Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Scoil Náisiúnta Bhaile Uí Chróinín
Ballycroneen, Cloyne, Co. Cork
Uimhir rolla: 18475A

Date of inspection: 15 September 2010
1. Introduction

SN Bhaile Uí Chróinín is a co-educational vertical primary school situated in eastern County Cork. The school is under the patronage of the Apostolic Administrator, the Archbishop of Cashel and Emly. The current enrolment is thirty-one pupils and this constitutes a fall in enrolment of fifteen pupils since the last school inspection in June 2001.

This whole school evaluation focused on the quality of teaching and learning in Irish, English, Mathematics and Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE). 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.

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 is strongly committed to the upgrading of school facilities.
- The parents are very supportive of the work of the school.
- The quality of teaching throughout the school is good.
- The pupils present as courteous and cooperative.
- Pupils are making good progress in literacy and very good progress in numeracy.

The following main recommendations are made:

- The board should take the necessary and appropriate steps to address the tensions that exist between staff members.
- The principal and staff in the school should work to re-establish effective communication and a satisfactory level of professional collaboration.
- The school should develop a strategic plan to address future curricular and organisational priorities.
- Assessment procedures should be developed further by analysing pupils’ results and ensuring that the outcomes inform teaching and learning.
3. Quality of School Management

- The board of management is properly constituted. In recent times, it has prioritised the regular upgrading of school facilities and, through its committed efforts, it has achieved very significant improvements. The board should consider employing a caretaker and/or secretary to support the smooth running of the school. The board has ratified a range of school policies. The board should ensure that all policies are appropriately signed and dated.

- The principal is conscientious and committed to the progressive improvement of the school. She ensures that her administration duties are fulfilled routinely, availing of a supply teacher scheme as required. Duties, organisational and pastoral in nature, have been agreed with the special duties teacher who carries them out attentively and assiduously. It is recommended that curricular responsibilities be assigned to the special duties teacher.

- It is evident that there are serious tensions between staff members which are impacting negatively on those involved. It is incumbent on all concerned to take the necessary steps to resolve these issues. It is recommended that the board of management engage with the principal and school staff for this purpose. The principal and staff in the school should work to re-establish effective communication and a satisfactory level of professional collaboration.

- The school building is maintained to a high standard. Corridors and entrance areas are used effectively to display pupils’ work and photographs commemorating important events.

- During the evaluation the pupils were courteous and cooperative. Pupils’ questionnaire responses indicate most pupils feel supported in their work, listened to and treated fairly by teachers. Most report there are good communications systems in place that allow them to speak freely to teachers. However, fewer than half the pupils state that they like coming to school. This is a concern that needs to be addressed by the board and staff.

- Parents are very supportive of the work of the school. Communication between teachers and parents is good. Parents are invited to discuss their children’s progress through formal parent-teacher meetings. A formal report is issued to all parents at the end of each year.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- The school plan, in both its curricular and its organisational content, is good. Draft policies are routinely presented to the board for discussion and ratification. It is recommended that the school make greater provision for consulting with parents during the planning process.

- The teachers engage in long-term and in short-term planning. Improved links should be established between whole-school planning and individual teachers’ planning. Monthly progress records are maintained by teachers. Both the level of detail and the nature of detail recorded in these need to be reviewed.

- To ensure maintenance of standards in the quality of teaching and learning, it is recommended that the school develop a strategic plan addressing future curricular and
organisational priorities. This should provide for regular review and the introduction of self-evaluation practices.

- 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; A designated liaison person (DLP) and a deputy DLP have been appointed in line with the requirements of the guidelines. It is recommended that management provide a copy of the procedures to ancillary staff and to visiting teachers to the school.

5. Quality of Teaching, Learning and Pupil Achievement

- The quality of teaching throughout the school is good. Well-structured whole-class teaching together with pair and group work was a feature of methodologies observed. There is a need for greater use of information and communications technology (ICT) as a support to pupils’ learning. In their questionnaire responses, most pupils say lessons are interesting and enjoyable. However, approximately half state they do not get to use computers often.

