Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Lochán an Bhealaigh National School
Mullingar, Co. Westmeath
Uimhir rolla: 18262G

Date of inspection: 23 November 2011
1 Introduction

Lochán an Bhealaigh National School is a small primary school serving a rural community in Loughanavally, approximately eight kilometres outside Mullingar. The school is under the patronage of the Catholic Bishop of Meath. The attendance levels of the sixty three pupils on rolls are very good and enrolment trends reflect steady growth in the school in recent years. 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:

- A strong sense of community spirit and a very positive school atmosphere are nurtured through the work of the principal, board members, staff and parents.
- The dedicated board of management carries out its duties effectively.
- All pupils conduct themselves in an exemplary manner and they present as articulate, confident and mannerly children.
- There is good teaching and learning in Irish, English and Mathematics.
- The management of communication and relationships between the school, the parents and the wider community is excellent.
- The parents’ association and parents in general give very good assistance to the school.

The following **main recommendations** are made:

- The school-self evaluation process should be extended to include action planning to address consistency in teaching approaches and in the setting out of specific, measurable targets in priority areas which are reviewed systematically.
- It is recommended that the school review the teaching of history with specific emphasis on the methodologies used to enhance the pupils’ skills of working as historians.
- The special education needs team should meet on a formal basis to coordinate practice in relation to planning, programme delivery and assessment.
- The school should review the availability and use of resources to support teaching and learning, with particular emphasis on resources for pupils with learning needs.
3. **Quality of School Management**

- The dedicated board of management provides effective support to the school. It is actively engaged in policy development, school maintenance and the management of internal school matters. It is recommended that the well-prepared financial reports be certified annually.

- The recently-appointed principal fosters a very positive school climate, is committed to the holistic development of pupils and manages very good communication and relationships with the school community. He receives excellent support from the deputy principal who carries out a wide range of duties in a capable manner. All duties should be regularly reviewed to ensure that they are in keeping with the school’s current priorities.

- The school grounds, the play and green areas, and the façade of the building are well maintained. There is scope to improve the level of educational resources in use in many classes to support teaching and learning. In particular, the range of visual teaching aids, mathematics resources and information and communications technology available should be prioritised. There is also a need to enhance the physical learning environment and resources in use for pupils with special educational needs.

- Communication and relationships between the school, the parents and the wider community are effective. A wide range of formal and informal communication channels is used to ensure that the parents are very well informed about school matters. The vibrant parents’ association and parents in general, give very good support through raising funds, engaging in policy development and assisting in school activities and events.

- There is very good home-school partnership as reflected in the parents’ questionnaires. All parents agreed that the school was well run and that they were happy with it. Some parents expressed dissatisfaction with the facilities in the school.

- There is very good management of pupils. The pupils are extremely well behaved, mannerly and cooperative. The majority of pupil responses in the Inspectorate questionnaires state that they like coming to school, they feel safe and enjoy their lessons. There is scope to raise the pupils' involvement in decision making in the school.

4. **Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation**

- The quality of the school planning process is generally competent. Good mechanisms are established for the review and development of school policies, which are undertaken in a consultative manner. Appropriate, informative organisational policies are in place. Some curriculum plans do not sufficiently reflect the school's context nor suitably guide classroom practice. It is recommended that the teachers engage in a detailed review of each plan to ensure that whole-school decisions on all aspects of curriculum provision are agreed and benchmarks for each class level are clearly laid out.

- The standard of individual teachers’ planning is appropriate. Teachers provide detailed long- and short-term plans and prepare differentiated plans for their pupils in the multi-class settings. There is scope for teachers to clarify the specific intended learning objectives for pupils, particularly in terms of skills’ learning.
• The staff has begun engagement with school self-evaluation and has graphed current pupil attainment in standardised tests. This data, along with ongoing test results and pupils’ work samples, should be analysed more closely to track pupil attainment and to target groups of pupils who require interventions to meet their specific learning needs, including high-achieving pupils. A process of action planning to address priority areas should be established whereby specific and measurable targets are set and reviewed annually.

