

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

**Whole School Evaluation
REPORT**

**Ballaghkeene National School
Ballaghkeene, Enniscorthy, Co. Wexford
Uimhir rolla:146680**

Date of inspection: 25 March 2010



WHOLE-SCHOOL EVALUATION

A whole-school evaluation of Ballaghkeene NS was undertaken in March 2010. This report presents the findings of the evaluation and makes recommendations for improvement. The evaluation focused on the quality of teaching and learning in English, Irish, Mathematics and Physical Education. The board of management was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the evaluation, and the response of the board will be found in the appendix to this report.

INTRODUCTION – SCHOOL CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

Ballaghkeene NS is a six-teacher, Catholic school. It caters for the educational needs of boys and girls from junior infants to sixth class, with the majority of pupils being drawn from the immediate environs of the school. A small increase in pupil enrolment figures is in evidence in recent years. While Ballaghkeene is a rural area, the pupils' parents have a variety of occupational backgrounds. The school participates in the Department's *Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools* programme (DEIS). As part of this initiative, the school has successfully implemented a series of measures to improve pupil attendance levels. The school is now advised to formulate a formal pupil attendance strategy which would incorporate the school's established good practices.

The following table provides an overview of the enrolment and staffing in the school at the time of the evaluation:

	Number
Pupils enrolled in the school	98
Mainstream classes in the school	4
Teachers on the school staff	6
Mainstream class teachers	4
Teachers working in support roles	1 full-time 1 part-time
Rural Schools' Coordinator	1 shared
Special needs assistants	1 full-time 1 part-time

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT

1.1 Characteristic spirit, mission or vision

In its ethos statement, Ballaghkeene NS expresses its commitment to promoting a happy, safe and friendly learning environment in which each child is encouraged to fulfil his or her potential. A strong emphasis is placed on the promotion of relationships between teachers and pupils and on the cultivation of a caring and hardworking school atmosphere. This characteristic spirit was manifest in the course of the whole-school evaluation in the range of school activities observed and in the positive interactions between teachers, pupils and their peers.

1.2 Board of management

The board of management functions productively and contributes positively to the successful operation of the school. The board is properly constituted and meets on a regular basis. Minutes of meetings are maintained and accounts of expenditure are externally audited. A variety of roles and responsibilities are undertaken and completed diligently by individual board members. The board is commended for its role in the ongoing development and maintenance of the school building and grounds, and for its provision of educational resources to support teaching and learning. The board plays a contributory role in the consideration and ratification of curriculum plans and organisational policies. In this context, it is recommended that the school's enrolment policy and code of behaviour be reviewed to ensure that they are in full compliance with pertinent legislation. It is further advised that all plans and policies be formally signed and dated by the chairperson on ratification by the board. Positive relations between the board and school staff, parents and the local community are reported.

1.3 In-school management

The in-school management team comprises the principal, the deputy principal and one special-duties teacher. The principal manages the work of the school capably. He cultivates a positive school climate and promotes a culture of teamwork and collaborative decision-making. He leads and manages the whole-school planning process. Under his direction, a number of priorities for development have been identified and addressed that have resulted in improvements in teaching and learning, and in the pupils' behaviour and participation. The principal is ably assisted by the deputy principal and the special-duties teacher. They undertake their assigned responsibilities with diligence and they make a positive contribution to the quality of school provision. In order to ensure that these allocated duties are continually responsive to the evolving priorities of the school, it is recommended that they be formally reviewed on a cyclical basis. The reintroduction of regular, formal meetings of the in-school management team is also advised. In so doing, priority should be given to using these meetings as a vehicle for progressing the school's curriculum-based priorities and for evaluating the effectiveness of curriculum implementation.

1.4 Management of relationships and communication with the school community

Ballaghkeene NS is commended for its continual development of positive relationships with parents and the wider school community. The production of a school booklet, the hosting of open evenings and the implementation of practices to support the induction of junior infant pupils all serve to familiarise parents with the work of the school and the role they can play in supporting their child's learning. In the context of the significant development of the school's information and communication technology (ICT) resources, consideration might now be given to the establishment of a school website. Parents are kept informed of ongoing school events through the issuing of frequent newsletters. They are provided with regular opportunities to discuss their children's progress through formal and informal parent-teacher meetings. Written reports on pupils' progress are issued annually.

