An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Scoil Bhríde
Ballyragget, County Kilkenny
Uimhir rolla: 17649C

Date of inspection: 13 October 2010
1. Introduction

Scoil Bhríde is a seven-teacher primary school, under the patronage of the Roman Catholic Bishop of Ossory, catering for girls from junior infants to sixth class and for boys from junior infants to first class. Attendance of the 137 pupils enrolled is generally good. There have been a significant number of changes to teaching personnel recently. The board of management was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the evaluation, and the response of the board will be found in the appendix to this report.

2. Summary of Findings and Recommendations for Further Development

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

- The school is supported by a conscientious board of management and staff.
- Significant emphasis is placed on responding to the pastoral care needs of the pupils.
- Good practices are in evidence in English writing.
- The quality of provision for pupils with special educational needs is very good.

The following main recommendations are made:

- The board of management should endeavour to establish a parents’ association on a formal basis.
- The in-school management team should further develop its curriculum leadership role in order to support the principal in the ongoing development, implementation and review of whole-school planning.
- The school is advised, as a matter of priority, to appoint a deputy designated liaison person in order to comply with its obligations on child protection.
- The school’s enrolment policy should be reviewed to ensure that statutory obligations pertaining to the Education Act (1998) and the Equal Status Act (2000) in relation to the enrolment of pupils with special educational needs are observed.
- All curriculum plans should fully reflect the context of the school and provide comprehensive guidance to inform teaching and learning.
- The school should devise a coherent and systematic whole-school approach to pupil assessment. This approach should then become an integral part of the cycle of teaching and learning.
- Individual teachers’ planning needs to address variations in the pupils’ ability levels more effectively. Strategies to facilitate consistency in monthly progress reports should be implemented.

3. Quality of School Management

- The board of management meets regularly and works collaboratively with the staff in attending to a variety of organisational and administrative needs. The chairperson is particularly supportive of the work of the school. The board recently devoted considerable time to school maintenance matters and to the employment of new staff. It is actively involved in the development of organisational policies and many curriculum plans have recently been ratified. The school’s enrolment policy should be reviewed as a matter of priority to ensure that statutory obligations pertaining to the Education Act (1998) and the Equal Status Act (2000) are observed in relation to the enrolment of pupils with special educational needs.
• The principal, appointed in January 2010, has initiated a programme to progress the school plan over a realistic timeframe. She is ably assisted by a committed in-school management team comprising an acting deputy principal and one special-duties teacher. The team members are commended for the effective manner in which they undertake their organisational and pastoral duties and the extent to which they contribute to the effective operation of the school. It is recommended that the curriculum duties attaching to the posts be further developed to include responsibility for the coordination, review and ongoing development of specific subject areas in the whole-school context.

• School management ensures that the school building and grounds are maintained to a good standard. A comprehensive range of teaching resources is provided and employed suitably to support teaching and learning. It is recommended that a formal policy on staff mobility be agreed so that all teachers are provided with the opportunity to experience a variety of classroom contexts throughout their careers in the school.

• While there is no formal parents’ association in the school, some parents are involved in aspects of school life. It is recommended that the board of management facilitates and encourages the establishment of a parents’ association on a formal basis. Parent-teacher meetings are held annually and parents are provided with a written report on their child’s progress at the end of the school year. A review of the report template and the inclusion of the results of standardised testing in English reading and Mathematics are advised to provide more comprehensive feedback to parents. The results of the questionnaire issued to parents indicate that there is limited collaboration with parents on the formulation of school policies and this is an area which requires attention.

• Relationships between the school staff and pupils are very positive. The pupils behave well and relate constructively to their peers and adults. There are good arrangements in place to support and care for the pupils. The school has established useful links with relevant outside agencies.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

• The quality of whole-school planning and school self-evaluation is poor. While plans have been formulated for most curriculum areas, there is scope for the incremental development of the school plan. Differentiated strategies to accommodate the range of pupil ability levels should be addressed more comprehensively. The school should devise a coherent and systematic whole-school approach to pupil assessment. This approach should then become an integral part of the teaching and learning cycle.

• Mainstream class teachers engage in long-term and short-term planning. Different approaches are used and the quality of these approaches varies. Good practice, which included planning for differentiation and assessment, was observed in some instances. This practice should be extended through the school to ensure that the needs of all pupils are met consistently. It is further advised that teachers adopt an agreed approach to monthly progress records. These records should focus on the learning outcomes achieved by the pupils, so that future planning can address the continued development of pupil learning. Such a reflective approach, if adopted, would contribute significantly to the school’s self-evaluation process.