- Déanann na hoidí iarracht chreidiúnach an Ghaeilge a chur chun cinn sa scoil. Bionn rann, dánta, agus amhráin á n-aithris ag na daltaí le taitneamh. Moltar liosta dánta a chumadh sa phlean scoile a bheadh in oiriúint d’aois agus do spéis na ndaltaí. Moltar freisin na frásaithe atá leagtha síos sa phlean a mhúineadh ar bhonn leanúnach. Ar an iomlán léann na daltaí go cumasach cruinn. Saothraithear an scribhneoireacht fheidhmíüil agus chruthaitheacht go coinsiasach agus dèantar an obair a chlárú go horduí. Aithnitéar go bhfuil cumas scribhneoireachta ag uimhir áirithe daltaí sna hardrangaí ar ardchaighdeán ar leith. Is dúshláin anois d’fhothúrann na scoile leanúnachas cainte a chothú ar bhonn leanúnach faoi cheann de na talún. Is dúshláin anois d’fhothúrann na scoile leanúnachas cainte a chothú ar bhonn leanúnach faoi ceann de na talún. Ait níos lán na cumhachtáin cumhachtach chuimhneachaí caite a chreidtear a bhfuil cumas scribhneoireachta ag uimhir áirithe na ndaltaí i ngach rang. Moltar freisin an domhain na ndaltaí a chreidtear a bhfuil cumas scribhneoireachta ag uimhir áirithe na ndaltaí i ngach rang. It was noted that the work of a number of pupils in the senior classes is of a particularly high standard. The challenge for staff in the future is to develop a greater fluency in the language in each class and to develop communication skills further. The pupils understanding could be further promoted with a regular linking of the learning to real-life contexts.

In English, discrete oral language lessons are a feature of classroom activity. From an early age pupils are exposed to a useful sight vocabulary in parallel with regular promotion of correct spelling and phonetic activity. There is an appropriate emphasis on developing pupils’ word-building skills. The core resource for reading is a set of graded books from a published scheme and this is supplemented by the use of the novel and by the promotion of library book reading. Teachers might usefully consider involving parents in a shared-reading initiative to support pupils’ learning further. Pupils engage in a range of reading activities and the presentation of their work to the class is encouraged. The foundations for neat handwriting skills are laid down in the junior classes and are maintained as the pupils progress through the school. In the further development of pupils’ writing, teachers should consider the introduction of a free-writing copy in the
junior classes, the use of ICT in process writing and the compiling of anthologies of pupils’ writing.

- In Mathematics, teachers presented content clearly. Active learning methodologies are a feature of activity in the middle and senior classes and the pupils demonstrate good competency in computation exercises. The use of concrete material is widespread and purposeful. The pupils’ understanding of mathematical concepts is facilitated through regular linkage with real-life situations. Problem-solving is given due care and attention and the pupils can demonstrate how they arrive at solutions through a variety of strategies. The pupils’ written work in the middle and senior classes is well presented in copybooks, an activity which should be extended to the junior classes. A whole-school approach to the development of pupils’ mathematical language should be incorporated into the school plan and addressed consistently in classroom routines. The development of mathematical displays in classrooms would complement pupils’ learning.

- The Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) programme in the school is well developed. In teaching SPHE, significant emphasis is placed on the social dimension. A range of suitable topics is explored using a variety of participative methodologies. To complement the programme visiting speakers are used regularly.

- Pupils’ results in literacy and numeracy in standardised tests indicate good and very good progress, respectively. It is recommended that pupils’ results be analysed on a whole school basis and the outcomes used to inform teaching and learning.

6. Quality of Supports for Pupils

- The part-time learning support teacher demonstrates a high level of commitment to her work. Individual education plans (IEP) are prepared on the basis of a careful diagnosis of pupils’ need and are characterised by a measured degree of detail and relevance. IEPs include specific targets with timeframes for review. It is recommended that the special needs assistant be consulted, as appropriate, during the drafting of IEPs. The writing of a weekly plan of work and the recording of individual pupils’ progress as a regular routine is recommended.

- Productive use is made of a range of resources to consolidate pupils’ learning. A model of in-class support that involves the class teacher, the learning support teacher and the special needs assistant would complement current approaches.

- The special needs assistant facilitates pupils’ access to the curriculum in an appropriate and competent manner.

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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 wishes to point out that this evaluation was completed in September 2010 and that, since then, the issues in the report have been addressed.

In particular, the Board is now confident that
  • the staff members working in the school are working well together
  • communication is effective and there is a satisfactory level of professional collaboration.

Also, the other recommendations in the report are being implemented.