

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Boher NS, Streamstown
County Westmeath
Uimhir rolla: 17236A

Date of inspection: 14 October 2010



1. Introduction

Boher NS, Streamstown is a two-teacher co-educational school catering for the needs of thirty-two pupils. A shared learning-support teacher provides support to a number of pupils with special educational needs. The school is under the patronage of the Catholic Bishop of Meath. It espouses and endeavours to provide for the full and harmonious development of each pupil. Enrolment patterns show a gradual decline in recent years. On the whole, pupils' 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 is committed to the development of the school and promotes it as a focal point within the community.
- A warm, caring and affirming school atmosphere exists and this creates a nurturing and supportive learning environment.
- The principal, teachers and ancillary staff work collaboratively and conscientiously to enhance the educational experiences of pupils.
- The pupils are courteous and respectful in their relationships with adults and peers and display a high level of engagement in their work.
- The school provides for a wide range of co-curricular and extracurricular activities.

The following **main recommendations** are made:

- Teacher's planning should be more closely aligned to the structure and content of the curriculum.
- A wider blend of teaching approaches and methodologies should be implemented in some classes to involve pupils to a greater degree as active agents in the learning process.
- A whole-school approach to assessment for learning should be implemented. Data garnered should be used to inform planning, teaching and learning.

3. Quality of School Management

- The quality of management provided by the board of management is satisfactory. The board is properly constituted and is clearly committed to the development of the school as a central part of the community. It should familiarise itself further with rules of procedure for boards of management, particularly in relation to the frequency and operation of meetings and the annual certification or auditing of accounts. The board is to

be commended for ensuring that the school is upgraded and well maintained on an ongoing basis. Plans and policies are ratified on a continuous basis. The board is advised to review the school's enrolment and special educational needs policy to ensure that existing good practice and relevant equality legislation are reflected in their provisions.

- The in-school management team is comprised of a principal and special duties teacher. The principal has served in the school for a long number of years, thus ensuring stability and continuity. Both teachers are to be commended for their commitment to the school and for the development of a warm and nurturing learning environment. They work in close collaboration on all school issues and assume leadership roles on their assigned duties. Into the future, a greater emphasis should be placed on curriculum implementation by discussing and documenting whole-school approaches.
- The management of the human and material resources is good. The school is adequately resourced to implement the various aspects of the curriculum. Ancillary staff contribute effectively to the smooth operation of the school. The board should review the practice of requesting individual pupil contributions to part-finance external tutors in the delivery of any aspect of the curriculum.
- Some good strategies to foster effective communication between the school, parents and the wider community are in operation. Parents are supportive of the work of the school and recent efforts to establish a parents' association are to be praised. It is hoped that this will enhance parental involvement further in policy development and school activities. Further strategies to communicate school and board of management activities with the wider community should be considered.
- The management of pupils in Boher NS is of a high standard. Interactions observed were positive, affirming and respectful. In questionnaires, all pupils reported that they enjoy positive relationships with their peers and feel safe in their school environment. School rules are clearly displayed and are well internalised by pupils. The school provides for a range of co-curricular and extracurricular activities that foster the holistic development of pupils.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- The overall quality of school planning is good. Organisational policies meet legislative requirements and support the effective operation of the school. There is scope for the development of some curriculum plans to reflect further the context of the school and to become more embedded in teachers' planning and practice. Engagement in school self-evaluation is in its infancy and it is recommended that the school develops a strategic development plan that sets out clear targets, programmes and timeframes for school improvement and development.
- All teachers prepare written planning to support their work. Long-term plans are comprehensive but would benefit from further specific information on content. In some cases, short-term planning and monthly progress records would be more purposeful if they were more closely aligned to the structure and content of the curriculum as opposed to textbooks.

