Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Scoil Naisiúnta na mBráithre
CBS Primary School,
New Ross, County Wexford
Uimhir rolla: 16741I

Date of inspection: 03 March 2011
1. Introduction

Scoil Náisiúnta na mBráithre (CBS Primary School), New Ross, under the patronage of the Catholic Bishop of Ferns, is a DEIS Band 2 school for boys from second to sixth class in single and multi-grade settings and is involved in a major amalgamation of local primary schools. It comprises large numbers of pupils whose first language is not English (EAL) and of traveller pupils. While attendance levels have improved in recent years, it is a cause for concern that almost a quarter of the 198 pupils on rolls in 2010 were absent for more than 20 days. The board of management of the school was given an opportunity to comment on the findings and recommendations of the evaluation; the board chose to accept the report without response.

2. Summary of Findings and Recommendations for Further Development

The following are the main strengths of the work of the school:

- Staff are committed to the pastoral care of pupils and many supports, initiatives and activities are in place to promote their holistic development. The school works purposefully to promote a positive and consistent approach to discipline.

- The board of management and parents give good support to the school, communications with the school community are very good and the school is welcoming of parents.

- The whole-school implementation of agreed writing strategies is having a positive impact on improving the quality of the pupils' writing.

- Support for pupils in special education settings is well structured and is provided in an affirmative, caring environment.

The following main recommendations are made:

- In-school management should extend its curriculum leadership role. The principal should lead a comprehensive evaluation of the DEIS action plan (2007-2010) and formulation of a new plan with refined targets and actions.

- The school should devise and implement a systematic, coherent whole-school approach to the assessment of pupils' learning. This approach should be an integral part of teaching and learning in all classes.

- Curriculum planning should fully reflect pupils' needs and guide all aspects of teaching and learning at each class level. In light of the very wide range of attainment levels, with many low achieving pupils, teachers' planning needs to be informed by assessment outcomes and should address pupils' varying ability levels through clear and achievable learning objectives.

- A wider range of teaching methodologies is essential in order to raise levels of pupil participation during lessons.

- The school should liaise with the Professional Development Service for Teachers to support improvement in the teaching of English and Mathematics.
3. Quality of School Management

- The board of management provides good support to the school. Much of its work is concerned with issues relating to discipline, school maintenance and amalgamation. It should closely monitor the staff’s evaluation of the school’s DEIS action plan (2007-2010) and oversee the formulation of a new action plan.

- The principal is committed to the pupils’ holistic development, is pro-active in promoting a positive approach to discipline, and actively encourages parental involvement. The in-school management team works conscientiously and diligently. In leading for improvement, the principal should focus strongly on enhancing his own, and the in-school management team’s curriculum leadership roles. In this regard, processes and systems should be established that enable teachers collaboratively to review teaching and learning, implement well-planned and effective programmes and monitor learning outcomes.

- While indoor facilities are generally satisfactory, there is no general purposes hall. Some classrooms have vibrant displays and investigation areas to support and consolidate current learning. This should be a feature of all teaching environments. A wide range of literacy and mathematics resources is available. Non-teaching staff work in a friendly, supportive manner.

- There is very good communication with the school community through newsletters, notes, texts and the school website. An open-door policy is promoted and most parent questionnaire responses agree that this is a welcoming and well-run school. Parents participate in classroom-based reading and mathematics activities and in the review of some school policies. The parents association supports the school well through in-school activities and fundraising events.

- The teachers manage the pupils in a supportive, positive way and display a commitment to their general welfare. Pupils were observed to display good behaviour and appropriate application to learning. A range of activities and whole-school approaches promote good behaviour and support pupils with challenging behaviour. The current review of the school’s Code of Behaviour and Bullying policies should take on board the findings of both parents’ and pupils’ questionnaires.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- Overall, the quality of whole-school planning has significant scope for development. The school plan contains an appropriate range of organisational policies. However, curriculum plans do not provide comprehensive guidance to meet the diverse range of pupils’ learning needs. These plans should set out specific learning programmes and detailed learning targets by class level. There is particular need for clear guidelines for the ongoing assessment of learning in each curriculum area.

- Teachers’ individual planning is primarily content-focused. Long-term plans should be tailored to the context and learning needs of the pupils. All short-term planning should state explicit learning objectives and make provision for different ability groups.

