An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Ballymoney National School
Ballineen, County Cork
Uimhir rolla: 18246l

Date of inspection: 16 June 2011
1. **Introduction**

Ballymoney NS is a two teacher co-educational school under the patronage of the Church of Ireland Bishop of Cork, Cloyne and Ross. Currently, there are 32 pupils enrolled in the school. Enrolment statistics indicate a forty percent increase in the past three years. The practices of the board with regard to pupil attendance are effective and in line with National Education Welfare Board (NEWB) and with Departmental guidelines and best practice.

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 give generously of their time and provide support, advice and a strategic vision to the school community.
- The school is respected and supported by the local community.
- Teaching and learning is at the core of the school decision-making process.
- There is a suitable focus on school improvement and on the attainment and maintenance of high standards.
- The principal provides effective leadership to the school community and has, with the support of her mainstream colleague, been successful in the creation of a positive and productive teaching and learning environment.
- A broad and balanced curriculum is provided and suitable child-centred methodologies are effectively used.

The following **main recommendations** are made:

- It is recommended that in phase two of the school refurbishment project, the provision of a staffroom is prioritised, which will provide a suitable learning and communal environment for staff.
- It is recommended that a communicative approach to language teaching be adopted as school policy.
- It is recommended that policies are developed which facilitate the annual review and prioritisation of assigned in-school management responsibilities in line with evolving school needs.

3. **Quality of School Management**

- The board of management plays a central role in the life of the school. The board ratifies and reviews policies on a regular basis, makes provision for the strategic development of the school building, promotes the continuous professional development (CPD) of the staff and oversees the school’s financial affairs efficiently. At the time of the whole-school
evaluation, a major renovation was taking place with Departmental assistance and a strategic plan exists in which future accommodation needs are to be addressed within an agreed timeframe. In that context, it is recommended that the provision of a staffroom is prioritised, which will provide a suitable learning and communal environment for staff.

- At the time of the evaluation, the senior classes were being taught in the adjacent parish hall. This building is owned and maintained by the parish and is available to the school all year round and is therefore used frequently as a resource for some curricular areas. One hundred percent of parents believe the school to be well run. Almost all parents, 94% percent, believe that school facilities are good and all believe the school to be a safe environment for their children

- The quality of the work of the in-school management team, the principal and one special duties post holder, contributes positively to the work of the school. A collegial and supportive atmosphere exists, responsibilities are shared and leadership is distributed. In order to further improve existing practice, it is recommended that assigned duties are prioritised annually by the board to include a relevant mixture of curricular, pastoral and administrative responsibilities. Formal reporting procedures should also be put in place to evaluate progress on agreed targets.

- The provision and effective use of resources in support of teaching and learning is very good and investment in ICT is at an advanced stage. Ninety percent of pupils surveyed stated that they get to use computers often at school. Clearly, good use is made of departmental grants and locally raised funds and all classrooms are interesting and stimulating places of learning. The board also employs a part-time secretary and a part-time cleaner who perform their duties to an acceptable standard.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- The quality of school planning is very good and a suitable collaborative process is followed with regard to the development and on-going review of policy documents. All plans are realistic and practical and indicate a sound awareness of the legal framework in which schools operate. The policies and practices of the school are consistent with departmental guidelines and best practice. Current plans to enable all parents to access all school policies through the school website will, when completed, further democratise the internal school decision-making process.

- Self-evaluation is an emerging feature of the work of the school and standardised test results and other data are carefully analysed with a view to refining practice in support of individuals and groups with particular needs. This is good practice.

- The impact of school planning is evident from the consistency and continuity of practice in each of the classrooms and from the clarity and continuity in the individual preparation and written monthly records of teachers.

- 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 learning environment of the school is healthy and productive. Lessons are well constructed and in line with the principles of the curriculum for primary schools. Suitable methodologies are employed and standardised test results, of Sigma-T and Micra-T, in reading and in Mathematics are above average. The atmosphere in classrooms is very positive and pupil behaviour is very good. Eighty-nine percent of parents believe that teaching is good in the school and almost all pupils, ninety-one percent, believe that their school is a good school.

- Múintear an Ghaeilge go córasach, structhúrtha sa scoil. Úsáidtear modhanna múinteoiriúnachach chun suim sa teanga a chothú. Moltar, ach go hárithne an úsáid a bhaintear as an gcíar báin idirghníomhach. Cuirtear béim ar na snáitheanna uile (éisteacht, labhairt, léithreoiríocht agus scribhneoireacht) agus léiríonn formhór na ndaltaí tuisint oiriúnach ar Ghaeile bhunúsach. Chun tuilleadh feabhas a chur ar an obair, moltar béim breise a chur ar Ghaeilge chumarsáideach, deiseanna éisteachta na ndaltaí a leathnú a thuilleadh agus clár teagaisc amháin a úsáid trasna na scoile. B'fhiú, chomh maith plean forbartha don Ghaeilge a bhunú ina leagfaí amach spriocanna fóghlama níos cinnte ó thaobh úsáid teanga. Moltar ball den fhoireann, le taithi, suim agus scileanna oiriúnacha, a aithint agus a chumasú chun an obair seo a threorú. B'fhiú, chomh maith, gníthe den tumoideachas a thriail mar chur chuige ó am go chéile.

