

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Belcarra National School
Castlebar, Co. Mayo
Uimhir rolla: 17585C

Date of inspection: 19 September 2013



1. Introduction

Belcarra NS is a co-educational rural school under the patronage of the Catholic Archbishop of Tuam situated nine kilometres south-east of Castlebar, Co. Mayo. Currently there are 139 pupils enrolled. The school is very well maintained and very attractively presented. This whole-school evaluation focused on the quality of teaching and learning in Gaeilge, English, Mathematics and Social, Personal and Health Education. 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:

- The board of management is effective in providing attractive and well maintained accommodation.
- There is a strong culture of co-operation shared by the whole school community.
- Very good standards are achieved by pupils in literacy and numeracy.
- The presentation of pupils' written work is very impressive throughout the school.
- Very good standards of teaching and learning were observed in all classrooms.
- Pupils are courteous and polite and engage well with their learning.
- Useful whole-school approaches have been developed to track pupil progress.

The following **main recommendations** are made:

- Posts of responsibility should be reviewed to ensure that there is both a greater emphasis on curricular leadership and a closer link with identified school priorities.
- The school's Relationship and Sexuality Education policy should be reviewed to provide greater clarity about this aspect of the curriculum.
- The school should review the number of textbooks at each class level and consider their impact on the range of learning activities provided.

3. Quality of School Management

- The effective board of management demonstrates a purposeful commitment to the school and to the provision and maintenance of good quality accommodation and facilities. It meets frequently and considers a broad range of issues at its meetings. The school is well run and accounts are certified annually. An agreed report should become a standard item at all board meetings and its contents disseminated to the school community. The board should also issue an annual report on its work in governing the school.
- The experienced and diligent principal is courteous and professional in his interactions with parents, pupils and staff. His work in advancing the various building projects is

commendable. He has succeeded in promoting a culture of teamwork and partnership amongst all members of the school community. He is ably assisted by a hard-working in-school management team who show a great dedication to the school. At present the team operates on an informal basis. While posts were reviewed within the last year, it is recommended that they be further revised. Current priorities for the school should be reflected in the duties assigned, with a greater emphasis on curricular leadership.

- The quality of the management of resources is very good. Classrooms are well resourced and effective use is being made of the digital technology available. All teachers provide bright, attractive, orderly environments which support teaching and learning.
- The management of pupils in this school is very good. Pupils are eager to participate in their lessons and are courteous and pleasant in their interactions with each other and with adults. Their responses in the pupil questionnaires indicate a very high level of pupil satisfaction with almost all pupils saying that this is a good school.
- Relationships between parents and teachers are open and welcoming. It is school policy that all parental concerns are addressed at the earliest possible opportunity. Effective systems are in place to provide parents with information about their children's progress. A recently established Home-School Association provides helpful support to the school through fundraising and assistance at events. This group should consider affiliating with the National Parents Council (Primary). Almost all responses to parental questionnaires undertaken as part of this evaluation indicate that the school is well run. Parents express very high levels of satisfaction with teaching in the school.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- The quality of the school planning and school self-evaluation process is good. The school has provided useful school planning documents and has also made a good start with school self-evaluation. Pupil learning outcomes are monitored systematically and this information is shared with the board. This good work is commendable.
- The quality of individual teacher planning is generally good and some very good quality planning was observed. In some cases there is an over-emphasis on the delivery of schemes of work provided by book publishers rather than those designed by teachers themselves. It is recommended that the school review how textbooks are used in the school to ensure that there is a greater focus on the achievement of learning objectives as specified in the Primary School Curriculum (1999).
- Progress records should indicate more clearly the learning outcomes that have been achieved. These records could then be analysed to promote school improvement as part of the school self-evaluation process.
- Confirmation was provided that the board of management has formally adopted the *Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools* without modification and that the school is compliant with the requirements of the *Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools*.

5. Quality of Teaching, Learning and Pupil Achievement

- The quality of teaching and learning and pupil achievement is very good overall, with some exemplary practice observed. Hard-working teachers are well prepared to deliver interesting and stimulating lessons. Pupil achievement in literacy and numeracy is very

impressive, as is evidenced, for example, by very good results in standardised tests and the quality of answers during the evaluation. During the evaluation appropriate activities were provided and pupils engaged well with their learning. The school should review the number of textbooks at each class level and consider their impact on the range of learning activities provided.

