An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Ballyhea N.S.
Charleville, Co. Cork
Uimhir rolla: 17112F

Date of inspection: 18 October 2011
1. Introduction

Ballyhea N.S. is a Developing Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) rural school with a staff comprising of a teaching principal, five mainstream class teachers, two support teachers one of whom is shared with Lisgriffin NS and two special needs assistants. The school operates under the patronage of the Apostolic Administrator of the Catholic Diocese of Cloyne. The school enrolment is 136 pupils and attendance rates are good. In this whole school evaluation (WSE), the inspection team focused on the quality of teaching and learning in Irish, English, Mathematics and History. The board of management of the school was given an opportunity to comment on the findings and recommendations of the report; 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:

- Overall, the teachers are dedicated and hard working.
- The quality of learning support and resource teaching is good with very good planning in evidence for pupils with special education needs (SEN).
- Good standards are achieved by the majority of pupils in English and Mathematics.
- All teachers make good use of the Interactive Whiteboards in teaching and learning.
- The members of the in-school management team work effectively and undertake a range of roles and responsibilities.
- The school has a very active parents' association.

The following main recommendations are made:

- Greater attention should be placed on curriculum leadership and the overseeing of the implementation of the curriculum plans, particularly the DEIS plan at all class levels.
- The priorities for the future development of the school should be agreed by the whole school community and the principal should play a strategic role in achieving these aims.
- There is a need for significant further investment in material resources including books and mathematical equipment in the school.
- The Board of Management should ensure that professional development opportunities such as Reading Recovery made available to the school through the Professional Development Support Team (PDST) should be availed of in the future.

3. Quality of School Management

- The quality of school management is good. The board of management is properly constituted. It meets regularly and considers a range of issues including finance, health and safety issues and maintenance. Minutes of meetings are recorded. School accounts are certified annually. The board is involved in whole-school planning process and policies are discussed in detail and ratified after due consideration. The board has overseen the building of an extension to the school and is in the process of further extending the school. Summer Works' schemes have been availed of and the physical environment of the school is of a very good standard.

- While a considerable investment has been made in the information and communication technology (ICT) equipment in the school, the school has a limited range of teaching and learning resources in the classrooms and there is a need to upgrade these resources.
The board should set priorities for the future development of the school particularly those identified in the school’s DEIS plan. This will necessitate the upskilling of staff to meet the targets outlined in the DEIS plan. Furthermore, the integrity of the school day is being compromised through the extension of breaks and the board needs to ensure that the school is in compliance with the terms of Circular 11/95 – Time in School.

- The Parents’ Association meets regularly is well-informed and involved in a range of activities in supporting the work of the school. Parents have been involved in reviewing and contributing to a number of policies; code of behaviour, anti-bullying, critical incident policy and child protection policy. This practice is commendable. Parents’ representatives stated that they are very satisfied with the educational provision in the school and that parents receive very good information about their children’s learning.

- The members of the in-school management team work well as a team. They undertake a range of roles and responsibilities very effectively. Their roles have been reviewed and the new duties assigned reflect the changing needs of the school. These roles focus on accessing and acquiring resources, policy development and the informal review of the implementation of the curriculum plans. Decision making is collaborative. Greater focus should be placed on curriculum leadership roles and school self-evaluation in the future. The priorities for the future development of the school should be agreed by the whole school community and the principal should play a strategic role in achieving these aims.

- The quality of pupil management is very good in some classes; however, there is scope for improvement in the middle and senior standards.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- The whole-school planning process is good. Good progress has been achieved in recent times by the school staff in revising many of the policies and plans. Organisational plans are detailed and reflect the practices implemented in the school. The DEIS plan as presented outlines general targets to be addressed but these targets need to be revised to ensure that they are specific, measurable and attainable. Assessment data are available, but have not been analysed on a whole-school basis and are not linked to specific targets in the DEIS plan. There is a need to track and record pupil progress on a more rigorous basis. An increased focus on the implementation of literacy and numeracy intervention initiatives is also required.

- School self-evaluation is at an early stage of development and an increased use of assessment data to evaluate the quality of pupil learning in classroom contexts and to track the progress of individual classes and pupils is recommended in this regard. Monthly progress records should also be used to evaluate the implementation of the curriculum.

- All teachers devise long-term and short-term plans and monthly progress reports. The quality of these plans is generally good. However, in a minority of settings there is significant scope for development in the planning reviewed. Learning programmes and plans should be differentiated for specific pupils at each class level and for those pupils with SEN. The textbook plays a dominant role in the programmes planned and implemented. This practice should be reviewed.

- 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 majority of the lessons observed during the WSE were good to very good. However, there was scope for development in some practice observed. Where good, well-structured lessons were observed, the teachers had clear teaching objectives and the lessons were well-paced leading to clearly developed concepts and skills. In these settings, a good range of teaching approaches and strategies was employed and the teachers were skilful in managing the development of content, knowledge and skills. Some work on differentiation was in evidence in some classrooms but this area needs to receive greater attention in all classes.

