

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Ballinagore Mixed NS, Ballinagore,
Kilbeggan, Co Westmeath
Uimhir rolla: 16340N

Date of inspection: 18 September 2013



1. Introduction

Ballinagore Mixed NS is a co-educational primary school catering for 66 pupils from Ballinagore and the surrounding area. Under the patronage of the Bishop of Meath, the school espouses a Catholic ethos and its mission statement is exemplified in its warm, welcoming and inclusive atmosphere. Overall, pupil attendance rates are very good. 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 board of management and the parents' association are commended for their active support of the school.
- The principal provides highly effective leadership for the school.
- Teachers have engaged fruitfully with school self-evaluation processes.
- A deep commitment, a culture of teamwork and a drive for continuous improvement is evident among all teachers.
- Teaching and learning in the four subjects evaluated is of a high quality.
- There is a positive school atmosphere and pupils are respectful in their interactions with adults and peers.

The following **main recommendations** are made:

- Differentiation strategies should be developed to ensure sufficient challenge and support for pupils in line with their ability.
- A progressive and incremental approach should be introduced to the investigation of the school's local historical environment.
- Formative assessment strategies should be linked to planned learning objectives across all areas of the curriculum in order to document pupils' learning progress.

3. Quality of School Management

- The board of management provides effective governance to the school. It meets regularly and members work successfully as a team. The board is commended for the provision of a productive learning and recreational environment. School finances are carefully managed. Members of the board are well informed about school activities and in relation to teaching and learning within the school. The board is centrally involved in the development and ratification of policies.

- The work of the principal is of a very high quality. She leads the drive for continuous improvement in the school and places a clear focus on instructional leadership. She combines her leadership role with her teaching duties very competently. The deputy principal capably undertakes a range of duties and these are regularly reviewed.
- The school's resources are managed effectively. Good use is made of a range of resources in the delivery of the curriculum. A culture of teamwork, commitment and partnership is evident within the school. Ancillary staff provide valuable support to the school.
- The management of relationships with the school community is good. Parents and the parents' association actively support the work of the school in a variety of ways. The school is commended for involving parents in curricular activities and in the review of pertinent policies. In interviews and questionnaires, the vast majority of parents expressed satisfaction with the quality of education provided in the school and with the information they receive on their children's progress. Further strategies should be developed to communicate school and board of management activities with the wider community.
- The management of pupils is highly commendable. Pupils conduct themselves in an exemplary manner and are courteous and respectful in their interactions with adults and peers. In questionnaires, all pupils reported that they feel safe at school and enjoy their lessons and learning. An appropriate focus is placed on the holistic development of pupils.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- The quality of whole-school planning is good. A broad range of administrative policies inform the smooth operation of the school. The board of management is advised to review the enrolment policy. Overall, curriculum plans are of a good quality and the school should further contextualise them to the needs of the school upon review. Suggestions for their refinement were discussed at the post-evaluation meetings.
- Teachers have engaged fruitfully with school self-evaluation and whole-school self-reflection is well embedded in school culture. The school is praised for following the processes and procedures advocated in the recently published *School Self-evaluation Guidelines for Primary Schools*, leading to the development of a purposeful three-year school improvement plan for literacy.
- Teachers' planning is of a high quality. Short-term plans are objective-based and overall, present a clear outline of pupils' learning activities and provision for differentiation. A whole-school approach to long-term planning should be adopted. Very good individual plans are prepared collaboratively for pupils in receipt of additional supports.
- Confirmation was provided that the board of management has formally adopted the *Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools* without modification and that the school is compliant with the requirements of the *Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools*.

5. Quality of Teaching, Learning and Pupil Achievement

- Teaching, learning and pupil achievement are of a high quality throughout the school. All teachers display proficient classroom management skills and skilfully employ a wide

range of methodologies. Corridors and classrooms are visually stimulating and support pupils' learning. Lessons are well structured but the further sharing of learning intentions at the outset of lessons is advised. Teachers explain new concepts clearly and use questioning effectively. Current provision for differentiation is largely based on class levels. The school is advised to explore further modes of differentiation to ensure that all pupils are supported and challenged in line with their ability. To build on good practice in the infant classes, additional time should be allocated to a wider range of play-based learning activities. Written work is monitored regularly. Pupils engage confidently in learning tasks and demonstrate an enthusiasm for learning.

