An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Scoil Náisiúnta an Bhreacaigh
Ardara, County Donegal
Uimhir rolla: 16869L

Date of inspection: 14 October 2010
1. Introduction

Scoil Náisiúnta an Bhreacaigh is a two-teacher, co-educational primary school under the patronage of the Catholic Bishop of Raphoe. There are 47 pupils enrolled in the school and seven class levels; there are no pupils in fourth class currently. The junior classroom accommodates pupils from junior infants to second class and the senior classroom accommodates pupils from third to sixth. Attendance patterns are satisfactory overall. The school participates in the Modern Languages in Primary Schools Initiative. The evaluation focused on the quality of teaching and learning in Irish, English, Mathematics and Music. The board of management was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the report; a response was not received from the board.

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 works efficiently in support of the school helping to ensure that high-quality teaching and learning conditions are created. The chairperson provides effective professional leadership in guiding the work of the board.

- The teaching principal’s work in leading and managing the school is of a high quality.

- The overall quality of teaching and learning is good. The use of information and communications technologies (ICT) to enrich the learning experiences of pupils is effective.

- Support for pupils with special and additional learning needs is delivered in a structured and systematic manner.

- Parental support for the school is highly commendable. The parents’ association is very active in raising funds for the provision of school resources.

The following main recommendations are made:

- The assessment data available in literacy and numeracy should be analysed on a whole-school basis and it is advised that an action plan to raise pupils’ performance in literacy be devised as a matter of priority.

- Shared teaching in Irish, English and Mathematics should be planned for and implemented in both classrooms.

- Further input by parents in the whole-school planning process should be promoted.

3. Quality of School Management

- The board of management is highly supportive of the work of the school community. It is committed to providing a well-organised teaching and learning environment. It prepares and ratifies school plans and policies as required. The board maintains strong community
links and a spirit of cooperation and collaboration is clearly evident in the day-to-day operation of the school. The board values the work of the staff and sees its role as one of enabling teachers to provide the best possible education for the pupils.

- The quality of school leadership is very good. The principal attends to his teaching and administrative duties with diligence and displays effective organisational skills. He leads and manages the implementation of the curriculum to good effect and has high expectations for pupils’ learning and attainment. The special duties teacher supports the work of the principal very well. There are good examples of consultation and shared responsibility between teachers and visiting support staff. These examples could be built upon further by including support staff at staff meetings as appropriate. This would assist in targeting priorities for development in the whole-school planning process particularly in literacy and numeracy. Further analysis of standardised tests results and promotion of shared teaching should be prioritised as areas for development within the school.

- The classrooms are very well resourced and provide stimulating learning environments. Provision for ICT is praiseworthy. Further stocks of graded, parallel readers and comprehension reading materials in Irish and English would be beneficial. A structured early literacy phonics programme should also be sourced to supplement the intervention strategies already underway in the school. The school benefits from the services of a very efficient part-time secretary and also from a part-time caretaker who maintains and cleans the school to a high standard. The school grounds are maintained very well.

- The management of relationships with the school community is very good and parents support the work of the school appropriately. The parents’ association is very active in raising funds for school activities. Some key policies are shared with parents. However, it is recommended that parents have further input in the development of policies.

- The overall management of pupils is very good. During the evaluation, pupils were very well behaved and cooperated fully with their teachers. Pupils’ responses to questionnaires administered during the evaluation indicate that they know the school and classroom rules very well and that they feel very safe at school. Parents’ responses to questionnaires in relation to discipline varied somewhat. Therefore, it is recommended that parental input be sought in the forthcoming review of the school’s discipline policy.

4. **Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation**

- The quality of the school planning is very good. The school plan contains an appropriate array of organisational and curricular policies. Plans are reviewed at staff meetings. It is advised that an action plan to raise pupils’ performance in literacy be devised as a matter of priority.

- Teachers are committed to school self-evaluation and they are reviewing plans to improve provision for pupils. Teachers have been targeting improvement in the use of ICT in teaching and learning and enhanced standards in Mathematics; both targets have been met successfully.

- The quality of individual teachers’ planning is very good. Teachers prepare very useful long and short-term plans with clear, time-bound targets. Monthly progress records are maintained carefully.

