation and general educational provision and that key policies, including a grievance policy be communicated to all parents.
1.3 In-school management
The principal is highly conscientious in the discharging of his administrative and managerial duties and he ensures that official documentation is maintained accurately. He works collaboratively with the board and with school personnel. The special duties teacher discharges a wide range of duties in a very effective manner. It is now recommended that the in-school management team focus on issues of teaching and learning in the school and that it explores how the implementation of the principles of learning outlined in the Primary School Curriculum (1999) might best be implemented, evaluated and developed over a stated period of time.

1.4 Management of relationships and communication with the school community
The board reports that parents are very supportive of the school and that they attend a range of co-curricular and extra-curricular events organised by the school. Periodic letters are sent home to inform parents of upcoming events and activities. A colourful, informative newsletter is prepared annually by pupils under the direction of the assistant teacher and this is of a very high standard. Annual parent teacher meetings are organised and end of year pupil progress reports are communicated to the parents of pupils from first to sixth class. This practice might be further developed to include a report on the progress of pupils from the infant classes. The format of report might also be reviewed to ensure that it is reflective of the Primary School Curriculum (1999). It is now recommended that the board renew its efforts at establishing a parents’ association which should be affiliated to the National Parents’ Council - Primary.

1.5 Management of pupils
During the evaluation period the pupils presented as courteous and kind individuals who work cooperatively with their peers and teachers. They are actively encouraged and facilitated to show respect towards each other, their peers, teachers and visitors. The school manages the pastoral needs of the pupils effectively. Many pupils demonstrate high levels of confidence and self-esteem however some pupils are hesitant to contribute to lessons. It is therefore recommended that increased focus be placed on developing the pupils’ social and emotional dimensions of learning thereby raising their self-confidence and motivation to learn.

2. QUALITY OF SCHOOL PLANNING

2.1 Whole-school and classroom planning
A whole-school plan has been drafted by the teaching staff. Curriculum plans have been prepared for each subject area. Some of these plans are of a good standard. There is a need however to ensure that these are tailored to the individual context of the school and that each plan offers clear guidance to individual teachers on how the curriculum is to be managed in a multi-class setting. Care should also be taken in the identification of clear criteria against which the implementation of the plan and its impact on the quality of learning and teaching might best be evaluated. A policy in relation to Relationship and Sexuality (RSE) should be drafted, in consultation with parents, as a matter of priority. A wide range of organisational policies have been drafted. These are, in general, of a high standard and are compliant with legislation, Department circulars and guidelines. It is now recommended that the school draft a strategic plan in which aspects of the whole-school plan are prioritised for review over a stated period of time.

All teachers prepare long and short-term plans in preparation for their work. Monthly progress records are also maintained. Some of this planning is of a high standard but there remains scope for development in some of the plans prepared. Teachers should ensure that the content selected is reflective of the interests and life experiences of the pupils and that less reliance is placed on commercial texts to determine topics explored. Also, an increased emphasis should be placed in
some planning on the identification of learning activities and teaching and learning methodologies which actively engage the pupils in the learning process and which motivate and stimulate the pupils.

2.2 Child protection policy and procedures

The school has drafted a child protection policy and a designated liaison person (DLP) and a deputy DLP have been appointed in line with the requirements of the *Child Protection Guidelines for Primary Schools* (Department of Education and Skills, September 2001). However, there is no evidence to indicate that this policy has been discussed at board level or that it has been ratified. It is therefore recommended, as a matter of priority, that the policy relating to child protection and procedures be discussed and ratified at board level and that it be brought to the attention of management, school staff and parents in line with the guidelines.

3. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

3.1 Language

**Gaeilge**

Déantar iarrachtaí fiúntacha atmaisféar fabhrach don Ghaeilge a chothú sna rangsheomraí agus dírítear aird ar scileanna éisteachta, labharta agus cumarsáide na ndaltaí a chur chun cinn tríd an scolí. Leagtar bheim ar an gcuir chuige cumarsáideach trí mhodhanna éagsúla a úsáid le linn na gceachtanna agus trí dheiseanna labhartha a eagrú do na ndaltaí. Deántar ceangal maith idir an obair ó bhéal, an léitheoireacht agus an scribhneoireacht. Tá stór focal an-maith ag an gcuid is mó de na daltaí. Tá siad in ann an Ghaeilge a léamh go cruinn agus go liofa agus eiríonn leo an téasc a phlé go tuiscineach. Tugtar deiseanna do na daltaí, go mór-mhór sna hardranganna, scribhneoireacht pearsanta agus foirmiúil a dhéanamh agus tá a saothair breátha láidir ins na copleabhair. Foghlaimionn na daltaí raon leathan de raínn, dánta, agus amhráin agus aithrisíonn said iad go taimseamar suas tríd an scolí. Cuirtear beim an-mhaith ar mhúineadh na gramadaí. Tríd is tríd tá an obair sa Ghaeilge le moladh. Moltar anois úsáid a bhaint as fhorleabhair mhóra agus scéim fhoghraíochta chun cu idiú le scileanna réamhléitheachta agus éisteachta na ndaltaí sna náisiúntaí agus sna bunráidanna a fhhorbairt, prionta i dtimpeallacht na scoile a mhéadú agus a saothair a chur ar thaispeáint ins na rangsheomraí níos minice.