The parents' association, which is affiliated to the National Parents' Council, is strongly committed to supporting the work of the school. The association operates effectively and plays an active role in a wide range of pertinent school activities including co-curricular and extra-curricular activities, school celebrations and events, and fundraising initiatives to provide additional school resources. The parents' association is praised for its innovative programme of activities, its ongoing commitment to assisting parents to support their children's learning, and for the quality of communication it maintains with the broader parent community. It is recommended

that the commitment of the parents' association and parents generally be utilised more fully in whole-school policy formulation and review.

1.5 Management of pupils

The pupils of Ballaghkeene NS are valued members of the school community and are treated with equality, fairness and respect. The welfare needs of pupils, including those pupils with specific learning, emotional or social needs are managed effectively and the pupils' holistic development is nurtured. In the main, the pupils are eager and motivated in their learning and participate enthusiastically in the range of curricular, co-curricular and extra-curricular activities. They cooperate with the school's rules, code of behaviour and initiatives to prevent bullying. Some opportunities are provided for the pupils to play an active role in relevant decision-making, for example through their involvement in the *Green Schools* initiative. The provision of further opportunities to consult pupils about education issues in a manner that is appropriate to their age and level of maturity would be beneficial.

2. QUALITY OF SCHOOL PLANNING

2.1 Whole-school and classroom planning

Overall, the quality of whole-school planning is of a suitable standard. Curriculum plans for each area of the curriculum and a wide range of organisational policies have been devised collaboratively by the principal and teaching staff, with some input from the board of management. A DEIS plan has been prepared to address the priority areas of literacy, numeracy, attendance, parental involvement and ICT. Parents are provided with access to all elements of the school plan and pertinent sections are communicated directly to parents through the school information booklet. The curriculum plans for English and Mathematics have recently been reviewed and updated. In order to maximise the impact of curriculum planning on teaching and learning throughout the school, it is recommended that an action-planning approach be more widely implemented to address identified curriculum priorities. It is further advised that the implementation of all curriculum plans and organisational policies be formally monitored on a cyclical basis.

Each teacher engages in long-term and short-term planning to guide their teaching. Overall, individual teachers' long-term planning is of a good standard. A review of the whole-school format for short-term planning is recommended. The approach currently in use does not facilitate adequate consideration of the intended learning outcomes for pupils and the manner in which learning activities are to be differentiated. In so doing, it is further advised that the format for recording monthly progress in learning be reconsidered. Such records should provide a clear overview of the key learning outcomes achieved by pupils and should be prepared and submitted by all teachers.

2.2 Child protection policy and procedures

Confirmation was provided that, in compliance with Primary Circular 0061/2006, the board of management has formally adopted the *Child Protection Guidelines for Primary Schools* (Department of Education and Science, September 2001). Confirmation was also provided 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.

3. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

3.1 Language

Gaeilge

Ar an iomlán, cuireann na hoidí an t-ábhar foghlama sna ceachtanna Gaeilge i láthair go spreagúil. I roinnt de na ranganna, baineann caighdeán cuí le cur i láthair na gceachtanna agus baintear úsáid as raon breá straitéisí oiriúnacha. Múintear foclóir, frásaí agus feidhmeanna teanga chun cur ar chumas na ndaltaí cumarsáid a dhéanamh. Sna ranganna seo, éiríonn le cuid mhaith de na daltaí iad féin a chur in iúl, ag úsáid teanga atá in oiriúint dá n-aois, le linn ghníomhaíochtaí cumarsáide. Níor mhiste i roinnt ranganna eile áfach struchtúr níos éifeachtúla a chur ar na ceachtanna chun a chinntiú go bhfuil forbairt á déanamh ar fhoghlaim na ndaltaí ó sheachtain go seachtain. Is gá freisin eiseamláirí nua teanga a theagasc go rialta agus dul siar ar a bhfuil múinte cheana féin chun go mbeidh an cumas ag na daltaí cumarsáid leanúnach a dhéanamh go neamhspleách. I ngach rang, moltar tuilleadh deiseanna cainte a thabhairt do na daltaí lena líofacht a fhorbairt chun cur lena gcumas fhíorchumarsáide. Bunaítear cuid mhaith den obair ar ábhar na dtéacsleabhar. Moltar aithbhreithniú a dhéanamh ar an bplean scoile agus scileanna teanga níos soiléire, bunaithe ar na téamaí, a leagan amach do gach rang mar threoir do na hoidí i múineadh na Gaeilge. Aithrisíonn daltaí i bhformhór na ranganna rainn, dánta agus amhráin go han-soiléir agus le dea-fhoghraíocht.

