An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Greaghrahan National School
Staghall, Belturbet, County Cavan
Uimhir rolla: 18346M

Date of inspection: 22 February 2012
1. Introduction

Greaghanrahan National School is a mainstream, co-educational primary school under the patronage of the Catholic Bishop of Kilmore. It is a rural school situated in the parish of Drumlane, west of Belturbet. The 74 pupils are distributed across three multi-grade classrooms and attendance is good overall. During this whole-school evaluation, provision for Irish, English, Mathematics and Physical Education was inspected. The board of management 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.

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 and parents give positive support to the school, communications with the school community are very good and the school is very welcoming of parents.
- There is a strong spirit of collaboration and a sense of shared purpose among the staff: the role of the principal in nurturing this spirit is acknowledged.
- In-school management is of a very high standard.
- The overall quality of teaching and learning is good. Teachers work in a very skilful, empathetic and diligent manner.
- The management of pupils is commendable.
- Throughout the school, the assessment of pupils’ learning is very effective.

The following main recommendations are made:

- Learning outcomes across the Irish curriculum should be targeted for improvement.

3. Quality of School Management

- The overall quality of school management is commendable. The newly appointed board of management is committed to supporting the school and to progressing the work of previous boards. Very good relationships are maintained with the school community. The board is kept apprised of pupils’ overall attainment levels in literacy and numeracy and partakes, more so in recent times, in policy ratification and review. However, a more systematic approach to the board’s involvement in the school planning development process is advised. Accounts are maintained very carefully and it is the board’s intention that they be audited annually from now on. The board should consider providing an annual report on the operation of the school.

- In-school management is of a very high standard. The principal provides strong, effective leadership. The cultivation of collaborative decision-making, open communication and mutual respect is a praiseworthy feature of his leadership style. The deputy principal
supports the principal very ably and positively. All staff contribute very purposefully to school initiatives. High-level commitment is evident from all. Official records are maintained carefully and the day-to-day operation of the school is efficient. The part-time secretary provides exemplary service.

- Resources are managed effectively overall. The school, refurbished and extended in recent years, presents extremely well. It provides very good mainstream teaching and circulation space and a general purpose room. A cheerful, child-centred and hygienic environment is provided for pupils. The board should now work towards further development of the playing grounds. A school bell system would be beneficial. A wide range of teaching resources has been acquired. Interactive white boards have been installed and are used to satisfactory effect overall. A well-equipped computer area has been established in the senior room. Recently, additional laptop computers have been purchased with the intent of facilitating pupils’ hands-on access in the other classrooms.

- The management of pupils is commendable. Teacher-pupil interactions are positive and affirming. During the evaluation, pupils showed empathy for and respect towards each other. Almost all engaged in communal play at break times. Additional activities might be facilitated for those who elect not to partake in larger-group games. Additional board games, including chess, should be encouraged at break times on wet days. Pupils are not involved in any specific committee work. In this context, the school might consider involvement in Green-Schools which would build on the environmental work already underway.

- Home-school communication is very good. An open-door policy is promoted and amongst other things, the school provides good support for new parents and regular updates on activities. The school is also researching the establishment of a web site. The general parent body is very supportive and, commendably, parents participate in classroom-based literacy activities in the junior classes. Questionnaire responses indicate that parents are very positively disposed towards the school. They agree that this is a well-run and welcoming school which caters well for their children's learning needs. However, there was some small variation in response as to whether parental opinions were sought regularly on school matters.

- The parents’ association supports the school very well through in-school activities and highly successful fundraising events. Members express strong support for the school and praise for the education provided and the welcoming atmosphere. They would welcome further involvement in school development planning and the establishment of more systematic communications with the board. The general parent body is kept very well informed of the association’s initiatives.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- The quality of school planning is good overall. A three-year plan has been devised. Administrative planning is clear, comprehensive and very well organised. Parents have received copies of policies and have been invited to comment on them. Going forward, more systematic involvement of parents in the planning process should be facilitated. Curricular plans are useful, showing evidence of good staff collaboration. In implementing its Irish planning, the staff should monitor carefully whether agreed learning outcomes for each of the four curriculum strands are being achieved.

- The teachers show a laudable willingness to engage in self-reflection and there is good commitment to continuous professional development. Some self-evaluation processes have commenced including monitoring of early literacy interventions and profiling of
pupils’ achievement in standardised tests. As a next step, action plans for literacy and numeracy should be devised.

- All teachers provide useful individual planning. In some cases the quality of this planning is very good. The content and specificity of monthly progress reports varies somewhat across the school. An agreed approach should be implemented which contributes to school self-evaluation.

