An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Scoil na mBearnan
Pallasgreen, Co. Limerick
Uimhir rolla: 16439J

Date of inspection: 22 September 2011
1. Introduction

Scoil na mBearnan is a co-educational primary school located close to the village of Pallasgreen, County Limerick. It operates under the patronage of the Catholic Bishop of Cashel-Emly. There have been significant changes in school personnel in recent years; the current principal was appointed at the start of this academic year and three of the other six teachers are new to the school. At the time of the evaluation, sixty pupils were enrolled in the school.

This report presents the findings of a whole-school evaluation undertaken in the school in September 2011, which focused on the quality of teaching and learning in English, Irish, 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 demonstrates very good ability to lead the school.
- The commitment to the welfare of pupils and the management of pupils are excellent.
- In the learning-support and resource settings, the quality of teaching is very good.
- In the mainstream classes, very good resources and methodologies are used by teachers and accordingly, lessons are interesting and engaging.

The following main recommendations are made:

- There is a need for greater adherence to the rules and procedures for boards of management outlined in the Department of Education and Skills’ Constitution of Boards and Rules of Procedure (2007).
- There is scope for more frequent and effective communication with parents.
- In English, there is significant scope for the school to develop pupils’ higher-order thinking skills and comprehension skills.
- Sa Ghaeilge, moltar tuilleadh béime a leagan ar amhráin, ar rainn agus ar scéalta iomlána a aithris do na daltaí i ngach rang.
  *In Irish, it is recommended that further emphasis be placed on songs, rhymes and on reading full stories to the children in every class.*
- A review of the allocation of learning support is recommended to ensure that the practices in the school are in line with the principles and procedures of the Learning-Support Guidelines.
Quality of School Management

- Overall, the quality of school management is good. However, there is scope for development in some aspects of the work of the board of management. At the time of the evaluation, the board was not properly constituted and it was evident that some meetings of the board of management had been convened for which minutes were not maintained. There is a need for greater adherence to the rules and procedures for boards of management outlined in the Department of Education and Skills’ *Constitution of Boards and Rules of Procedure* (2007). In particular, the procedures relating to the constitution of the board and meetings of the board should be observed. The board is also advised to ensure that school accounts are certified annually and that the duties of the post holders are reviewed annually.

- The board of management oversees the upkeep of the school building effectively. Recently, it managed a significant restructuring of two mainstream classrooms and the outcomes of this project are praiseworthy. Some measures have been taken to reduce the risks posed to pupils and to the public by the condition of an external wall, including the submission of applications to the building unit of the Department of Education and Skills. A review of the school’s health and safety policy should be carried out to take account of this risk. The board is proactive in providing resources to enhance the educational experiences of pupils with special educational needs.

- A range of school policies has been formulated and ratified by the board. Some information is distributed to parents and a good number of school events are organised, facilitating home-school and community links. Analysis of responses to a questionnaire administered during this evaluation indicates that there is scope for the school to communicate with parents more frequently. There is a need to provide parents with regular updates on whole-school issues and with further opportunities to become involved in the formulation of school policies.

- The parents’ association provides valuable support to the school. Responses received from parents through questionnaires indicate a good level of satisfaction with many aspects of the school.

- The recently appointed principal demonstrates very good ability to lead the school. She initiates developments in curriculum planning and she makes astute judgements regarding the overall development of the school. The other members of the in-school management team work hard to support the principal and they contribute greatly to the school by engaging in a range of tasks.

- Effective pupil-management strategies are used consistently throughout the school. Overall, the management of pupils is excellent. Pupils are well behaved, co-operative and expressive.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- A range of school policies has been formulated. These are of a good quality. The quality of whole-school planning in Irish, English and Mathematics is good. The school’s plan for Drama is generic in nature. A review of this plan is recommended to ensure that the
school provides adequate opportunities for pupils to engage in improvisation and for the integration of Drama with other curriculum areas.

- The mainstream class teachers compile long-term, short-term plans and monthly progress reports (cuntais mhiosula) which vary in quality. At each level, planning in Mathematics is precise and developmental. Teachers’ planning in English and Irish needs to be more language oriented and to this end it is recommended that the use of the text book as a basis for planning be avoided. Comprehensive plans are compiled by the learning-support and resource teachers outlining clear targets, based on well-informed observations of pupils’ needs.

- The school’s assessment and self-evaluation practices are satisfactory. Pupils’ written work is regularly monitored. Screening tests and standardised tests are administered and results are analysed by the teachers. At some class levels, teacher observations are used effectively to inform teaching. As pupils move through the school, there is evidence of some communication between teachers regarding their attainment. To further develop the school’s capacity to self-evaluate, it is recommended that additional emphasis be placed on ensuring that these practices become embedded throughout the school.

- 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 teachers use a very good range of resources and methodologies and accordingly, lessons are interesting and engaging. Pupils work diligently and their overall achievement is good.