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) has been appointed in line with the requirements of the guidelines. The school is advised, as a matter of priority, to appoint a deputy DLP.

5. Quality of Teaching, Learning and Pupil Achievement

- The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement is generally good. The teachers successfully employ a range of resources to support their work. Good questioning techniques are used to expand thinking skills and discussions are well managed. It is recommended that the pupils be afforded increased opportunities to work cooperatively in groups. A greater commitment to the use of information and communication technology (ICT) across the entire curriculum should also be prioritised as almost all pupils surveyed indicated that they do not often use computers in school.


Lessons in Irish are presented in a stimulating manner. Irish is used as the language of instruction throughout lessons, contributing significantly to the pupils’ understanding. A range of teaching and learning strategies is employed to develop the pupils’ oral capacities. These include puppets, language games, and posing and answering questions. The pupils pleasantly recite a wide selection of poems with commendable pronunciation. A majority of the pupils read with fluency and accuracy and they demonstrate positive understanding of their reading material. Writing activities are based on lesson themes. Samples of the pupils’ writing should be used to contribute to the print-rich environment in Irish.

- Satisfactory standards are achieved by the pupils across all strands in English. Oral language opportunities are explored effectively through story and through pertinent seasonal topics of interest. Due attention is given to the advancement of reading strategies. A majority of the pupils read accurately and they are developing appropriate comprehension skills. The pupils’ questionnaire results indicate that most pupils consider that they are doing well at reading. It is recommended that differentiated programmes of reading be implemented for pupils experiencing difficulties. The pupils are encouraged to write to a high standard in a variety of genres, with particular achievement noted in the composition of poetry.

- Teaching and learning in Mathematics is good. All classes have stimulating mathematical areas and resources which are used consistently to reinforce learning. In infant classes, rhyme is used frequently to consolidate learning. Good work is undertaken in the strand of number and an appropriate balance between the strands is achieved through the school. In many instances, mathematical tasks are linked to the pupils’ environment. Problem-solving skills are prioritised. Differentiation to support pupils in the multi-class setting is addressed appropriately. It is recommended that differentiated teaching approaches to attend to individual pupil needs be implemented in all classes. Whole-
school consensus on the incremental development of competencies in mathematical language would further enhance provision. A majority of the pupils indicate that they are achieving well in Mathematics.

- The quality of teaching and learning in Science is satisfactory. The pupils are consistently made aware of plants, animals, seasonal changes and natural phenomena. In general, lessons are well paced. Where good practice was observed, due consideration was given to the development of the pupils’ skills in predicting, investigating, fair testing, and in designing and making. It is advised that provision in Science be developed further. A more constructivist approach to learning should be implemented on a schoolwide basis through which the pupils’ skills as scientists can be extended optimally.

6. Quality of Support for Pupils

- The quality of teaching and learning for pupils with special educational needs is very good. The pupils are generally withdrawn individually and in small groups for supplementary teaching, with some in-class support being provided. The learning-support and resource rooms are bright, print-rich and mathematics-rich environments. Commendable learning and teaching methods are used. There is considerable good practice in evidence, which includes the organisation of comprehensive individual profile and learning plans (IPLPs). IPLP targets are clear, measurable and particular to the needs of individual pupils. It is recommended that parents receive a copy of their child’s IPLP. The pupils in receipt of learning support are aware of their own personal short-term targets and these are displayed carefully. Support teachers base their weekly planning on the targets set out in IPLPs and this is closely linked to the work undertaken in the classroom. Class teachers have a copy of the learning-support teacher’s weekly plans. Details of progress achieved are also documented.

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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 of Scoil Bhride N.S., Ballyragget, Co. Kilkenny, wish to acknowledge the work of the Inspectorate, Department of Education and Skills, in carrying out a Whole School Evaluation in our school in October 2010. We wish to thank the inspectors involved and feel we have benefited from this process.

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 following areas of recommendation have already been addressed:

- Deputy Designated Liaison person appointed
- Enrolment Policy was reviewed and rectified
- Health and Safety Officer appointed.

The Board of Management are working closely with the Principal and all other parties towards the implementation of all other recommendations put forward in the report.