Whole School Evaluation REPORT

Scoil Náisiúnta Bhaile Aodha
Darragh, Ennis, Co. Clare
Uimhir rolla: 13418J

Date of inspection: 3 October 2011
1. Introduction

Scoil Náisiúnta Bhaile Aodha is a co-educational primary school operating under the patronage of the Catholic Bishop of Killaloe. The school is located in a rural setting approximately 10 kilometres south-east of Ennis. The school has seven mainstream class teachers, two support teachers and an administrative principal. The current enrolment, at 183 pupils, represents a significant increase on the figure enrolled on the occasion of the last school report in 2002. Attendance levels are very high.

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

- The principal has a dynamic and inclusive style of leadership and he maintains a very strong focus on pupils’ learning at all levels of the school.
- The teachers demonstrate exceptional commitment to teaching and to the welfare of pupils.
- The school receives sterling support from a highly effective board of management and a dedicated parents’ association.
- Pupils are exemplary in their behaviour and in the manner in which they co-operate with their teachers.
- The quality of teaching and learning in the areas evaluated is of a very high standard.
- The school is central to the life of the community.
- The school is well resourced and facilities are excellent.

The following **main recommendations** are made:

- The board should review current class allocation to ensure an equitable distribution of pupils in accordance with Circular 0019/2011.
- In the context of advancing school self-evaluation practices the setting of specific time-bound targets is recommended to enable the measurement of improvements in outcomes for pupils.
- Further development of the model of in-class support which is already used in the teaching of Mathematics is recommended in order to optimise the use of teaching resources and the effectiveness of the support provided to pupils.
3. Quality of School Management

- Scoil Bhaile Aodha has a highly effective board of management comprising members possessing a range of skills which are used to good effect in managing and supporting the work of the school. The recent completion of a state-of-the-art modern school building is a tribute to the endeavours of the board. Accounts are prudently managed, certified and notified to parents. The well-maintained records of the board provide ample evidence of its involvement in planning, policy review and ratification.

- The development of this school has been influenced by a culture of effective and visionary leadership. The current principal was appointed in February 2011 and in a short space of time he has demonstrated his capacity to lead and further enhance school performance. He is well supported by an experienced and skilled in-school management team who competently lead initiatives which have a good impact on teaching and learning. The co-operation of non post-holders in this work is acknowledged and valued.

- A plentiful supply of resources, including a library and interactive white boards, is provided to enhance teaching and learning. A policy for staff and classroom rotation was recently ratified by the board. The board needs to review current class allocation to ensure an equitable distribution of pupils in accordance with guidance provided in Circular 0019/2011.

- The management of pupils is very good and a constructive, happy learning environment is very much in evidence. Pupils are exemplary in their behaviour and their questionnaire responses indicate very positive attitudes to school.

- Analysis of questionnaire responses indicates that the overwhelming majority of parents feel that the school is well run, welcoming and proactive in involving parents, and that teaching is good and that their children are happy in school. An active and dedicated parents’ association promotes and supports a range of initiatives, including a book rental arrangement, that benefit the pupils. Communication with parents and the local community is regular and effective.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- The board of management has considered and ratified a range of administrative and curriculum plans which are of a very good quality. All teachers compile long-term plans, short-term plans and monthly progress reports. These plans are of a good quality, and in many instances teachers place good emphasis on documenting clear and measurable learning outcomes. The support teachers engage in appropriate planning to match pupils’ needs and their attention to detail in compiling and maintaining documentation is very good.

- Very good assessment strategies are used throughout the school. A broad range of data is gathered and used with effect to inform teaching and learning and to monitor the progress of all pupils. Some worthwhile strategies are used to encourage pupils to evaluate their own progress. In the mainstream classes, particular attention is paid to monitoring the progress of pupils who present with difficulties. Screening tests, standardised tests and diagnostic tests are used appropriately by the teachers. Every pupil is tested using the Cognitive Abilities Tests (CAT) to ensure that teaching and learning are appropriately matched to pupils’ levels of ability and receptiveness and that additional support is appropriately allocated.

- The school’s practices in self-evaluation are developing very well. At whole-school level school strengths and areas for improvement are identified and considered on
a cyclical basis. The outcomes of data gathering and analysis are used effectively to plan for improvements in literacy and numeracy. Priorities are identified in specific aspects of the broad curriculum and approaches agreed to implement change. In the context of advancing school self-evaluation practices the setting of specific time-bound targets is recommended to enable the measurement of improvements in outcomes for pupils.

- 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 overall quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement is very good. Teachers' commitment to providing engaging and innovative learning experiences for pupils through the use of a broad range of methods and high quality resources, including information and communications technology (ICT), is noteworthy. Assessment of and for learning are intrinsic to the practice of teachers. There is a commendable willingness to engage with professional development and to share good practice.