- 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

- Tá obair shásúil ar siúl ina lán réimsí de sholáthar na scoile don Ghaeilge. Úsáidtear an Ghaeilge go neamhfhoirmiúil ar bhonn rialta i ngach seomra. Sna ceachtanna feicite le linn na cigireachta, bhi struchtúr cinnte ag gabháil leis an gcceacht agus bhi soiléireacht ag baint leis an ábhar nua. Bhain oidí dea-úsáid as an gclár bán idirghníomhach agus as ábhair léirithe. Is inmholta mar a athrisitear rainn agus dánta i ranganna áirithe. Is fiú é sin a dhéanamh i ngach rang. Cé go bhfuil stóras foclóra forbartha ag liaion maith de dhaltaí sna ranganna sinsearachacha, tá gá go fóill le foclóir agus úsáid bhiathra a fhorbairt ar bhonn níos comhcheartach tric an scoil. Léann mheoraíde de na daltaí le tuiscint ach moltar clár a leagan amach do thús na liteartachta agus scileanna léitheoireachta na ndaltaí a fhorbairt go curasach tric an scoil. Thabhfgadh soláthar breise d’ábhar léitheoireachta deiseanna do dhaltai léitheoireachta a cheachtadh i gcomhthéacsanna níos leithne. Sa iomlán, tá caighdeán sásúil á bhaint amach sa scribhneoireacht fheidhmíúil a chomao moltaí deiseanna breise saor-chumadóireachta a sholáthar.

- In providing for Irish, satisfactory work is undertaken in many aspects. Irish is used informally and regularly in every room. In observed lessons, there was definite structure and clarity in introducing new material. Teachers made good use of the interactive whiteboard and of visual resources. In certain classrooms, there is praiseworthy recitation of rhymes and poems. This would be worthwhile in every class. Although a good number of pupils in the senior classes have a suitable vocabulary, there is still need to develop vocabulary and verb use more systematically across the school. The majority reads with understanding. However, it is advised that a plan for early literacy be devised and reading skills be developed throughout the school. Additional reading materials would give pupils a chance to practice their reading in a wider context. Overall, there is a satisfactory standard achieved in functional writing but more opportunities for free composition are recommended.

- Provision for English is good. Talk and discussion opportunities are prioritised in all contexts. Poetry is well attended in most classrooms. Emergent and early literacy work in the junior classes is effective and innovative. The introduction of station teaching, involving in-class support from parents, shows considerable promise. In the middle and senior classes, reading experiences are good. Libraries are well organised and independent reading is fostered effectively. Standardised test results for English reading are very good overall. Regular writing opportunities are provided and writing standards are generally satisfactory. Further use of the drafting-editing-redrafting process is recommended. Overall, handwriting and spelling standards are good. The teachers plan to introduce a whole-school approach to comprehension development. This will be a very worthwhile initiative.
• Provision for Mathematics is very strong. Lessons observed during the evaluation were very clear, well paced and active. There was excellent use of hands-on learning resources and visual supports. Linkage across the strands is very effective and pupils are enabled to use specific mathematical language accurately. Team-teaching works well in the senior classes. Tables and number facts are revised regularly and pupils’ progress is assessed on an ongoing basis. Most pupils record their work carefully and it is monitored appropriately. Standardised test results for this subject are very good overall.

• Provision for Physical Education (PE) is commendable. Games, dance and gymnastics were observed and both indoor and outdoor facilities were utilised during the evaluation. Lessons were well structured, participative and busy. Pupils’ engagement was very good and supervised carefully. The requirement for suitable and safe attire for PE should be more consistent across the school. The school welcomes the support of a visiting coach for Gaelic games. Further development of the playing grounds should help to boost involvement in a wider range of team games. Currently, pupils do not attend swimming lessons as the school is situated some distance from a public facility.

• Throughout the school, the assessment of pupils’ learning is very effective. For example, standardised tests in Irish, numeracy and English reading and spelling are administered as well as varied and effective screening tests. Results are recorded carefully and pupils’ progress is tracked appropriately. The recently reviewed assessment policy is very useful. Parents are informed orally of their children’s progress in standardised tests. In accordance with recent departmental guidelines, parents should now be informed in writing and the report cards developed by the National Council of Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) should be introduced.

• The quality of overall teaching, learning and pupil achievement is good. Teachers teach in a skilful and purposeful manner. Explicit teaching of key concepts and an expectation of high standards are features of teaching in all contexts. Teachers’ use of questioning and the elicitation of pupils’ response are particularly effective. Whole-class teaching was observed to be used effectively and there was appropriate grade-specific differentiation of activities. In questionnaires, the majority of pupils indicated that they enjoy their lessons and learning. The school should extend group-working opportunities for pupils.

6. **Quality of Support for Pupils**

• Provision for pupils with additional and special educational needs is of a high quality. Three teachers provide specific support for pupils and implement both withdrawal and in-class approaches in literacy and numeracy. Observed teaching was very skilful with affirming teacher-pupil interactions. Learning environments are pleasant and well resourced. In general, written preparation and recording are effective. The responsibilities of all those involved in individual educational plans (IEPs) should be outlined. Regular review of grouping arrangements should be undertaken so as to maximise the numbers receiving support.

• Throughout the school, pupils are facilitated to partake in a wide range of co-curricular and extracurricular activities. These include field trips and interest visits and choir, sport, quiz, art and charitable activities.

*Published June 2012*
Appendix

SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

Submitted by the Board of Management
Area 1: Observations on the content of the inspection report

The B.O.M. of Greaghrahan N.S. welcomes the recent WSE report and its acknowledgement of the high standards and quality of teaching and learning in our school. We are pleased that the main strengths of the work of the school were identified and that the commitment and dedication of all members of the school community was affirmed. We would like to thank the inspector for her courtesy and professionalism during the inspection.

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 welcomes the various recommendations in the Report. Work on implementing improvements has begun and planning for the development of the school grounds has been initiated. The school staff have also committed to the development of a whole-school, systematic approach to the teaching of Irish in the school.