

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**

**Department of Education and Skills**

**Whole School Evaluation  
Management, Leadership and Learning**

**REPORT**

**St Patrick's National School  
Ballaghlea, Ballygar, Co. Galway  
Uimhir rolla: 14383V**

**Date of inspection: 16 October 2013**



## Whole-School Evaluation – Management, Leadership and Learning Report

### Introduction

A Whole-School Evaluation – Management, Leadership and Learning (WSE - MLL) was undertaken in St Patrick's National School, Ballaghlea, Ballygar, Co. Galway in October 2013. This report is based on a selection of lessons observed in the learning settings in the school, interaction with pupils and review of their work, meetings with the principal and with the board and parent representatives, completed parent and pupil questionnaires, and a selection of school documents. 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.

St Patrick's is a rural school operating under the patronage of the Catholic Bishop of Elphin. The staff comprises the principal, three assistant teachers, a shared learning-support teacher and a shared resource teacher, a special-needs assistant, a part-time secretary and a part-time cleaner. Enrolments have increased significantly over the past three years and this upward trend is expected to continue. The accommodation throughout the school building is in need of upgrading and extension in light of this growth.

The school has **strengths** in the following areas:

- The thoughtful, dynamic leadership of the principal fosters a strong collaborative work ethic among the staff and pupils.
- Very high standards of teaching were observed in all settings, and very good use was made of available resource materials and the local environment to support teaching and learning.
- School records indicate that overall learning outcomes for pupils, including pupils with special educational needs, are very good and in line with pupil ability.
- Staff members are making good progress in the school self-evaluation process and a culture of reflection and review is being developed effectively.
- The board of management demonstrates a strong commitment to the development of the school.

The following **recommendations** are made:

- The board of management should consider the accommodation needs of the school in light of increasing enrolments.
- The board should issue an annual report to inform the wider school community on matters relating to the operation and performance of the school.
- Individual education plans should contain specific learning targets set within a realistic timeframe and pupils' progress towards attaining these targets should be monitored and recorded.
- Improved arrangements should be put in place to inform parents of the school policy on relationships and sexuality education.

### Findings

#### 1. The learning achievements of pupils

- The overall learning achievements of pupils are very good. Pupils engaged very conscientiously with the range of learning tasks provided and they were enabled to work collaboratively and to very good effect on a variety of tasks across a range of curriculum areas.
- Learning outcomes for literacy and numeracy are highly commendable as is reflected, for example, in the most recent standardised test results in English and Mathematics,

in samples of pupils' work reviewed and in the oral examination of pupils during the evaluation.

- Most lessons observed included planned elements of discrete oral language teaching and this approach is commendable. Pupils can use a variety of strategies to interpret text. Samples of their work indicate that they explore a range of genres and write for a variety of audiences. Overall, the content and presentation of their written work is highly commendable.
- Maidir le litearthacht sa Ghaeilge, is léir ón obair ó bhéal go gcuirtear béim inmholta ar an gcumarsáid agus go bhfuil dearcadh dearfach agus suim na ndaltaí a gcothú go héifeachtach. Léann formhór na ndaltaí go cumasach agus le brí. Tugtar deiseanna dóibh abairtí iomlána agus scéalta phearsanta a scríobh go rialta. B'fhiú machnamh a dhéanamh ar thrialacha caighdeánaithe a úsáid chun gnóthachtáil na ndaltaí sa Ghaeilge a thomhas ó bhliain go bliain.
- *With regard to literacy in Irish, it is evident from pupils' oral work that the communicative approach is well emphasised and that positive attitudes and pupils' interest are effectively developed. The majority of pupils read capably and meaningfully. They are enabled to write full sentences and personal stories frequently. Consideration should be given to using standardised test to measure pupil achievement in Irish from year to year.*
- Pupils display very good understanding of mathematical skills and concepts. They are adept at solving mathematical problems and they engaged competently with the challenges posed to develop their skill and competence during the lessons observed.

## **2. Quality of teaching**

- The overall quality of teaching is very good. It is evident that teachers give careful consideration to planning learning activities to meet the needs of different ability levels.
- The learning environment in mainstream classrooms and in the support settings is print-rich, attractively presented and stimulating. Teachers make very effective use of a wide variety of approaches and resource materials to support teaching and learning in a suitably challenging manner. Very good use is made of the local environment and pupils' real-life experiences in many aspects of the curriculum.
- The whole-school cross-curricular approach to the teaching of literacy and numeracy is highly commendable.
- Supplementary teaching is provided both in mainstream classrooms and on a withdrawal basis. There is effective communication between the class teachers and the support teachers and they ensure that there is continuity and progression in the programmes of work planned. Individual education plans should contain more specific learning targets and pupils' progress towards attaining these targets should be monitored and recorded.
- The willingness of teachers to share their skills and to work creatively and collaboratively to overcome the challenges posed by the lack of space in most classrooms is praiseworthy.

## **3. Support for pupils' wellbeing**

- Classroom management is highly effective and pupils are very well cared for and supported. There is a strong emphasis on the holistic development of pupils and on their pastoral care. During the evaluation pupil behaviour was exemplary and in the questionnaires administered almost all pupils reported that they get on well with other children and they feel safe in the school.
- Evidence was provided to confirm that the school is compliant with child protection requirements.
- Almost all parents expressed the view that the school is welcoming of parents, that they are satisfied with arrangements for parent-teacher meetings and that, overall, they are happy with the school. Parents also highlight the need to have details of the school policy on relationships and sexuality education clarified.

- The ancillary staff makes a valuable contribution to the school and to the supports available for pupils.

#### **4. Leadership and Management**

- The board of management deals effectively with the overall management of the school. The board is properly constituted, meets regularly and maintains minutes. It is recommended that the board issue an annual report to inform the wider school community on matters relating to the operation and performance of the school.
- The principal has a clear vision for the growth and development of the school. She is successfully leading policy formulation and contributes significantly to the strategic development of the school.
- The attractively presented and frequently updated school web site serves as a very good example of the various approaches that are used to manage effective on-going home-school communication. Parental questionnaire responses indicate that parents wish to have their views sought more regularly on school matters. The school should consider how to facilitate meaningful liaison between the parent representatives on the board and the wider parent body. The establishment of a Parents' Association could assist in this regard.

#### **5. School Self-evaluation**

- Records indicate that the school has sought the views of parents, pupils and teachers in establishing a broad evidence base for its school self-evaluation process. A school improvement plan has been drafted in line with Circular 39/2012 and specific targets for improvement have been set.
- Teaching, learning and pupil achievement are considered to some extent at board meetings and it is anticipated that these aspects will receive greater focus by the board as part of its ongoing engagement in SSE.

### **Conclusion**

The school's capacity to develop further and to engage in school improvement is very good.

# **Appendix**

**SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT**

**Submitted by the Board of Management**

**Area 1 Observations on the content of the inspection report**

The board welcomes the affirmation of the many positive practices that exist in 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 Board of Management acknowledge the recommendations made in the report. The school is committed to a culture of continuous development, and recommendations made will be phased in on a continuous basis.