

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

**Whole School Evaluation
REPORT**

**Ballintemple NS
Ballycoog, Co. Wicklow
Uimhir rolla: 13224T**

Date of inspection: 7 November 2013



1. Introduction

Ballintemple National School is a two-teacher, co-educational, rural primary school under the patronage of the Catholic Archbishop of Dublin. It caters for pupils from infants to sixth class. The attendance of the twenty-three pupils enrolled is generally very good. 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:

- Ballintemple NS is an inclusive school and pupil care and well-being are of a very high standard.
- The principal leads and manages the school competently and maintains a clear focus on promoting ongoing improvements in teaching and learning.
- School staff demonstrate a very good awareness of the school's strengths and areas for development.
- The quality of pupil behaviour is excellent.
- Teaching, learning and pupil achievement in Music are of a very high quality.
- The board of management demonstrates praiseworthy commitment to the school.
- The parents' association and parent body are very supportive of the work of the school.

The following **main recommendations** are made:

- The identification of specific, measurable and realistic targets, the consistent implementation of agreed initiatives and the systematic monitoring of their impact on pupils' learning will support improvements in literacy and numeracy.
- More widespread use of active and collaborative learning methodologies is recommended to enhance the pupils' engagement levels and their independent learning abilities.
- A review of assessment practice should be undertaken and assessment information should be used systematically to guide the planning and delivery of programmes of work in line with the needs of individuals and groups of pupils.
- In structuring support for pupils with additional learning needs, early intervention initiatives should be extended and well-structured, in-class team-teaching interventions should be implemented in all classes.

3. Quality of School Management

- The board of management demonstrates praiseworthy commitment to the school and matters relating to teaching and learning are discussed regularly. The board's main priority is increasing enrolment levels to ensure the ongoing viability of this two-teacher school. It plays a role in the consideration and ratification of the school plan. The development of a strategic plan to facilitate a cyclical approach to policy review is advised.
- The principal leads and manages the school competently and cultivates a collaborative and supportive school atmosphere. She is a reflective practitioner who maintains a clear focus on promoting ongoing improvements in teaching and learning. She leads by example through her engagement in continuous professional development. She is supported by the hard-working special-duties teacher who undertakes a range of assigned duties capably. The results from the Inspectorate questionnaire indicate that all parents are happy with the work of the school.
- The school and grounds are maintained to a high standard and are enhanced through attractive displays of the pupils' work. A very good range of resources is employed to support teaching and learning and a majority of pupils indicate that they use computers regularly. The ancillary staff effectively support the work of the school.
- The quality of relationships and home-school communication is very good. Parent questionnaires demonstrate that all parents believe that the school is welcoming of parents and that there is a good school atmosphere. Parents are very supportive of the work of the school and help out in a number of practical ways. In particular, their work on the development of the school garden and its use as a learning resource are commended. To build on this good work, the board of management should seek to develop ways of including parents to a greater extent in the whole-school planning process.
- The quality of pupil behaviour is excellent. The school's supportive and familial atmosphere effectively facilitates the development of their self-confidence and self-belief. Pupils are considerate and respectful in their interactions with school personnel and their peers. The school's involvement in the *Green Schools* initiative successfully promotes articulation of pupil voice.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- The quality of whole-school planning is generally good and curriculum plans and a range of organisational policies are in place. While some plans are very detailed, greater clarity of programme content in curriculum plans will support the incremental development of pupils' learning.
- Each teacher provides long-term and short-term planning which reflects the multiple-class contexts in the school. The adoption of a school-wide thematic approach to planning is praised. To optimise the impact of planning on pupils' learning, clearer links between planning and practice are needed. Learning objectives should clearly identify the intended learning outcomes for pupils and their skill development. In addition, greater levels of planned differentiation are required in order to respond effectively to the breadth of pupils' abilities in evidence at each class level.
- The principal and staff have made a good start to the school's self-evaluation process. Their analysis of assessment data and evidence from teachers, pupils and parents have

resulted in a very accurate appraisal of the school's strengths and areas for development. In using the school self-evaluation framework, the identification of specific, measurable and realistic targets; the consistent implementation of agreed initiatives; and the systematic monitoring of their impact on pupils' learning will support improvements in literacy and numeracy.