Léann mionlach daltaí le líofacht oiriúnach sna meánranganna agus sna hardranganna. Is gá aird a dhíriú sa bhreis ar dhea-fhoghraíocht agus ar scileanna léitheoireachta a fhorbairt go córasach. B'fhiú freisin grúpobair a chleachtadh chun tascanna léitheoireachta a chur in oiriúint do chumais éagsúla na ndaltaí. Is fiú machnamh a dhéanamh chomh maith ar éagsúlacht ábhar léitheoireachta a sholáthar agus a úsáid ag gach rang leibhéal. Cleachtann na daltaí scríbhneoireacht fheidhmiúil don chuid is mó ach tugtar roinnt deiseanna dóibh scríbhneoireacht phearsanta a chumadh. B'fhiú níos mó deiseanna scríbhneoireachta a chruthú chun taithí a thabhairt do na daltaí ar théacsanna éagsúla a chumadh. Moltar chomh maith na tascanna a dhifreálú chun freastal a dhéanamh ar chumais éagsúla na ndaltaí agus úsáid sa bhreis a bhaint as scafláil ón oide.

Irish

In the main, lesson content in Irish is presented in a stimulating manner. In some classes, lessons are implemented in a suitable manner and the teachers utilise a good range of appropriate teaching strategies. Vocabulary, phrases and language functions are taught as a means of developing the pupils' competence to communicate. In these classes, a significant number of the pupils communicate successfully during oral-language activities using age-appropriate language. In other classes, the more effective structuring of lesson implementation is recommended to ensure continual progress in the learning outcomes being achieved by the pupils. It is advised that new language structures are introduced regularly and that previously learned structures are revised so as to facilitate the pupils to engage in independent, extended communication. In all classes, it is advised that the pupils be provided with increased opportunities to develop their fluency and their ability to engage in authentic dialogue. Much of the lesson activity is based on the content of the textbooks in use. It is recommended that the school plan be reviewed, and that the language skills for each class, based on the curriculum themes, be laid out clearly as an aid to the teachers in implementing the Irish programme. In a majority of classes, the pupils recite a range of rhymes, poems and songs very clearly and with accurate pronunciation.

In middle and senior classes, a minority of pupils read with appropriate fluency. It is recommended that additional attention be afforded to the systematic development of reading skills and correct pronunciation. It is advised that reading groups be implemented to ensure that reading activities accommodate the range of pupil ability levels. The provision and use of a wider range of reading material at each class level should be considered. In the main, the pupils engage in writing tasks of a functional nature, with some opportunities for engagement in personal writing activities. It is recommended that the pupils be provided with greater opportunities to experience a variety of writing genres. The differentiation and scaffolding of writing tasks is advised to accommodate the pupils' differing levels of competence.

English

Overall, teaching and learning in English is of a suitable standard. The pupils' oral language competence is developed through reading and writing activities and, in some instances, through the use of discrete oral language lessons. While a majority of the pupils express themselves with suitable confidence and competence, there is scope for development with regard to the expressive language competence of a sizeable minority of the pupils. In order to develop all pupils' expressive language competence sufficiently, it is recommended that discrete oral language lessons, that address the specific curriculum objectives across a range of pertinent contexts, be implemented persistently at each class level. In so doing, the pupils' listening and speaking skills should be fostered, in tandem with their ability to engage constructively with the views and opinions of their peers. The pupils are exposed to a fitting range of rhyme and poetry. In most class contexts, they recite preferred poems with laudable expression and intonation.

The school is commended for its systematic development of the pupils' reading competence. Due attention is given consistently to the development of the pupils' phonological and phonemic awareness, word-attack skills and reading strategies. A breadth of approaches including large-format books, shared-reading initiatives, reading schemes, parallel readers, in-class parent/teacher interventions, peer-reading projects, class novels and classroom libraries is employed successfully. Most pupils read with fluency and appropriate understanding. Increased attention to the promotion of the pupils' higher order comprehension skills when interrogating shared and personal reading material would be beneficial.

The pupils' letter formation and handwriting skills are duly developed in infant classes. As they progress through the school, the quality of the presentation of their written work is of a variable standard and would benefit from greater consistency of approach at a schoolwide level. Appropriate attention is paid to the development of the pupils' functional writing skills. Some praiseworthy examples of the pupils' engagement with a range of writing genres are in evidence in individual classrooms. It is recommended that the pupils be exposed regularly to the breadth of writing genres and that they be afforded opportunities to write for a variety of purposes and audiences. It is further advised that a more systematic approach to the pupils' formal engagement in a process approach to writing be implemented.