**Irish**

Worthwhile efforts are made to nurture a favourable atmosphere toward Irish in classrooms and attention is directed at promoting pupils’ listening, oral and communicative skills throughout the school. Emphasis is placed on the communicative approach through the use of a variety of methodologies during the lessons and through the provision to pupils of opportunities to use language. Good links are made between oral, reading and writing activities. The majority of the pupils have a very good vocabulary. They are, in general, able to read Irish accurately and fluently and they succeed in discussing the text with understanding. Opportunities are provided to the pupils, especially in the senior classes, to engage in creative and formal writing activities and good examples of their work are to be seen in the copybooks. The pupils learn a wide range of rhymes, poems and songs and they recite these with enjoyment throughout the school. There is a very good emphasis on the teaching of grammar. The work in Irish merits praise overall. It is now recommended that large-format real books and a phonics programme be utilised to develop the pre-reading and listening skills of the pupils in the junior classes, that environmental print be increased in the school environment and that the work of the pupils be displayed in the classrooms more regularly.
**English**

In general, the majority of pupils are achieving satisfactory levels of attainment in English. Pupils in the middle and senior classes present with good oral language skills and they debate topics and present knowledge in a clear and concise manner. In the infant and junior classes good work is undertaken in developing pupils’ receptiveness to language, in extending their receptive vocabulary and in cultivating an appreciation of the function that sentence structure has to play in the communication of meaning. However, there is significant scope for development of pupils’ oral language skills at these levels, especially in relation to the pupil’s ability to use language as a speaker and in initiating and sustaining conversations and in the development of pupils’ expressive language skills. It is therefore recommended that a systematic programme for the development of pupils’ language skills be outlined and implemented at these levels.

The organisation of early intervention programmes, in which groups of pupils from the infant and junior classes are withdrawn for intensive support in the area of phonics, phonological awareness and in reading experience, has resulted in the pupils’ developing satisfactory levels of achievement in English reading. It is recommended that consideration should now be given to the organisation of team and co-operative teaching methodologies which should involve the class teacher and the learning-support teachers working co-operatively within the classroom context. Increased emphasis should also be placed on the development of the pupils’ emergent reading skills through their engagement in collaborative and experiential reading activities. Pupils in the middle and senior classes are facilitated to engage with a wide variety of reading materials and the novel is explored to very good effect at these levels. Pupils’ comprehension skills are systematically developed and they are encouraged and facilitated to read for pleasure.

Letter formation and the presentation of written exercises are very well developed in the infant and junior classes. In these classes, the majority of the pupils’ writing exercises focus on the completion of transcription and workbook-based activities. It is therefore recommended that pupils’ be facilitated to write in a variety of topics and genres for a wider range of audiences and that they be provided with greater autonomy in the selection of topics for their writing. Pupils in the middle and senior classes regularly engage in the writing process and very appropriate emphasis is placed on developing their formal and creative writing skills. Attractive samples of completed assignments feature in this classroom.

**3.2 Mathematics**

The quality of teaching and learning in Mathematics is of a good to very good standard. Lessons observed were, in general, well structured and paced and care was taken to develop the mathematical concept being addressed. Mathematical language was well explored though an increased emphasis might be placed on the provision of opportunities for pupils to use this language through the arrangement of collaborative and co-operative learning activities. Oral mathematical activities feature regularly as an integral part of lessons in the middle and senior standards and at these levels pupils are afforded regular opportunities to engage in discovery learning techniques and to interact with a wide range of concrete materials. This very good practice should be adopted on a whole-school basis. In order to further enhance pupil attainment in Mathematics it is recommended that increased emphasis be placed on the use of pupils own experiences and the environment so as to enable them to see Mathematics as relevant to their own lives. It is further recommended that the use of concrete materials features to a much greater extent in the infant and junior classes.

**3.3 History**

Very good lessons were observed in the teaching of History during the evaluation period and the pupils displayed a keen interest in the topics addressed. A variety of resources were skilfully
utilised to gain and retain pupil engagement in the lessons. Pupils in the middle and senior classes are facilitated to engage in project work. Excursions to areas of historical interest feature in the programme of work organised. Local history is very well explored and when questioned pupils displayed a very good ability to link events of national importance to their own local area. This good practice is highly praised. In the junior and infant classes aspects of the pupils own personal and family histories are well explored. In general, appropriate emphasis is placed on the development of the skills of working as an historian. However, it is recommended that the use of commercial textbooks at these levels to determine the content of lessons should be de-emphasised and a focus should be placed on the selection of content which reflects the experiences and interests of the pupils. The strand Story should also be developed further and a greater focus should be placed on the provision of an integrated Social, Environmental and Scientific Education programme of work within the time allocated to this area of the curriculum.