**Irish is taught systematically and in a structured manner. Suitable methodologies are used to foster interest in the language and the use of the interactive whiteboard is especially praiseworthy. All of the strands (listening, speaking, reading and writing) are emphasised and the majority of pupils display a suitable understanding of basic Irish. To improve the work further, it is recommended that additional emphasis is placed on communicative Irish, that listening opportunities are extended further and that only one learning programme is used throughout the school. It would also be worthwhile to develop a strategic plan for the promotion of Irish which would identify specific learning targets in respect of the use of Irish communicatively. It is recommended that a staff member with appropriate skills and interest be selected and supported in managing this work. It would also be worthwhile to experiment with aspects of immersion education in Irish as a teaching strategy on occasions.**

- English is taught systematically and effectively. Classrooms are print-rich and attractive, providing a rich context for language acquisition. There is a consistent emphasis on language development across the curriculum and pupils learn new language contextually in a structured and systematic manner. The school recognises the importance of reading fluency as a key cornerstone of learning and promotes it effectively. Standardised test results indicate steady improvement over a three-year period and in almost all percentile bands, school distribution exceeds normal distribution figures. Almost all parents, 95% percent, believe the school is helping their children to progress with reading and most pupils, 82% percent, believe they are good readers. Writing skills are taught successfully and there is a relevant emphasis on the writing process. Some very good examples of pupils’ written work, in a variety of genres, were observed during the course of the evaluation.

To further improve practice it is recommended that a literacy plan be developed which should, within an agreed time-frame, explore and develop new interventions and strategies to further promote oral, reading and writing skills and practices in an integrated manner.
• The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in Mathematics is very good. Mathematics lessons are well structured and the development of concepts and skills is effectively linked to the environment. Pupils are encouraged to enjoy the subject and to think mathematically and also to apply rules and formulae to specific situations. There is a commendable emphasis on methods rather than answers, and teachers play a supportive role in enabling pupils to see themselves as mathematicians and problem solvers. Standardised test results indicate levels of pupil achievement which significantly exceed normal distribution patterns in all of the percentile bands. Eighty-eight percent of parents believe their children are doing well at Mathematics and the majority of pupils think they are doing well at the subject.

• A broad and balanced programme is provided for in Physical Education (PE) and the learning environment provided is both supportive and productive. Opportunities are provided for achievement by all pupils and the importance of play and enjoyment is emphasised. An adequate range of equipment is provided for and lessons are well structured with clear purpose and outcomes in mind. The use of an adjacent parish hall facilitates the implementation of a PE programme throughout the school year. External instructors are used to supplement the internal school PE programme, funded by voluntary contributions. Their work is linked to and integrated into the school's curriculum.

6. Quality of Support for Pupils

• Support for pupils with special educational needs is provided by a visiting learning support teacher for 5.75 hours per week. Early intervention is a feature of the school and in-class support is provided, where appropriate. Currently, two pupils receive learning support. A number of pupils attend the ‘Irish Centre for Talented Youth’.

• The quality of teaching approaches and interventions for pupils with special educational needs is satisfactory, assessment and record keeping practices are effective and information is shared with parents in line with departmental guidelines and practice. Most parents, 83%, are happy with the arrangements for parent-teacher meetings and 89% believe that school reports give them a good picture of how their children are doing.

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.

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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 Ballymoney National School welcomes this Whole School Evaluation Report, which highlights some of our strengths and would like to thank the inspector of the DES for his affirming and constructive comments.

- We are pleased that the report affirms much of the positive work being done in our school and in particular the reference to the positive and productive teaching and learning environment.
- We welcome the recognition that teaching and learning is at the core of the school decision-making process and that a broad and balanced curriculum is provided and suitable child-centred methodologies are effectively used.
- The Board congratulates the principal and all members of staff for their hard work and continued dedication and also commends the members of the Parents’ Association for their continued work and support.

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 of Management of Ballymoney National School welcomes the positive findings and have already begun to implement the recommendations as outlined in the report.

- The communicative approach to language teaching has already been adopted as school policy.
- The post of responsibility has been reviewed and will be reviewed annually in the future.
- We acknowledge the importance of a staffroom to provide a suitable Learning and communal environment for staff.