- The school’s engagement with self-evaluation is weak. Whole-school planning processes for the implementation of the DEIS action plan are not systematic. Set targets are not closely informed by the analysis of school assessment data. There is insufficient monitoring and evaluation of the implementation and impact of new strategies and interventions on pupil learning outcomes.
The work currently underway in tracking all pupils’ attainment is good. These and other assessment data should be closely analysed to evaluate DEIS targets and to inform targeted group teaching.

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 standard of teaching and learning varies significantly. Aspects of competent teaching include the sharing of learning objectives and well-structured, appropriately-paced lessons. Overall, lessons are predominantly whole-class and teacher-directed, with insufficient group work and active learning. Given the very wide range of attainment levels, with many low achieving pupils, a wider range of teaching methodologies is essential. All lessons should incorporate more direct teaching of key concepts, grouping of pupils, raised pupil participation levels and thorough ongoing consolidation. While some good examples of pupils’ handwriting and presentation of work are on display, more guidance and shared expectations are needed regarding pupils’ work in copybooks.

There is significant scope for development in the teaching and learning of Irish. The use of pair work, songs, rhymes and games was observed in some classes. In general, insufficient emphasis is placed on the communicative approach during lessons. More explicit planning for, and teaching of new topic-based language on a regular basis up through the school is required. It is recommended that levels of pupils’ participation be raised through cooperative tasks, drama techniques and use of resources. Progressive programmes for reading and writing are required that provide an appropriate level of challenge and enjoyment to pupils.

The standard of the teaching of reading varies significantly. Established practices include paired- and shared-reading, phonics, class novels and the recent introduction of First Steps approaches. There is insufficient emphasis on the systematic development of functional and higher-order reading skills. Many pupils do not reach appropriate levels of competence in reading, though there is a small group of high-achieving pupils in many classes. A full review of the teaching of reading is required which addresses grouping of pupils, teaching of reading skills, graded-reading materials and assessment.

The implementation of whole-school writing strategies is having a positive impact and some good examples of writing are evident. Grammar, punctuation and spellings are
aspects of all teachers’ practice. In oral language the main teaching strategy is teacher-led talk and discussion. Many pupils do not display sufficient confidence in communicating. All teachers should adopt a skills-based, oral language programme, using a wide range of teaching methodologies such as play, games and drama.

- There is a wide variety in standards of teaching and learning in mathematics. A large number of pupils do not display mastery of key mathematical concepts and skills across the strands. Whole-class teaching predominates. Aspects of limited good practice observed include sharing learning objectives, clear explanation and modelling, mental mathematics, use of appropriate resources, differentiated, cooperative tasks and thorough consolidation. These should become established practice at all class levels. To determine the effectiveness of teaching, ongoing assessment of each pupil’s mastery of appropriate mathematics objectives is required.

- The school should liaise with the Professional Development Service for Teachers to support improvement in the teaching of English and Mathematics.

- There is scope for development in teaching and learning in physical education (PE). While pupils experience appropriate levels of physical activity and cooperative work, in the majority of lessons observed there was insufficient progression up through the class levels in the teaching, development and application of new skills. All teachers should ensure the explicit teaching and application of new skills, foster pupil creativity, monitor pupils’ learning and provide supportive feedback.

- The teachers employ strategies and tools to record pupil attainment including teacher-designed tests, work samples and checklists. A more systematic approach is required where assessment outcomes directly inform planning. Appropriate strategies are in place to inform parents of their children’s progress; standardised test results should be communicated to parents in line with Circular 138/06.

6. Quality of Support for Pupils

- Support for pupils in special education needs settings, including EAL teaching, is appropriately structured and is provided in an affirmative, caring environment, mostly on a withdrawal basis. The team uses a range of diagnostic tests and liaise with class teachers to formulate education plans. Overall, appropriate, well-resourced lessons are presented. Learning support should be provided as an additional resource for classroom programmes. In addition, a range of in-class models of support should be explored. Home-school-community liaison and school-completion programme personnel provide a good range of focused, additional supports for pupils. This ‘Green Flag’ school also provides a variety of other activities such as outings, workshops, sporting activities and music for pupils.

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