- 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 is appropriate, with some very good practice in evidence. Features of best practice include, well structured and paced lessons, clear explanations, good use of resources and some suitably challenging differentiated learning opportunities. In their questionnaire responses, all pupils report that teachers explain things clearly. While active learning approaches were observed during the evaluation, more widespread use of active and collaborative learning methodologies is recommended to enhance the pupils' engagement levels and their independent learning skills.
- A number of suitable assessment approaches are used. Recent whole-school approaches to literacy assessment are praised and should be extended. The challenge for the school is to develop a whole-school approach to assessment for learning across the curriculum. In so doing, the information from assessment should be used systematically to inform the planning and delivery of programmes of work in line with the needs and abilities of individuals and groups of pupils. This is of particular importance given the mixed-ability nature of the pupil cohort. A greater emphasis should be placed on differentiation so that all pupils, including the more able, are appropriately challenged in their learning. Team teaching and group teaching are effectively used in some lessons to facilitate differentiated teaching and learning. This practice should be extended.
- Tá caighdeán Gaeilge na n-oidí le moladh. Déanann siad machnamh ar straitéisí spreagúla chun an Ghaeilge a chur chun cinn agus baineann siad úsáid chuí as raon acmhainní chun ábhar na gceachtanna a léiriú. Cé go bhfuil storfhocail sásúil ag formhór na ndaltaí agus léann siad le hiarracht mhacánta agus le tuiscint chuí, tá gnéithe le forbairt ina gcumas cumsarsáide. Moltar i bhfad níos mó béime a dhíriú ar thréimhse cumsarsáide na gceachtanna agus ábhar cinnte idir fhoclóir, fhrásaí agus struchtúir a chleachtadh go rianúil. B'fhiú deiseanna rialta a thabhairt do na daltaí páirt a ghlacadh i bhfíorchumarsáid. Moltar na scileanna teanga a chomhtháthú ar bhealach níos nádúrtha chun cabhrú leis an sealbhú teanga. Chuige sin, b'fhiú don scoil athbhreithniú a dhéanamh ar phleanáil sa Ghaeilge agus clár teagaisc córasach céimniúil do mhúineadh na Gaeilge a shoiléiriú.

The standard of teachers' Irish is commended. They consider motivating strategies to promote the language and make appropriate use of a range of resources to illustrate lesson content. While a majority of pupils have an appropriate vocabulary range and read with significant effort and suitable understanding, there is scope for development in their communicative abilities. It is recommended that greater attention be placed on the stages of lessons and that discrete vocabulary, phrased and language structures be taught incrementally. Regular opportunities for the pupils' engagement in real-life communication should be provided. To assist language acquisition, a more natural linkage of language skills is recommended. To this end, the school plan should be reviewed and a systematic, incremental teaching programme for Irish clarified.

- Teaching and learning in English has been identified as a current school self-evaluation priority. The introduction of a range of initiatives in the promotion of pupils' oral and comprehension skills, their reading fluency and their interest in reading is commended. Oral language activities are integrated appropriately across the curriculum and praiseworthy emphasis is placed on the recitation of poetry. While many pupils can discuss topics with confidence, they would benefit from additional opportunities to enhance their expressive language abilities. Most pupils believe they are doing well at reading. Some good use is made of a broad variety of reading material and many pupils read fluently and with suitable understanding. In order to enhance pupils' reading abilities, a whole-school approach to pupils' acquisition of a variety of reading skills is recommended. Some good examples of the pupils' writing in a range of genres are in evidence. To build on this work, the adoption of an incremental approach to the development of pupils' writing and editing skills is advised. To support improvements in pupils' learning, it is advised that the effective team-teaching approach to literacy used in some classes be employed more widely.
- There are a number of good aspects of teaching and learning in Mathematics. These include an emphasis on oral maths work, purposeful use of resources and the provision of active learning opportunities. Pupils engage in activities with interest and a majority believe they are doing well in Maths. While pupils demonstrate appropriate understanding during lessons, their ability to apply their knowledge and understanding needs to be enhanced. Additional emphasis on the development of pupils' problem-solving skills through the increased use of mental mathematical activities and active and collaborative learning methodologies is recommended. In order to cater for the range of pupil abilities, including the very able pupils, there is scope to develop further the use of assessment information to plan for and deliver differentiated programmes of work.
- Teaching, learning and pupil achievement in Music is very good. The curriculum strands are addressed in a comprehensive manner. Pupils participate in a wide range of activities, including performing, listening, responding and composition work and demonstrate good sense of pulse and pitch. They sing a range of songs with enthusiasm and instrumental performances are of a very high quality. The school's involvement in a local music project contributes to the provision of a broad musical experience for pupils.

6. Quality of Support for Pupils

- Ballintemple NS is an inclusive school and pupil care and wellbeing are of a very high standard.
- Provision for pupils with special educational needs is of a good standard. Lessons are well structured. Pupils participate positively in a variety of learning activities and their self-confidence is promoted purposefully. A number of screening and diagnostic tests are used in the identification of pupils in need of supplementary teaching. Education plans are prepared for all pupils in receipt of additional support in consultation with class teachers and parents. Pupils' progress is recorded and reviewed at regular intervals. The use of a more comprehensive range of diagnostic tests and resources to contribute to the setting, implementation and reviewing of specific targets for individual pupils is advised. In structuring support for pupils with additional learning needs, it is recommended that early intervention initiatives and well-structured, in-class team-teaching interventions be implemented in all classes.

Published March 2014

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 and staff of Ballintemple N.S. welcome the very positive findings and recommendations of the WSE.

We wish to thank the whole school community for their on-going dedication and commitment to our school.

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 recommendations are being implemented as part of a continuous, consistent process to further enhance the quality of teaching and learning in our school.