- Tá éagsúlacht le sonrú in éifeacht an teagaisc agus na foghlama sa Ghaeilge. Tá teagasc na Gaeilge sna naíonáin agus sna bunrangann ar chaighdeán maith. Ar an iomlán, bhí éagsúlacht mhór i gcumais labhartha na ndaltaí, lag ar an iomlán sna hardranganna. Is léir go dtagann laghdú ar suim agus ar chumas labhartha na ndaltaí de réir mar a tháinig an phídil ar an iomlán a chlocaíodh. Tá scileanna léitheoireachta formhór na ndaltaí ar chaighdeán an t-seachtain. Tá obair scríofa na ndaltaí de réir mar a tháinig an phídil ar an iomlán a chlocaíodh. Moltar an Ghaeilge a chur in iniméadadh go bhfuil gach rang agus na chúisí a tháinig an phídil ar an iomlán a chlocaíodh. Moltar an Ghaeilge a chur in iniméadadh go bhfuil gach rang agus na chúisí a tháinig an phídil ar an iomlán a chlocaíodh. Moltar an Ghaeilge a chur in iniméadadh go bhfuil gach rang agus na chúisí a tháinig an phídil ar an iomlán a chlocaíodh.

The effectiveness of teaching and learning in Irish varied in the different settings. The quality of teaching in the infant and junior classes is of a good standard. In general, there was a wide variation in the oral language ability of the pupils. However, the standard was weak in the senior classes. It is clear that the pupils' interest and spoken language abilities decline as they progress through the school. The reading skills of most of the children in Irish are of a low standard and overall, their writing skills are limited. It is recommended that structured reading lessons incorporating the relevant reading skills be taught systematically in every class throughout the school. It is also recommended that Irish be used as an instructional language in other subjects, such as Physical Education, and also informally during the day throughout the school. Children should also be provided with opportunities to engage in a wide range of personal writing experiences in Irish.

- The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in English ranges from fair to good. In most classes, the pupils' oral language skills ranged from poor to satisfactory and the consistency of the delivery of oral language lessons varies from class to class. The implementation of a whole-school approach to the teaching of an oral language programme which identifies clear learning outcomes to be attained at each class level is recommended. Overall, the majority of pupils achieve good standards in reading. A phonological awareness programme is implemented in the school. In some of the formal reading lessons observed there was scope for development. There is a need, at whole-school level, to review the reading and comprehension strategies taught at the different class levels and to ensure that each reading lesson has a clear objective and learning outcome for the pupils. Class novels are used in most classes and this good practice is commended. It is recommended that this practice should be further extended to all classes. In general, the range of reading materials available in the school was limited and there is an over reliance on the class texts. The quality of the pupils' writing ranges from
satisfactory to good. It is recommended that a more structured approach to the teaching of writing and children should be introduced to writing in different genres.

- The quality of teaching and pupil achievement in Mathematics ranges from fair to good. The language of Mathematics is taught effectively in some settings. In some settings, concepts are presented in well paced lessons and carefully explained. Limited use of concrete materials was observed during the evaluation process. In most of the lessons observed, whole class teaching predominated. In some settings, attention is given to teaching worthwhile strategies to develop pupils’ problem-solving skills but these could be further extended to all classes. A greater emphasis on oral Mathematics and problem solving is recommended. The use of collaborative problem solving is also recommended. The provision of additional resources in all classes will facilitate greater use of concrete materials in the teaching and learning process. While group work was observed in some settings the extension of this good practice is recommended in all classes.

- Some good lessons were observed in the teaching of History during the evaluation period and most pupils displayed a keen interest in the topics addressed. A variety of materials including power-point presentations and internet resources were skilfully utilised to gain and retain pupil engagement in the lessons. Story was explored effectively at infant, junior and middle standards. Skill development received commendable attention in some settings. Timelines were in evidence in some classrooms and their use is commended as an effective tool in developing pupils understanding of chronology. It is recommended that the use of commercial textbooks as the primary resource for teaching and learning should be de-emphasised and a focus should be placed on the selection of content which reflects the experiences and interests of the pupils.

- There is scope for development in the area of assessment. Standardised tests in reading and Mathematics are administered annually from first to sixth class. The Middle Infant Screening Test (MIST) is administered in June. This test should be administered in the fifth term of the infant cycle and the Forward Together Programme should be delivered in the sixth term if required. A very limited range of diagnostic tests are administered by the Learning Support/Resource teachers (LS/RTs) as there are few diagnostic materials available in the school. Mainstream class teachers use a range of assessment modes including teacher designed tests and tasks. It is recommended that the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) guidelines on assessment be utilised to identify a wider range of assessment strategies. Assessment data should be used to inform the teaching and learning programmes devised.

6. Quality of Supports for Pupils

- Overall the quality of teaching observed in support settings was of a good standard. Well-maintained records detail the initial concerns identified and the screening measures administered by the teachers. A Special Education Needs’ policy has been developed and is in line with DES circulars and guidelines. Pupils presenting with special educational needs are provided for by one Learning Support/Resource teacher and one teacher who provides support for pupils with low incidence needs. Support teachers have established very good relationships with pupils. Very good quality Individual Pupil Learning Profiles (IPLPs) and Individual Education Plans (IEPs) are in place for pupils receiving support. IPLPs/IEPs are shared with parents and the relevant teachers. Lessons incorporate activities which are suitable to pupils' learning needs and strengths. Some pupils are receiving learning support do not meet the Department of Education and Skills (DES) criteria and early intervention programmes have not received sufficient attention to date. It is recommended that the school should avail of Reading Recovery training when it becomes available. Overall progress is in keeping with pupils' ability and the teaching targets set.