An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Baltard National School
Doonbeg, Co. Clare
Uimhir rolla: 159681

Date of inspection: 02 March 2011
1. **Introduction**

Baltard National School is a co-educational primary school situated close to the village of Doonbeg in Co. Clare. The school has rural DEIS status. It operates under the patronage of the Catholic Bishop of Killaloe.

The school caters for a small local population and families who migrate to the Baltard area for short periods, many originating from inner-city Dublin. On 30 September, 2010 there were nine pupils enrolled in the school and at the time of the evaluation, the number of pupils enrolled had declined to seven. The school has one mainstream class teacher. In view of the continuing pattern of low enrolment, the viability of the school is a cause of concern.

This report presents the findings of a whole-school evaluation undertaken in the school in March 2011 which focused on the quality of teaching and learning in English, Irish, Mathematics and Visual Arts. 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**

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<th>The following are the main strengths of the work of the school:</th>
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<td>• The school building and grounds are very well maintained and presented.</td>
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<td>• The recently appointed principal is strongly committed to the development of the school.</td>
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<td>• The class teacher and the support teachers work hard to adapt their approaches to meet the needs of the pupils.</td>
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<td>• The teaching in the mainstream classroom features the effective use of a wide range of well-selected methodologies and creative approaches.</td>
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<th>The following main recommendations are made:</th>
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<td>• The board of management should consult with key stakeholders regarding the future viability of school and take appropriate action.</td>
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<td>• Board members should avail of further training to assist them in managing the school more effectively.</td>
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<td>• The board should take steps to strengthen its links with parents and with the local community.</td>
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<td>• The school should review and extend its practices in assessment to include analyses of standardised test results and the use of diagnostic tests.</td>
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<td>• The school needs to engage in a process of whole-school review and, in so doing, to set and monitor targets for ongoing improvement.</td>
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<td>• In order to address difficulties which relate to the management of pupils, the formulation of a Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) policy is strongly recommended. In addition, a review of the school’s code of behaviour should be carried out as a priority.</td>
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3. Quality of School Management

- The board of management carries out some of its functions in a satisfactory manner: it meets regularly and oversees improvements to the school grounds and buildings. It provides a good range of teaching resources to the school and certifies school accounts. The board has availed of training provided by the Killaloe Diocese in the implementation of the Department’s Child Protection Guidelines for Primary Schools.

- There are some significant weaknesses in the management of the school. The extent of school development over a number of years has been extremely limited. This is characterised by erratic enrolment, limited engagement by school authorities in whole-school planning, lack of planning for the changing needs of the school and community, lack of clear vision for overall school development and poor promotion of the school within the community. There is a critical need for the board to avail of further training to assist them in managing the school more effectively.

- Due to the low and fluctuating enrolment trends, the school’s viability is in question. The board reports that children from the local, indigenous population attend other nearby primary schools by choice. The school rolls indicate that many pupils enrol for short periods in the school. A very small number of pupils have attended Baltard National School for the period of their full primary education during the last ten-year period. In light of these facts, it is recommended that the board commence a process of consultation with key stakeholders regarding the future viability of the school.

- The quality of in-school management is good. The principal was appointed at the commencement of this academic year. She receives strong support from the two support teachers and the school secretary. Their mutual commitment to the school is most noteworthy.

- The management of pupils is satisfactory. However, at times, the challenging behaviour of a minority of pupils impacts negatively on the quality of the interaction between the teachers and pupils and between the pupils and their peers. In collaboration with parents, the school should review its code of behaviour and formulate a policy in SPHE. Within these policies, the school should document a clear approach to developing pupils’ ability to relate to others.

- The management of relations and communication with the school community is poor. In recent years, inadequate attention has been given to addressing issues which relate to the school’s future. The uncertainty surrounding this issue has contributed to the decline in enrolment. There is a need for the board to strengthen its links with the local community and to ensure that there is clarity in its communication regarding the challenges facing the school.

- There is evidence that parents have some limited involvement in the life of the school. However, this is much scope for improvement. For example, the school needs to generate opportunities for more extensive collaboration with parents in the formulation of school policies.
4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- Overall, the quality of school planning is adequate. However, with the exception of the ratification of the school’s child protection policy and procedures, the school planning process has lapsed in recent years. In the short time since the principal’s appointment, creditable progress has been made in formulating and reviewing a range of school plans.

- Planning for curriculum implementation in the long-term poses significant challenges for the mainstream class teacher. These challenges arise from the fluctuation in the number of pupils enrolled in the various class levels and in the number of pupils enrolled in the school. The difficulties which arise from unsatisfactory pupil behaviour also limit the extent to which the teacher can successfully implement the learning activities outlined in her long-term plans.

- The quality of the teacher’s short-term plans is good. These plans are carefully prepared and appropriate learning objectives are outlined. Monthly progress reports (cuntais mhíosula) are maintained.

- The school’s self-evaluation practices are insufficient. The school should set and monitor targets for whole-school review.

- 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 teaching in the mainstream classroom features the effective use of a wide range of well-selected methodologies and creative approaches. However, the limited number of pupils in attendance has a restrictive effect on the overall educational provision and on the standards achieved by pupils. This is most evident in the quality of interactions between pupils and in the limited opportunities for valuable shared learning experiences between pupils and their peers.

