Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Scoil Ailbhe
Ballybricken, Grange, Kilmallock, Co. Limerick
Uimhir rolla: 18030l

Date of inspection: 7 February 2011
1. Introduction

Scoil Ailbhe is situated in the parish of Ballybricken and Bohermore, approximately twelve miles from Limerick city. The school which has four mainstream teachers is under the patronage of the Catholic Archbishop of Cashel and Emly. Current enrolment, at 110 pupils, reflects a considerable growth in recent years in the school’s population and projections are that this trend will continue. Attendance rates are very good. This report presents the findings of a whole-school evaluation undertaken in the school in February 2011. The evaluation focused on the quality of teaching and learning in English, Irish, Mathematics and Drama.

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

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<th>The following are the <strong>main strengths</strong> of the work of the school:</th>
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<td>• The board of management has worked diligently to achieve a modern, well-resourced school.</td>
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<td>• The principal leads the work of the school in a dynamic and insightful manner.</td>
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<td>• The teachers are hard working and resourceful and display a range of individual skills and capabilities.</td>
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<td>• Pupils are well managed and engage positively in the learning process.</td>
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<td>• Commendable standards of achievement are evident in the curriculum areas evaluated.</td>
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<td>• A long-established and active parents’ association provides meaningful support for the work of the school.</td>
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<td>• The school is central to the life of the local community.</td>
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The following **main recommendations** are made:

• It is recommended that the generation, collation and use of data be further streamlined so that the school community can self-evaluate with greater confidence.

• The school’s strategic plan should be revisited and presented for board approval, and regular updates on progress should be communicated to the partners.

• Teachers should extend the use of their assessment data to track pupils’ progress individually. Reports to parents should be in line with the practice outlined in Circular 0138/2006 *Supporting Assessment in Primary Schools*. |
3. Quality of School Management

- The board of management is properly constituted and engages with its functions and responsibilities with due regard for relevant statutory requirements and good practice guidelines. Accounts are carefully maintained and have been certified to the end of August 2010. It is recommended that the board should report at regular intervals to parents so that there is greater awareness of the nature and extent of the board’s operations and its progress in achieving its stated objectives. Section 20 of the Education Act 1998 is worthy of note in this regard.

- The principal provides very good leadership for the school. He works diligently to ensure that the learning environment is safe and well organised and that pupils achieve in accordance with their abilities across the broad spectrum of objectives outlined in the curriculum. The principal is ably supported in the day-to-day management of the school by the deputy principal and special duties teacher. Much good work has been done in terms of defining and developing the roles and duties of the post holders. Further progress in this regard should involve a more frequent review of duties to ensure close alignment with the school's objectives.

- The physical infrastructure of the school has been developed to a high standard in recent years and is maintained very well. The school has been awarded two Green Flags, and pupils are active in maintaining the school and its environs in a clean, tidy and litter-free state. A plentiful supply of useful resources, including interactive white boards, is provided to enhance teaching and learning.

- The pupils engage with their teachers, each other and visitors in a positive, confident and respectful manner. An analysis of pupils’ questionnaire responses indicates that almost all pupils surveyed feel safe in school and get on well with other pupils.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- The quality of school planning is commendable. A wide range of organisational policies has been developed and these policies contribute positively to the effective management of the school. Plans for the curriculum areas are reviewed regularly and focus on achieving consistency and continuity in teaching throughout the school. It is recommended that the next phase of policy review include greater consultation with both parents and the board of management.

- School planning and self-evaluation practices are developing well and are making a positive contribution to the effective functioning of the school. Data are generated through standardised testing and other assessment practices in an effort to ensure that pupils make satisfactory progress. It is recommended that the generation, collation and use of data be further streamlined so that the school community can self-evaluate with greater confidence. It is also recommended that the school's strategic plan be revisited, and be presented for board approval, and that regular updates on progress be communicated to the partners.

- The quality of classroom planning is generally very good. Teachers are conscientious and thorough in their approach to planning and recording of progress.

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 quality of overall teaching, learning and pupil achievement is very good. Commendable efforts have been made at a whole-school level to use a broad range of methodologies in line with curriculum guidelines. Teaching is lively and energetic. Pupils’ work is carefully monitored and affirmed. Good examples of the use of information and communications technology (ICT) were observed during the evaluation.