3.4 Assessment
Standardised tests in literacy and numeracy are administered annually and the results of these tests assist teachers in the identification of pupils in need of support. Some teachers maintain pupil profiles and portfolios containing samples of work completed by the pupils. Pupils’ written work is regularly monitored and evaluated. Spelling and tables tests are administered weekly from first to sixth class. There is however scope for development in teachers’ assessment practices. It is therefore recommended that the recently drafted assessment policy and the areas of the curriculum plans which address assessment of and for learning be reviewed against current practice. This should ensure that end of year reports on pupil progress are supported by valid data and that differentiated programmes of work can be prepared, as appropriate. It is further recommended that files be organised in which records pertaining to individual pupils should be maintained for a stated period of time.

4. Quality of support for pupils

4.1 Pupils with special educational needs
The school has an allocation of five hours for learning support and three hours for resource teaching. A full-time teacher, based in a neighbouring school and a part-time teacher provide a very high standard of support to pupils with special educational needs. Using available assessment data, very comprehensive education plans for individual pupils are devised in which specific learning targets and appropriate learning activities are outlined. Pupil progress is recorded against these targets and an informative end-of-instructional term progress report is completed. Each teacher makes very adequate preparation for their lessons and both utilise a wide range of teacher designed and commercially produced resources to support pupil learning. Pupils in the junior and middle classes benefit to a great extent from the early intervention initiatives provided in the areas of literacy and numeracy. It is now recommended that the role of parents in the drafting and reviewing of individual education plans and in evaluating pupil progress be further developed. At present, the support teachers operate from a store room adjoining the staff toilet. It is therefore recommended that the board address the accommodation requirements in the short-term and that they consider submitting an application to the Department for a devolved grant to enable them to provide suitable permanent accommodation.

4.2 Other supports for pupils: disadvantaged, minority and other groups
The promotion of equality of participation and access to education is strongly evident in the work of the school at all levels. All pupils are facilitated to partake in school arranged activities and events on an equal basis. The school is highly praised in this regard.
5. **CONCLUSION**

The school has strengths in the following areas:

- The school is well resourced with a wide variety of supportive materials and resources and the building and grounds are maintained to a very high standard.
- The school benefits from a supportive board of management.
- The quality of teaching observed during the evaluation period was, in general, of a good to very good standard.
- Pupil attainment in the subject areas evaluated was of a satisfactory standard.
- The quality of support provided to pupils with special educational needs is of a very high standard.

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

- It is recommended that the board’s role in the whole-school planning process be significantly increased and that arrangements for the inclusion of parents in this process be outlined. Policies in relation to Relationship and Sexuality Education (RSE) and Child Protection should be addressed as a priority.
- It is recommended that the in-school management team focus on issues of teaching and learning in the school and that it explores how the principles of learning outlined in the Primary Curriculum (1999) might best be implemented, evaluated and developed over a stated period of time.
- It is recommended that consideration should be given to the organisation of team and co-operative teaching methodologies which should involve the class teacher and the learning support teachers working co-operatively within the classroom context in the area of literacy and numeracy.

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, December 2010*
Appendix

School Response to the Report

Submitted by the Board of Management
Area 1  Observations on the content of the inspection report

We the Board of management of Flemby National school have studied the report on the recent WSE. We take on board the recommendations outlined in the report. The school community wish to thank the inspector for the professional, courteous and pleasant manner in which the WSE was conducted.

The report has highlighted that we have strengths in the following areas
  • The school is well resourced with a wide variety of supportive materials and resources and the building and grounds are maintained to a very high standard.
  • The school benefits from a supportive board of management.
  • The quality of teaching observed during the evaluation period was, in general, of a good to very good standard.
  • Pupil attainment in the subject areas evaluated was of a satisfactory standard.
  • The quality of support provided to pupils with special educational needs is of a very high standard.

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 following steps have been undertaken to implement the findings of the report.

  • Statement of policy has been put on display and has been communicated to the parents.
  • The Board notes the inspectors recommendation in respect of each members role in the whole school planning process. The Board has put a system in place to review all plans and policies.
  • Teachers have met with a facilitator from PDST who covered oral language and planning.
  • The Board has renewed its efforts at establishing a parents’ association in correspondence to all parents.
  • The Board is in the process of reviewing the SPHE policy which will bring attention to developing the pupil’s self-confidence and motivation to learn.
  • An RSE policy has been developed and will be dealt with by the Board at its next meeting.
  • Our child protection policy has been reviewed, ratified, signed and dated. It has been brought to the attention of management, school staff and parents in line with the guidelines.
  • The teachers take on board all the recommendations in each curricular area. In particular the organisation of team and cooperative teaching methodologies involving the class teacher and the learning support teacher in literacy and numeracy has been undertaken.
  • The role of the parents in drafting and reviewing of individual education plans has been further developed.
  • The Board will address the additional accommodation requirements of the school.