- Sroichtear caighdeán maith i múineadh agus i bhfoghlaim na Gaeilge. Baintear dea-úsáid as fearas léirithe agus ábhair choirccrèteacha i rith na ngníomháiochtaí taitneamhacha a chuirtear ar siúl. Baineann cuid de na daítaí caighdeán maith amach sa Ghaeilge labhartha. Moltar tuilleadh béime a leagan ar amhráin, ar rainn agus ar scéalta iomlánla a athris do na daítaí i ngach rang. Tabharfaidh sé seo deis do na daítaí foclóir nua agus nathanna cainte a fhoghlaim i slí a bhfuil dílis do luas nádúrtha na teanga. Léann formhór na ndaltaí le liofach fíorúnach agus tuiscint shásúil. Tá gá áfach, le haidir dhiúnt a dhéanamh ar dhea-fhoghraiocht na teanga. Baineann caighdeán maith le saothar scribhneoireachta na ndaltaí i seánraí éagsúla.

The quality of teaching and learning in Irish is good. Good use is made of visual aids and concrete materials during the enjoyable activities that are carried out. Some of the pupils achieve a good standard in oral Irish. It is recommended that additional emphasis be placed on songs, rhymes and on reading full stories to the children in every class. This will afford pupils opportunities to learn new vocabulary and phrases in accordance with the natural rhythm of the language. The majority of pupils read with appropriate fluency and satisfactory comprehension. There is a need however, to address accurate pronunciation of the language. Pupils’ written work in a variety of genres is good.

- The quality of teaching in English is good. In oral language, pupils’ engagement in class discussions and brainstorming activities is creditable. It is recommended that the
extension of pupils' vocabulary be a key priority for teachers and that a broader range of contexts, including poetry, be used as a basis for work in oral language. Very good work is undertaken to develop pupils' early-reading and writing skills. Pupils read frequently and many pupils develop good fluency in their reading. There is significant scope for further work to be undertaken in extending pupils' higher-order thinking skills and comprehension skills. Writing is well taught and the quality of pupils' written work is good.

- Mathematics is well taught and pupil attainment ranges from average to good. Co-operative work, guided discovery and independent learning are adeptly facilitated by the teachers. References to real-life situations and to the school environment are incorporated into lessons. In order to raise overall pupil attainment, it is recommended that a greater emphasis be placed on oral mathematics, on problem-solving and on developing pupils' estimation skills.

- Overall, the teaching of Drama is good. Lessons feature good work in mime, some improvisation, creative use of signifiers and teacher-in-role. Pupils demonstrate satisfactory ability to co-operate and engage in the dramas. Providing more opportunities for pupils to work in small groups is recommended as a precursor to working in large groups and whole-class scenes.

6. Quality of Support for Pupils

- The quality of support for pupils is good. The quality of teaching is very good and effective work is carried out in one-to-one and in group settings. Pupils' learning is well consolidated and their progress is consistently monitored. Good-quality in-class support is provided for some pupils. Valuable early intervention is provided in literacy. The development of pupils' phonological awareness, phonemic awareness and listening skills receives intensive support.

- A review of the allocation of learning support is recommended to ensure that it is in line with the principles and procedures of the Learning-Support Guidelines. In particular the withdrawal of pupils from the senior classes should be reviewed. As the school's practice of withdrawing an entire class for instruction in Mathematics does not adequately target the pupils with the greatest levels of need, this should be discontinued. At some levels, in-class support in Mathematics is recommended in order that pupils receive targeted, differentiated support in accordance with their needs.

Published January 2012
Appendix

School Response to the Report

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

Summary of Findings and Recommendations for Further Development

- The Board of Management have addressed the need for greater adherence to the rules and procedures for Boards of Management. Since the WSE, members of the Board of Management have attended training, and all procedures relating to the constitution of the board and meetings of the board are being comprehensively observed. The Board will continue to ensure that the school accounts are certified annually and duties of post holders reviewed.

- The Board of Management acknowledges the work of the parents’ association and its valuable involvement in a range of supportive initiatives in our school. Home-school communication is an important aspect of our school and many forms of correspondence are in place. The Board of Management welcome the recommendations by the Inspectorate and in following same, will provide more frequent parent communication in relation to whole school issues. The School website has since been up-dated and a school newsletter has been published, with one to follow each term. The Board of Management will endeavour to provide further opportunities for parents to become involved in the formation of school policies.

Quality of Teaching, Learning and Pupil Achievement.

- We continue to work and build upon initiatives introduced at the start of this school year, to develop comprehension skills in English. We have implemented the ‘Building Bridges of Understanding’ whole school approach (by Dr. Martin Gleeson) and we happily continue our Shared Reading Programme. We will review our whole school English plan and set out targets for a whole school approach to developing comprehension skills in English. Similarly, in Mathematics, we welcome the recommendations made by the Inspectorate, to develop oral mathematics and problem-solving skills.

Quality of Support for pupils

- Following the WSE recommendations and review of the allocation of learning support in the school, the withdrawal of an entire class from the senior room for Maths has been reviewed and addressed. The children with lower percentile in Maths Sigma-T are now being specifically targeted with learning support.

- The Board of Management welcomes the findings of the Inspectorate in relation to the quality of support available to the pupils in our school. The Special Education team are dedicated and committed to their work and provide excellent support for pupils in the school. The resources available to support our pupils are commendable with the recent addition of our Sensory Room called ‘The Rainbow Room’, last year. The Board will continue to support and enhance the educational experiences of pupils with special educational needs.