Child protection policy and procedures

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

• Overall, the quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement is competent. The teachers display effective communication skills and work assiduously to cater for the different class levels in their classrooms. Many of the lessons observed reflected competent teaching and good monitoring of learning. There is a need for all teachers to share effective practices regarding multi-class teaching in terms of programme planning, lesson structure and assessment of learning outcomes. Outcomes of the pupils’ questionnaires reflect a need to extend opportunities for group work and use of computers.

• Baintear amach caighdeán maith i múineadh agus i bhfoighlaim na Gaeilge. Sna naoináin úsáidtear dánta, mím, cluichí agus amhráin mar chuíd de na cheachtanna. Leagann an chuid is mó de na múinteoirí an bhéim chuí ar an gcur chugiu cumarsáide. Tugann siad deiseanna do na daltaí na frásai na, a bhaineann le téama na seachtaine, a chleachtadh i bpéiri. Ba choir an cheachtas éifeachtach seo a leathnú. Sroicheann an chuid is mó de na daltaí, go mórmhor sna h-ardranganna, caighdeán mhaith sa Ghaeilge labhartha. Cuirtear ar chumas na ndaltaí obair scríofa de chineálacha éagsúla a thabhairt chun críche. Maidir le liofacht agus tuiscint na léitheoireachta, sroicheann formhór na ndaltaí caigheán breá agus léann siad go muinínneach.

• The standard of teaching and learning in Irish is good. Poems, mime, games and songs are intrinsic to lessons in the infant classes. Most teachers place suitable emphasis on the communicative approach. They provide pupils with opportunities to practise the new phrases in pairs, based on the week’s theme. This effective practice should be extended. Most pupils, particularly in the senior classes, achieve a good standard of spoken Irish. The pupils are enabled to engage in writing in a range of genres. Most pupils attain a competent standard regarding reading fluency and understanding, and they read with confidence.

• In general, there is competent teaching, learning and pupil achievement in English. There is commendable teaching of early-reading skills. Up through the school there is a need for more cohesion in the approaches used in the teaching of the English programme. Some excellent practice was observed which reflected the in-depth study of writing genres, use of the novel and the close monitoring and feedback of the pupils’ written work. In many classes, the pupils engage in discussions with confidence. To develop their oral competence further, is advised that all pupils are taught specific expressive
skills such as debating and presentation skills, and engage more frequently in the recitation of poetry from memory.

- Overall, the quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in Mathematics is good. The pupils’ early-mathematical skills are competently taught using number work, games, and excellent resources. Aspects of best practice observed in other settings include effective and explicit teaching of core concepts, application of mathematics to real life, cooperative tasks and regular monitoring and testing of pupils’ learning. This should be extended to all classes. It is recommended that problem-solving, use of resources, oral mathematics, and the learning of tables and mathematical facts be prioritised in this curriculum area.

- The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in History is fair. The pupils engage in a satisfactory range of learning experiences including project work, use of photographs, ICT and story. Overall there is scope to extend the breadth of provision to include more in-depth study of local history and the use of a wider range of methodologies such as engaging with artefacts, evidence and timelines, as well as the use of role play and surveys. It is recommended that the school review the teaching of history with specific emphasis on enhancing the pupils’ skills of working as historians.

- The quality of assessment is competent. Some very good work in compiling checklists and using the outcomes of assessment to inform planning was observed. This work and the provision of feedback for improvement should be extended. A whole-school approach to the maintenance of records of individual pupil attainment should be developed further. Screening and standardised testing are conducted annually. More diagnostic assessment should be carried out on individual pupils to determine the learning needs of pupils who are under achieving in literacy and numeracy.

6. Quality of Support for Pupils

- The quality of support for pupils with special educational needs is generally competent, with scope for improvement in certain aspects. There are supportive and affirmative interactions evident between teachers in special education roles and pupils. Many of the lessons observed reflected appropriate, progressive learning activities. The special needs assistant carries out her work very well. Overall there is a need for the targets and programmes in individual education plans to be more closely informed by the content of professional reports and the outcomes of ongoing assessment. It is recommended that the special education team meet on a formal basis to review practice in relation to planning, programme delivery and assessment.

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