Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Boston National School
Boston, Tubber, Co. Clare
Uimhir rolla: 10763L

Date of inspection: 19 October 2011
1. Introduction

Boston National School is a co-educational primary school which operates under the patronage of the Catholic Bishop of Killaloe. It is situated in the Burren, approximately ten kilometres from the town of Gort, County Galway. The local population has declined in recent years.

At the time of the evaluation, twelve pupils were enrolled in the school. They are taught by two mainstream class teachers and a learning support teacher. There has been a significant decrease in enrolment since the previous evaluation was undertaken in 2004, when thirty pupils were enrolled. Currently, there are no pupils in first class or in second class.

This report presents the findings of a whole-school evaluation undertaken in the school in October 2011, which focused on the quality of teaching and learning in English, Irish, Mathematics and Physical Education. 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:

- A friendly, inclusive atmosphere pervades the school.
- Many of the pupils express themselves confidently and fluently in English and in Irish.
- High standards of handwriting and presentation of work are in evidence.
- The quality of teaching in the learning-support setting is very good.
- Pupils take part in a good range of co-curricular and extracurricular activities.

The following main recommendations are made:

- In accordance with Primary Circular 07/03, the board of management should clearly specify responsibilities for the special-duties post holder.
- The board of management and principal teacher should ensure that the school’s enrolment practices are fully in line with Primary Circular 24/02.
- There is a critical need for regular formal staff meetings to be held.
- The range of support provided by the learning-support teacher should be extended to include early intervention and in-class support.
- Teachers should provide differentiated learning experiences for pupils, facilitate pupils to work in groups and plan for more challenging learning experiences for the pupils who are in third class (currently taught with junior and senior infants).
- The school should develop its assessment and self-evaluation practices.
3. Quality of School Management

- The board of management functions effectively. It is properly constituted, it meets regularly and school accounts are certified annually. The board is committed to the development of the school and it works conscientiously in overseeing maintenance work. Recently, it acquired a field adjacent to the school to be used as extra space for curriculum-related activities. This has been a significant boost to the school.

- A range of clear policies has been ratified by the board. However, the school’s enrolment policy and practices are in need of review. In line with Primary Circular 24/02, the board of management and principal teacher should ensure that at the time of enrolment a copy of the child’s birth certificate is obtained and retained in school records.

- The quality of in-school management is satisfactory overall with some scope for improvement. The principal outlines priorities for school development and good progress has been made in a number of areas. There is a good level of co-operation between the three teachers in the day-to-day management of the school and in managing issues which arise incidentally.

- The special-duties teacher fulfils some pastoral duties. Otherwise, there is lack of clarity in relation to her duties. In line with Primary Circular 07/03, the board of management should clearly specify responsibilities for the special-duties post holder.

- While there are regular, informal discussions between the three teachers, formal staff meetings are not held. There is a critical need for regular formal staff meetings to be held.

- The school is well rooted in the community: school facilities are used to host community events and some activities involving pupils, parents and community members are carried out in Drama and in Music. There is no parents’ association in the school. Questionnaires indicate that the majority of parents consider that the school is well run. However, it is evident that there is scope for the board of management to communicate more effectively with the parent body. To this end, the dissemination of an annual report on the operation of the school is recommended. Providing further opportunities for parents to contribute views about school policies is also recommended.

- The pupils are very well managed and well behaved. Many of the pupils express themselves confidently and fluently. The school makes good efforts to maximise opportunities for pupils to engage in activities locally. In light of the low level of enrolment, this is particularly beneficial to pupils’ overall development.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- The quality of the whole-school planning conducted to date in Irish, English, Mathematics and Physical Education is good. However, there is scope for development in the whole-school planning process. Each of the three teachers should be involved in formulating and reviewing whole-school plans. The school’s policy on learning support should be reviewed to ensure that the criteria used for selecting pupils who receive support are clearly outlined.

- The quality of the class teachers’ long-term and short-term plans and monthly progress reports (cuntais mhíosula) is generally good. The learning-support teacher compiles very good quality programmes of work.
• The school’s assessment practices are effective in monitoring pupils’ progress. However, there is scope for the teachers to use assessment data more effectively to inform teaching and learning. The use of a wider range of assessment strategies would help the school to determine if pupils’ achievement is in line with their potential.