Child protection policy and procedures

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 overall quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement is good. Productive learning environments have been created throughout the school and pupils' work is regularly celebrated through display. Daily opportunities are provided for pupils in the infant and junior classes to explore and be creative through play. Effective methodologies such as pair work, group work, talk and discussion, circle time and dramatic conventions were observed during the course of the evaluation. There is scope for this provision to be extended and developed in some classrooms. To optimise learning outcomes, further provision for differentiation is recommended to ensure appropriate challenge or support for pupils. High quality resources are prepared and used effectively in many lessons but a reduced reliance on textbooks and workbooks is advised in some instances. The recent installation of modern information and communication technology (ICT) in each classroom should impact positively on the use of ICT as a pedagogical tool. Written work is well monitored by all teachers and the overall presentation of pupils' work is praiseworthy. Pupils display a high level of engagement in their learning and can discuss many aspects of their learning confidently.
- While all teachers undertake some form of assessment, there is scope to develop the effectiveness of formative assessment practices within the school. Consideration should be given to analysing the results of standardised and screening tests and other assessment data in order to inform the planning and delivery of differentiated learning activities. Results should be collated as a means of tracking individual pupil's progress over their attendance at primary school. The school's assessment policy should be reviewed to incorporate the best practice guidelines issued by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment in 2007. Going forward, the results of standardised tests should be communicated in writing to parents.
- Tá teagasc agus foghlaim na Gaeilge sásúil agus is léir go bhfuil iarracht dáiríre á dhéanamh ag gach oide dearcadh dearfach a chothú i leith na Gaeilge. Úsáidtear í mar theanga chaidrimh i múineadh na Gaeilge agus cloistear go minic í freisin mar theanga bhainisteoireachta an ranga. Úsáideann oídí áirithe modhanna múinte éagsúla le linn na gceachtanna ar a n-áirítear cluichí, rólghlacadh, obair bheirte, scéalaíocht, amhráin agus rannata. Moltar an dea-chleachtas seo a leathnú ar fud na scoile. B'fhiú tuilleadh béime a leagan ar chur chuige comhtháite trasna na ceithre snáithe sna meán agus sna hardranganna chun cumas cumarsáide na ndaltaí a fhorbairt. Comhairlítear éispéiris níos saibhre a sholáthar do na daltaí sa léitheoireacht agus sa scríbhneoireacht agus an bhéim ar téascleabhair agus leabhair saothair a laghdú.
- *The teaching and learning of Irish is satisfactory and it is obvious that all teachers are making an earnest effort to cultivate a positive attitude towards Irish. It is used as the language of communication in the teaching of Irish and is heard regularly at other times throughout the day for classroom management. Some teachers use a variety of methodologies during lessons including games, pair work, stories, role play, songs and rhymes. It is recommended that this good practice be extended throughout the school. Increased emphasis should be placed on an integrated approach across the four strands in the middle and senior classes to develop pupils' communicative competence. It is advised that pupils' experiences in reading and writing be enriched further and a reduced emphasis placed on textbooks and workbooks.*

- The quality of teaching and learning in English is good. Teachers provide opportunities for the development of pupils' oral language competence discretely and on a cross-curricular basis. A positive attitude to reading is fostered throughout the school and pupils demonstrate an ability to read accurately and fluently. In the infant and junior classes, pupils' emergent reading skills are nurtured systematically. Some use is made of an array of reading materials throughout the school to cater for the range of pupils' abilities. The writing experience of some pupils is based largely on workbooks and in order to add greater challenge and variety, further opportunities should be provided for pupils to write in a wider variety of genres and for different purposes and audiences. A good emphasis is placed on listening to, reciting and writing poetry.
- The overall quality of teaching and learning in Mathematics is of a high standard. Most pupils can competently perform number operations and are positively disposed to Mathematics. A greater emphasis should be placed on mental mathematics in all classes. In some instances, pupils work co-operatively during lessons and use concrete materials to consolidate their understanding of mathematical concepts. Good use is made of stories, rhymes and games in the infant and junior classes. Commendably, the local environment is used to demonstrate the practical relevance of Mathematics. Further provision for differentiation and a reduced emphasis on the use of textbooks would improve pupils' grasp of knowledge, concepts and skills in Mathematics.
- The quality of teaching and learning in Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) is good. The positive and caring atmosphere in the school creates a suitable climate for the effective delivery of the curriculum. Story, music, circle activities and talk and discussion are used to stimulate dialogue and to develop pupils' personal attributes and skills. A number of programmes are used effectively within the school to support the implementation of the curriculum. It is recommended that the section on Relationships and Sexuality Education within the SPHE policy be developed by a committee representative of the school community in order to provide clarity for implementation.

6. Quality of Supports for Pupils

- On the whole, there is good quality support for pupils with special educational needs (SEN). An individual education plan has been developed for each pupil in receipt of learning support and this is shared with mainstream class teachers. Consideration should be given to involving parents further in the development of individual plans so they can subsequently support the achievement of targets. It is advised that pupils' previous individual plans and progress records be stored within the school. Short-term planning contains good details on progress but could be more closely aligned to the curriculum. Lessons observed were characterised by clear delivery and were tailored to meet pupils' identified learning needs. Good emphasis is placed on early intervention within the school. It is recommended that the existing model of withdrawal be replaced by a more balanced provision of withdrawal and in-class support, based on the needs of individual pupils. Further use of diagnostic testing is advised in order to inform the development of learning targets. The school's SEN policy should be reviewed to include more explicit reference to the continuum of supports within the school and to provide for the selection, continuation and discontinuation of pupils availing of support.
- Staff deal sensitively and discretely with instances of hardship or disadvantage that arise.

Published, June 2011

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 welcomes the recent WSE report as it reflects and affirms the high standard of education being provided by Boher N.S.
- The Board of Management acknowledges the many strengths of the school as endorsed by the inspector.
- The Board of Management would like to acknowledge the commitment and dedication of the members of staff of Boher N.S.
- The Board would also like to thank the staff members for their continued efforts and their high standard of professionalism.
- The Board wishes to express its appreciation to the examining inspector for the courteous and professional manner in which he carried out the inspection.

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 appreciates and welcomes the advice of the inspectorate and is currently acting on this advice for the further development of the school.
- All recommendations will form the basis for any further planning within the school.