- Tá caighdeán maith á bhaint amach i múineadh agus i bhfoghlaim na Gaeilge. Úsáideann oidí modhanna múinte éagsúla agus straitéisí difriúla le linn na gceachtanna. Ar an mórgóir, tá struchtúr maith ar cheachtanna agus cuirtear béim mhaith ar an gcur chuige cumarsáideach. Moltar an bhéim a chuirtear ar an nGaeilge neamhfhoirmiúil i mbliana agus táthar ag súil go gcuirfidh sé seo le cumas na ndaltaí labhairt go muiníneach fúthu féin. Déantar soláthar maith de rannta, d'fhilíocht agus d'amhránaíocht trasna na scoile. Tá scileanna léitheoireachta agus scríbhneoireachta á saothrú go céimniúil ach d'fhéadfaí béim sa bhreis a chur ar fhorbairt na saorscríbhneoireachta. Moltar don scoil clár céimnithe a ullmhú agus a chur i bhfeidhm do mhúineadh teanga de réir téamaí an churaclaim ionas go mbeidh forbairt agus leanúnachas i bhfoghlaim na ndaltaí.
- *A good standard is being achieved in the teaching and learning of Irish. Teachers use a variety of methodologies and different strategies during lessons. Overall, lessons are well structured and a good emphasis is placed on the communicative approach. The emphasis placed on informal Irish this year is praised and it is hoped that this will build on the pupils' ability to talk about themselves with confidence. Good provision is made for rhymes, poetry and singing throughout the school. Pupils' reading and writing skills are developed systematically but more emphasis could be placed on developing independent writing skills. The school is advised to prepare and implement a graded programme for language teaching according to the curriculum themes to ensure development and continuity in the pupils' learning.*
- The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in English is good. Pupils' oral language skills are developed through discrete lessons and on a cross-curricular basis. Emergent reading skills are nurtured effectively through the development of pupils' word identification strategies and phonological awareness. Pupils develop their reading skills through the use of a wide range of reading materials and comprehension skills are taught systematically. The use of differentiated parallel readers in the infant classes is praised and the extension of this practice should be considered. Opportunities to write are provided at each class level and a good emphasis is placed on the writing process. A more consistent application of the school's handwriting policy is advised. An appropriate focus is placed on engagement with poetry.
- There is effective practice in the teaching and learning of Mathematics. Mental warm-up activities are used successfully to promote pupils' grasp of number concepts. Teachers place an emphasis on the explicit teaching of new concepts, create opportunities for pupils to manipulate materials and enable pupils to clarify their thinking through discussion. Pupils' attention is correctly drawn to the practical application of Mathematics. Problem-solving and estimation skills are developed incrementally.
- The overall quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in History is good. Pupils are enabled to engage with a wide range of evidence and an appropriate emphasis is placed on developing pupils' abilities to work as historians. Appropriate timelines are well used to develop pupils' understanding of chronology. While some aspects of the local environment have been explored from a historical perspective, it is recommended that

the school plans a progressive and incremental approach to its investigation to deepen pupils' understanding.

- Assessment practices within the school are good. A broad range of standardised, screening and diagnostic tests is administered and good analysis is undertaken. Teachers record pupils' progress using a variety of approaches, particularly in English and Mathematics. Pupils' ability to self assess is also being nurtured. It is recommended that formative assessment strategies be linked to planned learning objectives across all areas of the curriculum in order to provide data on pupils' progress. A more formal approach to recording provision for pupils at stage one of the continuum of support is advised.

6. Quality of Support for Pupils

- A shared support teacher has recently been appointed. There is high quality support for pupils with special educational needs. Support teaching is provided on both a withdrawal and in-class basis. A review of the caseload is recommended to ensure that pupils with the greatest level of need receive the highest level of support. The teaching and learning observed was characterised by affirming teacher-pupil relationships and was well structured to meet pupils' learning needs. A variety of effective teaching methodologies and a good range of resources are employed successfully. Going forward, regular review of targets and the ongoing documentation of progress should be undertaken and recorded.

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 staff of Ballinagore National School are very satisfied with the outcome of the Whole School Evaluation.

We are pleased that the report recognises the positive atmosphere in our school community and the high quality of teaching and learning in our school.

The Board welcomes the overwhelmingly positive feedback received from parents and children during this process.

We also wish to take this opportunity to thank the staff of the school for their ongoing hard work and commitment to Ballinagore N.S.

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 and the staff are working together to implement the recommendations in the report. These recommendations will be used to further develop our ongoing system of self-evaluation and improvement.