• The school’s self-evaluation practices are at an early stage of development. There is a need to establish procedures which will assist the school to engage in more robust self-evaluation including convening formal staff meetings and the further analysis of monthly progress reports by the principal.

• 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 ranges from satisfactory to good. As there is very wide variation in the levels of pupils’ achievement there is a need for teachers to plan for further differentiation of lessons. It is recommended that pupils with similar ability levels be enabled to work together and that more challenging learning experiences be provided for the pupils in third class. There is scope for the mainstream class teachers to display more materials across the curriculum to further support pupils’ learning.

• Tá roint dea-chleachtas i múineadh na Gaeilge. Comhtháhaltear na scileanna éisteachta, labhartha agus tuisceana sna gniomhaíochtaí shuimiúla a chuirtear ar siúl idir rainn, amhráin agus scéalta. Sna bunranganna, b’fhéidir go mbeadh tuilleadh aithris sa cheachtanna chun deiseanna a thabhairt do na daltaí frásaí a chleachtadh. Glacann daltaí sna meánranganna agus as na hardranganna páirt i seicí go muineach agus bionn sé ar a gcumas abairtí a thabhairt leis an pháideas agus struchtúir chasta. Léann siad le liofacht agus le foghraiocht cheart agus léirionn siad tuiscint shásúil ar chineálacha éagsúla teacs. Sonsíodh caighdeán an-mhaith ins na samplaí scríbhneoireachta a rinne na daltaí le linn na meastóireachta.

There is some good practice in the teaching of Irish. The skills of listening, speaking and comprehension are integrated in the interesting activities that are undertaken in rhymes, songs and stories. In the junior classes, more repetition in the lessons would be worthwhile to allow pupils opportunities to practise phrases. Pupils in the middle and senior classes take part in dramas and sketches confidently and they have the ability to construct sentences with a broad vocabulary and complex structure. They read with fluency and accurate pronunciation and they demonstrate satisfactory comprehension of a range of texts. A very good standard of work was in evidence in the samples of written work completed by pupils during the evaluation.

• The quality of teaching in English ranges from satisfactory to good. In oral language, pupils participate well in whole-class discussions and in activities which extend their vocabulary. Early literacy skills are developed adequately. While some pupils read confidently and articulately, it is recommended that more teacher-modelling of the reading process and more guided reading be undertaken as a means of developing the
reading fluency of all pupils. Pupils’ comprehension skills are well developed. Writing in a range of genres is well taught. High standards of handwriting and presentation of work are in evidence.

- Mathematics is well taught. Lessons encompass good teacher-demonstrations and some practical work in the school environment. Pupils’ ability to answer a range of questions is generally good. Lessons in Mathematics would be enhanced by the provision of in-class support. This would enable the teachers to facilitate more collaborative work between pupils and to target pupils’ needs and abilities more explicitly.

- Overall, there is good provision in Physical Education. Lessons feature warm-up and cool-down routines and a good level of physical activity. While a limited amount of work is carried out in gymnastics there is good coverage across the other strands of the curriculum. The strand *Outdoor and adventure activities* is very well catered for and pupils are given good opportunities to explore the Burren environment.

6. **Quality of Support for Pupils**

- The learning-support teacher provides very good quality support to pupils in English and in Mathematics, by withdrawing them from the classroom individually and in small groups.

- Support is provided in an attractive, print-rich environment. A very good range of resources and diagnostic tests is made available to the teacher and these are used to very good effect. Learning activities are well structured and feature very clear explanations and very good teacher modelling of the skills in literacy.

- Some pupils have been withdrawn from the mainstream classrooms for support for a number of years. As this approach is not in line with the principles and procedures of the *Learning-Support Guidelines*, the school should review this practice and should employ the model of in-class support more extensively as a means of supporting pupils. It is also recommended that early intervention be provided for pupils in the junior class and that the practice of withdrawing pupils from the classroom at this level be discontinued.

*Published March 2012*
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 of Boston National School notes the findings of this report and welcomes the recognition given to the strengths highlighted.

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 has facilitated and is facilitating the recommendations of the inspection.

We would like to thank the inspector for her help and advice during the Whole School Evaluation and particularly at the post-evaluation meeting.