3.2 Mathematics

The quality of teaching in Mathematics is good and a suitably broad programme of learning is implemented at each class level. A positive attitude to Mathematics is cultivated among the pupils through the implementation of a variety of school-based interventions including *Maths for Fun*. The pupils explore a wide range of mathematical concepts through well-structured talk and discussion and the use of an appropriate range of mathematical equipment. The pupils are introduced to and use appropriate mathematical language and the quality of teacher questioning to

consolidate their understanding is lauded. In some classroom settings, the pupils' estimation and problem-solving skills are fostered skilfully, in tandem with the purposeful use of the environment and real-life contexts. It is recommended that these approaches be implemented more consistently on a schoolwide basis. While taking account of the range of pupil abilities, variable levels of achievement in Mathematics are in evidence. Although a majority of the pupils are progressing at an appropriate pace in each of the strand areas, lower-level learning outcomes are being achieved by a considerable number of the pupils. It is recommended that the pupils' acquisition of discrete concepts be monitored more systematically and that greater levels of differentiated teaching be engaged in at individual classroom level. In so doing, particular attention should be afforded to reinforcing the pupils' mental mathematics and computational skills.

3.3 Physical Education

Teaching and learning in Physical Education is of a high quality. While the school does not presently have access to a general purposes room, effective use is made of its outdoor and community-based facilities to ensure the implementation of a broad and balanced physical education programme. Lessons in Physical Education are well designed, implemented and resourced. They serve to develop the pupils' diversity of physical skills and to consolidate the acquisition of these skills through well-structured, team-based activities. The teachers are praised for taking due account of the pupils' differing abilities in designing and implementing lessons and for ensuring a continual progression in their skill levels. As a consequence, the pupils engage very positively in the range of physical activities and high levels of cooperation and enjoyment are in evidence. In implementing the physical education programme, pupils from second to sixth classes access a sustained period of aquatics training annually. The school accesses the support of external tutors to assist in the implementation of aspects of the gymnastics strand and in the promotion of Gaelic games. Parents and members of the wider school community also assist productively in the implementation of the physical education programme. The school's continual commitment to promoting the pupils' physical fitness is celebrated through its *Active School Week* and annual sports day. The pupils are facilitated to participate in a wide range of extra-curricular activities and competitions, including camogie, hurling, football, handball, rounders and basketball. The voluntary commitment and sharing of expertise by individual teachers in providing the pupils with access to this variety of contact and non-contact sports is highly praised.

3.4 Assessment

In all classrooms, the teachers employ a range of assessment modes to evaluate the progress of individual pupils and in most instances such assessment is confined to the curriculum areas of English and Mathematics. These approaches include teacher observation, checklists, language/literacy benchmarks, work samples and teacher-generated and commercially produced tests. The pupils' written work is assessed regularly and in some classroom contexts constructive written feedback is provided for pupils. Standardised assessment in English and Mathematics is administered annually to pupils from first to sixth classes. The progress of senior infant pupils in English is also monitored annually through the use of a screening assessment. The school is commended for facilitating the training of parents to engage in early-intervention follow-through with their children in response to this assessment. In order to ensure the implementation of purposeful assessment practices at a schoolwide level, it is recommended that the school devise a whole-school assessment policy. Policy and practice should ensure that due cognisance is taken of the full range of assessment strategies, including formative and more pupil-directed assessment approaches. In turn, the results of such assessment should be reviewed systematically and used to ensure more effective differentiation at individual classroom level.

4. QUALITY OF SUPPORT FOR PUPILS

4.1 Pupils with special educational needs

A series of policies to guide provision for pupils with special educational needs (SEN) has been devised and is currently operational. It is recommended that existing policies be incorporated into a single policy statement that takes full account of more recent departmental circulars and guidelines and established good practice in this area. In particular, the inclusion and schoolwide implementation of the staged approach to assessment, identification and programme planning, as per the provisions of Circular 02/05, are advised. Consideration should also be given to the appointment of a designated SEN coordinator to oversee provision. Supplementary teaching for pupils with SEN is currently structured almost exclusively on a pupil withdrawal basis. This provision is well organised and implemented, and is of a high standard. It is recommended that the school now deploy SEN personnel to ensure that adequate provision is made for prevention, early intervention and in-class support measures. This should be accompanied by the introduction of greater provision for pupils with additional learning needs in Mathematics. The restructuring of SEN caseloads will necessitate a review of the school's current procedures for the selection of pupils for supplementary teaching.