- 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

- Tá caighdeán maith le sonrú i múineadh na Gaeilge agus tá dul chun cinn sásúil a dhéanamh ag na daltaí. Sa bhunroinn, cuirtear béim fhíúntach ar mhodhanna gníomhacha, agus ar rainn agus dhánta. Léirionn na daltaí sa dá roinn tuiscint mhaith ar an dteanga agus tá dul chun cinn córasach a dhéanamh acu i scileanna agus foscleanna na léitheoireachta. B'fhíú sraitheanna léitheoireachta bhreise a chur ar fáil siá a d'Teanga agus trí shaorscríbhneoireachta a dhéanamh.

- The quality of teaching in Irish is good and the pupils are progressing well. In the junior section worthwhile emphasis is placed on activity methods and on rhymes and poems. Pupils in both sections display a good understanding of the language and they are developing pre-reading and reading skills in a systematic manner. It would be worthwhile to extend the reading schemes to enhance pupils’ interest in Irish reading. Pupils’ writing ability is developed well through teacher-guided writing activities and free writing.

- The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in English is satisfactory overall. Oral activities are appropriate and pupils can discuss a wide range of topics confidently. Role play, brainstorming and improvisation are used well in both classrooms. The blending of phonemes and work on onset and rhyme are integral to the teaching of phonological and phonemic awareness at the junior section. This approach could be augmented by the introduction of a structured phonics programme to support the pupils’ phonological skills. Reading schemes and class novels are used to good effect. However, it is advised that further comprehension and supplementary graded reading materials are sourced for both classrooms. The results of standardised tests indicate that further attention should be directed towards raising the attainment levels of pupils in literacy. Focused literacy intervention is needed and all staff, including support teachers, should attend to this as a matter of priority. There is commendable emphasis on the writing process in both classrooms and various strategies are used successfully to encourage pupils to write. Senior pupils make good use of ICT in drafting and editing their writing.

- Provision for Mathematics is good. Lessons observed were purposeful and the pupils were actively engaged in their learning. Junior pupils demonstrated good addition and subtraction skills. Senior pupils achieved well in various computation tests. Pupils demonstrated an enthusiasm for Mathematics. Work presented in copybooks was neatly presented and corrected regularly. Pupils’ performance in standardised attainment tests is good.

- Music is taught well. Teachers in both classrooms choose and organise activities that are well structured and appropriate. The elements of music are explored satisfactorily by pupils through listening and responding to suitable excerpts, song singing and playing the recorder. During the evaluation, the pupils displayed considerable enthusiasm for the subject and were knowledgeable about the works of a number of different composers.

- The quality of overall teaching, learning and pupil achievement is good. A commendable range of teaching methodologies is employed by both mainstream and support teachers and these ensure the active participation and appropriate engagement of pupils in their
learning. In their responses to questionnaires administered during the evaluation, the pupils indicated that they enjoy lessons and learning.

6. Quality of Support for Pupils

- Provision for the pupils with special and additional learning needs is good. A learning-support and a resource teacher, both based elsewhere, provide support for pupils with additional and special educational needs. The support teachers are commended for their use of effective teaching approaches and methodologies including in-class support. A range of diagnostic tests is used to identify pupils’ strengths and learning needs. Learning programmes are organised with specific targets for groups and individual pupils. Early intervention strategies are implemented in the junior room in collaboration with the class teacher and this practice of intervention should be extended to the senior classroom as well. Parents are informed about their children’s progress at parent-teacher meetings which are held twice a year. It is recommended that end-of-year written reports should be issued to parents. The special needs assistant is deployed effectively in support of a pupil with special educational needs.

- The Modern Languages Programme is implemented very well. In the lessons observed during the evaluation, the teacher used active teaching methodologies to teach French phrases, rhymes and songs. Project work in French history and culture is attractively displayed in the senior classroom and in the resource room.

- The school implements worthwhile transition programmes for both new infants and sixth class pupils supported by Tír Boghaine Teo. There is very good engagement with parents and post-primary schools in this regard.

- Teachers are sensitive to any instances of disadvantage which manifest and endeavour to be as supportive as possible of pupils who may need additional support. The school participates in a healthy eating programme which is organised by An Bord Bia and supported by the Department of Education and Skills.

Published June 2011