- Múintear an Ghaeilge go héifeachtach. Labhraíonn na hoidí an teanga go cruinn líofa agus múintear ceachtanna le fuinneamh. Tugtar faoi deara cáilíocht mhaith i labhairt na Gaeilge sna ranganna éagsúla. Baintear úsáid mhaith as obair bheirte chun deiseanna a thabhairt do na daltaí a scileanna cumarsáide a threisiú. Bíonn na daltaí in ann ceisteanna a fhreagairt agus a chur go héifeachtúil. Léann na daltaí Gaeilge go muiníneach agus go tuisceanach. Moltar anois úsáid a bhaint as leabhair bheaga leabharlainne agus as úrscéalta Gaeilge chun cur leis a scileanna léitheoireachta. Moltar freisin níos mó deiseanna a thabhairt do na daltaí a bheith ag scríobh go neamhspleách.

Irish is taught effectively. All teachers speak Irish accurately and fluently and lessons are taught energetically. A high standard in spoken Irish was observed in the various classes. Good use was made of pair work to provide pupils with opportunities to strengthen their communication skills. Pupils can ask and answer questions effectively. Pupils read Irish confidently and with understanding. It is now recommended that little library books and Irish novels are used to enhance their reading skills. It is also recommended that pupils be given more opportunities to write independently.

- The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in English is very good overall, as is evidenced, for example, by written work and by the most recent standardised test results. A very high standard of penmanship and presentation of work was observed throughout the school. Pupils are provided with multiple opportunities to write independently across the curriculum and some lovely samples of pupils' project work were observed. To enhance this good practice it is recommended that pupils be provided with opportunities to use information and communication technology to publish their written work. In all classes, oral language development is very well managed and structured activities are provided to enhance pupils' vocabulary and fluency. Pupils recite a good range of poetry. The school has recently established peer tutoring in a number of classrooms. This initiative is commendable.
- The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in Mathematics is good. Teaching in the lessons observed was clear and well-structured with a worthwhile emphasis on the use of activity-based learning and the use of concrete materials. The school has identified the need to use a common language for the teaching of Mathematics and this is reflected in all teachers' planning. In-class learning support for Mathematics has been recently established. This worthwhile initiative would be further enhanced by the use of collaborative teaching approaches such as station teaching and specialist mathematics programmes that have been designed to provide additional support for pupils who have lower achievement in Mathematics.
- Effective practice was observed in Social, Personal and Health Education. There is a strong culture of respect and tolerance fostered in this inclusive school. Lessons were well managed with a suitable emphasis on skill development. Pupils engaged well with the lessons provided and a high level of enjoyment and benefit was observed. Parental responses to the questionnaires indicate that some parents feel that they are not well-informed about the details of the school's Relationship and Sexuality Education policy. The school should review its policy in this regard to provide the necessary clarity about this aspect of the curriculum.
- Some very effective whole-school approaches to assessment were observed during the course of the evaluation. Teachers are well informed about pupils' progress and are

aware of individual strengths and weaknesses. Individual pupils' attainments in literacy and numeracy are tracked year-on-year and compared with performance in a non-reading intelligence test. The school should devise a system for recording teachers' observations of pupils' performance in the early years to ensure that early intervention strategies can be used effectively.

6. Quality of Support for Pupils

- This is an inclusive school and it welcomes pupils with special educational needs. The school's learning support policy advocates the staged approach and there is clear evidence that class teachers provide differentiated approaches to address pupils' difficulties. This good practice is commended. The school should consider using the templates provided in *The Continuum of Support* resource pack to further enhance this good work.
- Good quality teaching approaches and interventions for pupils with special educational needs were observed during the course of the evaluation. Good quality individual education plans have been devised. Targets are well chosen and are derived from the specialist reports available.
- In the special education setting, regular assessment of progress and careful record keeping ensure that pupils' progress is monitored. These records indicate that most pupils are making satisfactory progress in keeping with their ability.

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