Informative individual education plans (IEPs) are prepared for pupils in receipt of supplementary teaching. The learning targets identified for individual pupils are appropriately specific and take due account of the outcomes of school-based diagnostic assessment and externally produced assessment reports. The IEPs are used effectively to plan and implement intervention programmes and to monitor individual pupils' progress. Lesson provision for pupils with SEN is well structured and implemented. The learning activities take due account of the specific learning needs of the pupils concerned and are executed in a proficient and well-resourced manner. Teacher-pupil interactions are encouraging and supportive and they serve to promote the pupils' academic self-concept. Positive pupil progress in the achievement of their intended learning goals is in evidence. Regular opportunities are provided for consultation with class teachers and the parents of pupils in receipt of supplementary teaching. The work of the special needs assistants, under the direction of class teachers, contributes significantly to the inclusion of pupils with SEN. The SEN teaching team are commended for their regular availing of continuing professional development opportunities for the benefit of their pupils with SEN.

4.2 Other supports for pupils: disadvantaged, minority and other groups

The pupils in Ballaghkeene NS experience being educated in a welcoming and inclusive school environment. They are facilitated to participate in all aspects of school life and its associated activities. The school's commitment to the care and welfare of all its pupils is commended. As part of the school's participation in the Department's DEIS programme, a number of innovative interventions are being implemented to encourage the pupils to realise their full potential and to assist their parents in supporting their children's participation in education. The work of the rural schools' coordination service is praised for the effective links it has developed with parents and for its facilitation of parents' participation in a variety of meetings, courses and activities that empower them to actively support their children's learning. The direct involvement of parents in a range of school-based initiatives to progress the pupils' achievement in literacy and numeracy is praised. Also noteworthy is the school's implementation of a tailored programme for senior pupils to support their transition and induction into post-primary school.

5. CONCLUSION

The school has strengths in the following areas:

- Ballaghkeene NS is characterised by a strong sense of community, an ethos of caring and belonging, and a commitment to the welfare of pupils.
- The principal and teaching staff are committed to the pupils and the school and undertake their work in a spirit of teamwork and cooperation.
- The operation of the school is enhanced significantly by the work of the board of management, the parents' association and the support of parents generally.
- Overall, the pupils engage with commendable enthusiasm in their learning.
- The quality of teaching and learning in Physical Education is of a high standard.
- Parents are empowered to actively support their children's learning through involvement in innovative, school-based initiatives under the auspices of the rural schools' coordination scheme.

The following key recommendations are made in order to further improve the quality of education provided by the school:

- It is recommended that an action-planning approach be implemented to address whole-school curriculum priorities.
- The methodologies and strategies currently in use in the teaching of Irish should be augmented to ensure that all pupils' competence to speak, read and write through the medium of Irish is developed in a coherent and systematic manner.
- The pupils' oral language competence in English should be promoted through the schoolwide provision of regular, discrete oral language lessons that are founded on the primary curriculum objectives.
- The learning needs of lower achieving pupils in Mathematics should be addressed through the systematic monitoring of their acquisition of discrete mathematical concepts and the provision of greater levels of differentiated teaching at individual classroom level.
- The range of modes in use to assess the progress of individual pupils should be extended to incorporate more formative and pupil-directed assessment approaches.
- Provision for pupils with special educational needs should be expanded to include the deployment of SEN personnel to provide increased prevention, early-intervention and in-class support.

Post-evaluation meetings were held with the staff and the board of management where the draft findings and recommendations of the evaluation were presented and discussed.

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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 the school staff wishes to thank the D.E.S. inspector for her professional approach to the W.S.E. in Ballagheene N.S.

The Board appreciates the recognition that:

- There is a strong sense of community and an ethos of caring in the school.
- The principal and teachers are committed to the pupils and the school.
- The work of the Board, parents and rural schools co-ordinator contributes significantly to the school.
- The standard of teaching and learning in P.E. is high.

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

- We are already implementing an action-planning approach through our DEIS plan in literacy, numeracy, attendance and parental involvement and will extend this to other curriculum priorities.
- The school plan for Irish will be reviewed with an emphasis on language and communication skills.
- A more comprehensive, progressive oral language programme for English will be drawn up and implemented through discrete oral language lessons.
- Our action-plan for mathematics is in place and already we have seen significant improvement in results since the WSE in March. We will provide further assessment of lower achieving pupils to provide greater levels of differentiation at each class level.
- We are exploring assessment approaches with a view to incorporating different methods with more pupil input.
- The Resource and Learning Support teachers have been redeployed to provide in-class support in the infants class and fifth class.