An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Scoil Mhuire
Ballyheane, Castlebar, Co. Mayo
Uimhir rolla: 13444K

Date of inspection: 22 September 2011
1. Introduction

Ballyheane NS is a co-educational rural school under the patronage of the Catholic Archbishop of Tuam. It is situated eight kilometres south-west of Castlebar, Co. Mayo. Currently there are sixty-one pupils enrolled. The school is very well maintained and very attractively presented.

This whole-school evaluation focused on the quality of teaching and learning in Gaeilge, English, Mathematics and Drama. 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 and staff are very committed to the school and ensure that the pupils are their fundamental concern at all times.
- There is a strong culture of co-operation and team-work evident in the school.
- Good standards of teaching and learning were observed in all classrooms.
- Very effective practices in the teaching of English ensure that pupil achievement is very good.
- Useful whole-school approaches have been developed in assessing and tracking pupil progress.
- Pupils are courteous and polite and engage well with their learning.
- Parents are enthusiastic in their support of the school.

The following main recommendations are made:

- The board of management should be constituted in accordance with the Rule 6(a) of Constitution of Boards and Rules of Procedure for Boards of Management of National Schools. To comply with Rule 13(a), it should hold not fewer than five meetings per school year.
- In Mathematics, greater use should be made of group work and learning activities should be matched to pupils’ ability levels.
- There should be a greater focus on oral Mathematics and more frequent revision of topics covered.
- Ba chóir go gcuirfí ar chumas na daltaí fíorchumsáid a dhéanamh trí Ghaeilge. *Pupils should be enabled to communicate in Irish.*
3. Quality of School Management

- At the time of the evaluation the board of management was not properly constituted. This is because the treasurer of the board is employed as the school secretary and as such is not eligible to sit on the board. The board should be constituted in accordance with Rule 6(a) of the Constitution of Boards and Rules of Procedure for Boards of Management of National Schools. As required by Rule 13(a), the board should meet for a minimum of five meetings per year. The board has recently engaged in the analysis of test data. This initiative is commended.

- The principal works enthusiastically and diligently and is highly praised for her dedication to the school community. She is ably supported by the deputy principal. At present the in-school management team operates on an informal basis. It is recommended that the posts of responsibility be reviewed to ensure that a greater emphasis is placed on curricular leadership.

- The quality of the management of resources is good. Classrooms are very well resourced and effective use is made of the wide range of teaching and learning resources available within the school.

- Relationships between parents and teachers are open and welcoming. In their responses to questionnaires administered as part of this evaluation, all parents feel that the school welcomes them and they express a high level of satisfaction with the school. A very attractive school website is used effectively to communicate with parents.

- The management of pupils in this school is very effective. Pupils are eager to participate in their lessons and are courteous and pleasant in their interactions with each other and with adults. Their responses in the pupil questionnaires indicate a very high level of pupil satisfaction with the school.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- The quality of the school planning and school self-evaluation process is good. Administrative policies are clear and well-written. Useful curricular policies provide clear guidance on the implementation of the curriculum. These policies should be made available to parents. The school has recently engaged in the analysis of test data and has begun the process of school self-evaluation.

- All teachers provide satisfactory individual classroom planning. An agreed format for recording progress should be devised and curriculum objectives achieved should be recorded.

- 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, learning and pupil achievement is good. Teachers work diligently and are well prepared to deliver interesting and stimulating lessons. Classrooms are very attractively presented and there is a strong sense of order and efficiency throughout. In order to cater more effectively for the varying learning needs of pupils, group work should be utilised in all classes, particularly for English and Mathematics.

- Tá cáilíocht mhaith bainte amach i nGaeilge. Tá Gaeilge chruinn líofa ag na hoidí agus múnéann siad na ceachtanna le spraoi. Léirionn na daltaí caighdeán maith i dtuisiúnt na teanga ach tá gá le forbairt i labhairt na Gaeilge. Moltar níos mó béime a chur ar an gcúigiúr cumarsáide agus níos mó deiseanna a thabhairt do na leanaí cumarsáide a dhéanamh i nGaeilge. Baintearúsáid mhaith as an nGaeilge mar theanga bhainistíochta i ngach seomra.

A good standard is achieved in Irish. The teachers speak Irish fluently and accurately and they teach lessons enthusiastically. The pupils demonstrate a good standard in understanding Irish but there is scope for development in the area of spoken Irish. It is advised that a greater emphasis be placed on the communicative approach and that more opportunities to converse in Irish be provided for the pupils. Irish was used effectively as the language for classroom management in all classrooms.

- The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in English is very good, as is reflected in recent standardised test results. Throughout the school, structures have been put in place to encourage pupils to read for pleasure. Very effective strategies are in place in the infant classes to develop pre-reading skills and to improve pupils’ command of phonics. Pupils’ written work is very attractively presented.

- The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in Mathematics is good and many pupils demonstrate a good grasp of basic concepts. However, during the evaluation it was evident that some pupils are in need of a more targeted approach to the teaching of Mathematics. To this end, greater use should be made of group work and learning activities should be matched to pupils’ ability levels. Greater emphasis should be placed on oral Mathematics, with frequent revision of topics previously covered. It is recommended that an agreed whole-school strategy be devised for problem solving.

- Very effective practice was observed in Drama. Lessons were well managed and there was a strong emphasis on enhancing pupils’ self-confidence and the development of oral language. Pupils engaged well with the lessons and a high level of enjoyment was observed.

- Some very effective whole-school approaches to assessment were observed during the course of the evaluation. Comprehensive pupil profiles have been developed and individual pupil attainments in literacy and numeracy are tracked year on year.

6. Quality of Support for Pupils

- Support for pupils with special educational needs is implemented effectively. Good quality individual education plans have been devised. Targets are well chosen and are derived from the specialist reports available. Copies of these plans should be provided to parents.

- A satisfactory standard is achieved in the learning activities that are provided in special education settings. Activities are carefully chosen to ensure that they meet pupils’
individual needs. Good systems for collaboration with mainstream teachers have been developed.

- Some in-class supports have been put in place. These include early intervention programmes in the infant classes and some team teaching of Mathematics. It is recommended that these strategies be reviewed to ensure that the most effective use possible is made of the available resources.

- The quality of home-school partnership is very good. Parents are supportive of the school and their involvement in their children’s education is actively encouraged.
Appendix

SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

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

The Staff and Board of Management of Ballyheane N.S. are very pleased with this affirming report. We would like to acknowledge the courtesy and fairness shown by the inspector during the evaluation process.

Area 2  Follow-up actions planned or undertaken since the completion of the inspection activity to implement the findings and recommendations of the inspection.

Since the inspection of our school the Board of Management have already commenced working on the recommendations made in this report.