- Tá caighdeán an-mhaith á bhaint amach i dteagasc agus i bhfoghlaim na Gaeilge. Moltar iarrachtaí na n-oidí chun úsáid theagmharsach neamhfhoirmiúil na Gaeilge a fhairsingiú sa scoil. Cuirtear na ranganna Gaeilge i láthair go briomhar tarraingteach. Leagtar béim fhóinteacht ar chluichí teanga, ar sheifití agus ar rannpháirtíocht na ndaltaí. Sonraithear cumas na ndaltaí raon maith ceisteanna a chur agus a fhreagairt. Léann na daltaí go cuíinn, liofa ó na tacaíseabhair agus na leabhair oibre sna ranganna éagsúla. D’fhéadfaí tuilleadh tairbhe a bhaint as úrscéalta simplí agus fíorleabhair sa ghné seo den obair. Cotháitear scileanna scribhneoireachta go córasach tríd an scoil agus breathnaítear cumas inmholta ceapadóireachta i measc cuid mhaith de na daltaí sna hardranganna. Chun barr maithéasa a bhaint amach san obair seo, ba chóir measúnú ar mhúineadh agus ar teagasc na Gaeilge a phlé agus a fhreagairt ar bhonn uile-scoile.

A very good standard is achieved in the teaching and learning of Irish. The teachers are praised for their efforts to expand the incidental and informal use of Irish in the school. Helpful emphasis is placed on language games, on improvisation and on the participation of the pupils. Pupils’ capacity to ask and answer a good range of questions is noted. Pupils in the various classes read fluently and accurately from their textbooks and workbooks. It should be possible to derive greater benefit from simple novels and real books in this aspect of the work. Writing skills are systematically developed throughout the school and a praiseworthy ability at composition is observed among a good number of pupils in the senior classes. The evaluation of the teaching and learning of Irish should now be considered and developed on a whole-school basis, as a means of building on existing good practice.

- The overall quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in English is very good. Innovative language games and strategies are used to advance the development of pupils’ oral language skills. Pupils in the infant and junior classes recite a broad range of poems and rhymes. Reading is taught very successfully in the school. The strategies employed in the teaching of reading include a consistent focus on word identification skills, the development of a variety of comprehension skills and the promotion of shared reading and the use of class novels. Recent efforts to develop a school library are commended. Writing, in all the various genres, is carefully developed. Drafting, editing, publishing and writing for different audiences are used to good effect. Pupils’ work is presented neatly throughout the school.

- Good standards are achieved in the teaching and learning of Mathematics. A broad and balanced mathematics curriculum is taught. The lessons observed highlighted the teaching of mathematical language, the use of concrete materials, the development of concepts and the performance of computations. Interactive white boards, posters and concrete materials are used effectively to facilitate the understanding of concepts. Pupils’ work is neatly presented and carefully monitored by the teachers. Further gains in
Mathematics achievement should be possible through placing greater emphasis on developing pupils’ problem solving skills.

- Drama is taught effectively. Pupils are provided with a broad range of experiences through which they co-operate and communicate in the improvisation of stories and poems. Talk and discussion, as a prelude to these activities and by way of reflection afterwards, is well directed and stimulating. The improvisational activities provide very good opportunities for pupils to engage with emotions and ideas. Teacher in role, pupil in role and still images are used to good effect.

6. Quality of Support for Pupils

- Provision for pupils with special educational needs (SEN) is very good. Learning support and resource teaching is provided by three teachers, two of whom work in a shared capacity with neighbouring schools. It is recommended that the board of management continue to seek to rationalise current provision in the context of local clustering arrangements. Individual plans and profiles are carefully compiled by teachers and progress is monitored effectively.

- Support teaching is well organised and skilfully delivered and pupils clearly benefit from the supportive and affirming learning environment provided. Support is provided on the basis of pupils’ identified needs, on an individual basis and in group settings as necessary. A key element of provision involves alleviating learning difficulties through early intervention. Support is provided in both literacy and numeracy and, to a lesser extent, in dealing with emotional and social development. Delivery is by means of withdrawing individual pupils and groups from class for the most part. This model of support needs to be kept under review to allow for the implementation of models of team teaching and in-class support, as appropriate.

- The quality of assessment approaches in use is good. All teachers employ a range of assessment modes to monitor the progress of pupils. Teachers should extend the use of their assessment data to track all pupils’ progress on an individual basis. Reports to parents should be line with the practice envisaged by Circular 0138/2006 Supporting Assessment in Primary Schools.

- The school has an active and supportive parents’ association. The association organises regular events which not only serve as fundraisers but are important social events in the school calendar. The teachers appreciate very much the high levels of support and co-operation provided by parents. Parents are informed of their children’s progress through written reports and ongoing contact with teachers. Almost all parents indicate through their questionnaire responses that they are happy with the school.

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