- Déanann an t-oide tréaniarracht suim sa Ghaeilge a chothú. Seinneann na daltaí uirlisí traidisiúnta, canann siad amhráin agus bionn siad páirteach i gcluichí teanga agus i rólghacadh. D'ainneoin na ndea-íarrachtaí seo, is léir go laghdófar éifeacht na hoibre de bharr an ghrúpa bhig a bhionn i láthair, agus na n-éagsúlachtaí a bhionn i gceist in inniúacht agus i leibhéal tuisceana na ndaltaí. Baineann na daltaí caighdeán sásúil amach sa léitheoireacht. Tugann siad faoi réimsí éagsúla scribhneoireachta agus baineann siad caighdeán inghlactha amach san obair seo.

  The teacher makes a great effort to cultivate an interest in Irish. The pupils play traditional instruments, sing songs and they take part in language games and in role-play. Notwithstanding these good efforts, it is evident that the effectiveness of this work is limited as a consequence of the small number of pupils in attendance and the variations in their level of competence and understanding of the language. Pupils achieve a
Satisfactory provision is made for the teaching of English. In oral language, pupils discuss topics and recite a good range of rhymes. However, as limited pupil-to-pupil interactions are achieved in these lessons the development of pupils’ competence and confidence in using language is restricted. The school’s print-rich environment underpins the development of early-reading skills effectively. Pupils read a good range of books and the standard of reading in second and third class is good. The standard and range of written work completed by pupils is satisfactory.

The quality of teaching in Mathematics is good and pupils’ attainment is satisfactory. Pupils engage in practical work during lessons. Concrete materials are used to support the acquisition of mathematical concepts. Lessons feature drill and practice as well as talk and discussion. It is advised that some pupils would benefit from further consolidation and revision of topics.

In the Visual Arts, a good programme of work is undertaken across the strands of the curriculum. Pupils have good ability to describe the processes involved in their work. Samples of pupils’ work are displayed throughout the school in an attractive manner.

Standardised tests in English and Mathematics were administered this year. Whole-school analyses of the results achieved by pupils from year to year are recommended.

6. Quality of Support for Pupils

A part-time learning support teacher and a part-time resource teacher provide 2.5 hours learning support and 3.5 hours resource support respectively to pupils. These teachers work conscientiously to provide satisfactory supports for the pupils.

The support teachers demonstrate considerable flexibility in adapting their teaching to address the needs of pupils, particularly when there are difficulties with pupils’ behaviour. They provide in-class support and they withdraw pupils from the mainstream classroom. Work in the outdoor environment is also undertaken. Good efforts were made to use a range of stimulating materials including games and information and communication technology (ICT) during the lessons observed.

Individual plans are outlined for the pupils who receive support. These plans include an adequate outline of the pupils’ needs and associated targets. The school should administer diagnostic tests to help in determining and addressing the specific educational needs of pupils who receive learning support.

There is a need to monitor pupils’ progress regularly, so that the effectiveness of the learning support and resource interventions can be evaluated.
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 welcomes the W.S.E. report as it affirms the good work being done by the children, parents, staff and school community. We found the experience of the Whole School evaluation to be a fair and positive one. Since the appointment of the new principal the school has undergone big changes. It has been painted internally and externally. The blackboards have been replaced with an interactive projector and whiteboards as well as updating IT resources etc. We are delighted that these positive changes were recognised by the inspector as we feel this will ultimately enhance the learning environment for the children.

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 is in consultation with the key stakeholders regarding the future viability of the school and is in the process of making a submission to the Department of Education and Skills. In the past number of years the Board of Management have been aware of the challenges faced by the school regarding enrolments. They have liaised with Rural Resettlement Ireland and still continue to do so. Rural Resettlement Ireland have been supportive over the years and continue to be. On a positive note housing is readily available and we hope to promote this via a website which the BOM are currently considering developing in order to further promote the school.

- The principal and chairperson have recently availed of training and the board of management as a unit will avail of further training in January 2012.

- The board is taking steps to strengthen links with parents and with the local community.

Here are some of the activities undertaken since the completion of the WSE.

The school celebrated its school centenary in late June. The event was a huge success and the school received support and practical help from a committee which was made up of parents – past and present, board of management as well as past pupils, teachers and the local community in general. The school received positive feedback from everyone.

The children in our school will take part in a carol service with other schools in the parish at the Christmas Market at Doonbeg Golf Club.

The children and parents will attend a Christmas party in the local hall hosted by Doonbeg development group for all the schools in the parish.

The children, parents and staff will visit a local refuse and recycle company as part of Our Green Schools programme.

Parents will help out with costumes, props and make-up for our annual Christmas concert.

Re assessment: The school has undertaken standardised testing and the staff has availed of recent training regarding Numeracy, Literacy and Assessment. The resource teacher has also looked at appropriate diagnostic tests.

An SPHE policy has been completed.
The Behaviour Policy has been reviewed as well as the Individual Behaviour plan which was in place to help with dealing with challenging behaviour.

The school has engaged in a process of whole-school review and has drawn up a plan of action regarding proposed targets and improvements.

Finally the staff and Board of Management would like to thank the inspector for the courtesy, respect and sensitivity she showed to the staff and children during her visit to our school. We also received very positive direction from the district inspector at the post evaluation meeting. The process was positive, formative and valuable to everyone in the school community. We have learned from the experience as we continue to build on our strengths, we appreciate the continuous learning opportunities the inspector provided.