- Tá ardmholadh tuillte ag na hoidí as ucht a dtiomantas don teanga Ghaeilge agus an cur chuide cruthaitheach dearfach a úsáidtear i bhforbairt chumas cumarsáide na ndaltaí. Cloiseann na daltaí an Ghaeilge labhartha go flóirminic i rith an lae scoile agus tús úsáid na Gaeilge sna ranganna corpoideachais go hínholtach ach go háirithe. Múintear an teanga go spreagúil cumasach, trí bhéim ar leith a leagan ar ghníomhachtaí aititneamhacha, ar rian, amhráin, obair bheire agus sceití beaga. Glacann an scol páirt le bua i gcomórtas drámaíochta Ghaeilge agus i ngníomhachtaí eile dá sórt. Leann na daltaí go tuisceannach, liofa agus b'fhíûdeiseanna a thabhairt dòibh cleachtadh d'hál ar réimse níos leithne d'abhair léitheoireachta sa Ghaeilge. Leagtar beim stiarna ar thorbarcht chorasach na scileanna scríbhneoireachta agus brataoir eagsúlacht bhreá sa cleachtachta a dhéantar faoi theoir na n-oidi. Chuirfeadh breis cleachtachta sa saorscríbhneoireacht le luach ghné seo na hoibre.

The teachers deserve high praise for their commitment to the Irish language and the creative and positive approach adopted in the development of pupils’ communicative abilities. The pupils hear spoken Irish very frequently throughout the school day and the use of Irish in Physical Education classes is particularly praiseworthy. The language is taught in an encouraging and able manner by placing particular emphasis on enjoyable activities, on rhymes, songs, duologues and short sketches. The school participates successfully in Irish language drama competitions and other similar activities. The pupils read fluently and with understanding and should be given opportunities to experience a broader range of reading materials in Irish. The systematic development of pupils’ writing skills is prudently emphasised and a fine variety is noted in the teacher-guided teaching activities. This aspect of the work could be further enhanced through provision of more opportunities for free writing.

- English is very well taught at each class level. Commendable work is undertaken to develop pupils' oral language skills with very good emphasis placed on developing cognitive abilities through language. Lessons feature brainstorming, lively
discussions, high-quality multi-sensory activities and the use of very stimulating audio-visual presentations. At all class levels, teachers systematically address the development of reading skills and pupils' expressiveness and fluency when reading are most noteworthy. It is advised that pupils in the junior classes would benefit from the use of more language experience material. During the evaluation, some exemplary practice was noted in the explicit teaching and development of comprehension skills. The writing process is skillfully taught. Pupils’ written work in free writing, poetry and a range of other writing genres is very good. They demonstrate good understanding of the conventions of grammar and spelling. Pupils’ handwriting and presentation of work are of a very high standard.

- The quality of teaching and learning in Mathematics is highly commendable. Frequent opportunities are provided for pupils to explore concepts through talk and discussion in groups. Very effective direct instruction was observed incorporating high-quality questioning, consistent use of mathematical language and thorough consolidation of topics. The relevance of concepts to real-life situations is well explored. As a means of developing practice, it is recommended that further analysis of pupils’ test results be carried out. The information yielded can be used to inform differentiated teaching and interventions and to evaluate the effectiveness of particular interventions.

- The quality of teaching and learning in Physical Education is very good. There is evidence of a clear commitment to provide breadth and balance in the delivery of the strands of the curriculum. Lessons are characterised by very effective organisation of activities and high levels of pupil engagement. Pupils’ participation in classes indicates that they are progressing well in the acquisition of skills and in developing the knowledge and attitudes necessary to pursue active life styles. The teachers are also commended for encouraging and facilitating the involvement of both girls and boys in a significant programme of extracurricular sport and games.

6. Quality of Support for Pupils

- The inclusion, care and provision for pupils with special educational needs are most noteworthy. The school’s practices in supporting pupils are outlined in a comprehensive, well-considered policy. All through the school the staged approach to assessment, identification and programme planning is very carefully implemented. There is a high level of consultation with pupils’ parents.

- The selection of pupils for learning support is informed by the use of screening tests, standardised tests and astute teacher observations. In addition, the cognitive abilities test (CAT) is used to identify pupils who present with difficulties of a verbal, numerical and spatial nature.

- Two teachers are involved in the provision of learning support and resource teaching. Pupils are withdrawn from the mainstream classroom individually or in groups and while this is generally appropriate, it is advised that when pupils in senior classes require learning support, the model of in-class support should be favoured.

- Teaching methods and activities are very well matched to pupils’ specific needs and levels of receptiveness. Clearly defined learning targets are addressed and pupils’ progress is carefully monitored.

- In the infant classes, very well structured early intervention is provided to assist the development of pupils’ competencies in literacy. Learning activities and teaching are effectively differentiated for groups of pupils. There is scope for the school to extend this model of in-class support to the teaching of Mathematics in the middle
and senior classes, in order to further enhance the effectiveness of the support provided.
Appendix

SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

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

The BOM wishes to acknowledge the courtesy and professionalism of the inspectorate during their visit to Ballyea N.S. This report is a welcome affirmation of the good work and high standards in our school. The BOM would also like to acknowledge the dedication of the staff, the strong sense of community and the high level of co-operation among staff, parents and pupils within the 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 BOM and Staff have begun the process of reviewing the report in detail. It is intended to incorporate all WSE recommendations in the school’s strategic plan.