

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

**Whole School Evaluation
REPORT**

**Ballintleva National School
Curraghboy, Athlone, Co. Roscommon
Uimhir rolla: 18729F**

Date of inspection: 24 January 2013



1. Introduction

Ballintleva National School is a co-educational school operating under the patronage of the Catholic Bishop of Elphin. It is located in a rural setting approximately four kilometres from the village of Dysart, Co. Roscommon. At the time of the evaluation the school had sixty-nine pupils and the staff comprised a teaching principal, two other mainstream teachers, a learning-support teacher, a visiting resource teacher and a part-time caretaker.

This whole-school evaluation focussed on the teaching and learning in Gaelge, English, Mathematics and Science. 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:

- There is very effective collaboration between the board, parents and staff.
- The process of school self-evaluation is well advanced.
- The overall quality of teaching and learning is very good.
- Pupils are commended for their dedication to work and the respect they show to their fellow pupils, their teachers and visitors to the school.

The following **main recommendations** are made:

- The school accounts for each year should be audited or certified.
- The board should establish practices to facilitate more active engagement of parents in the planning process.
- Further development of the school plan should focus on clarifying the curricular content for each class level.
- The use of standardised tests to assess achievement in Irish should be considered.

3. Quality of School Management

- The board of management functions very effectively, forming subcommittees, maintaining regular contact with staff and managing finances in a manner that clearly benefits the school. Minutes of meetings are carefully recorded and financial statements are regularly presented at meetings. As required by Section 18 of the Education Act 1998 the board should ensure that the school accounts for each year are properly audited or certified in accordance with best accounting practice.
- The board is commended for its active engagement in school self-evaluation. The board has reviewed overall pupil performance and a three-year improvement plan has been drafted. The board intends to provide the school community with a summary school self-evaluation report and improvement plan in due course.

- The in-school management team comprises the principal, deputy principal and a special duties teacher. The principal exemplifies excellent professional standards and provides very effective curriculum leadership. A culture of teamwork is promoted and all members of staff are encouraged to take initiative and lead aspects of school improvement. Posts of responsibility span an appropriate range of duties that are undertaken with diligence.
- School resources are very well managed. The school was extended and refurbished in 2008/9 and it now provides spacious, modern classroom accommodation, an assembly hall and ample play facilities. Classrooms are well resourced with teaching and learning materials, including information and communication technologies. The board should review the use of the staff-room for resource-teaching purposes.
- The school benefits from strong parental support and a parents' association has recently been formed. Parents actively support their children's involvement in a wide and varied range of activities. During the evaluation, parent representatives expressed a high level of satisfaction with the school and reported that parental opinion is welcomed and valued. Responses to parent questionnaires indicate a need to inform parents about the school's programme in relationships and sexuality education and to enhance their knowledge of the work of the board and of the parents' association.
- Commendable attention is given to the management of pupils. Pupils are very well behaved and are respectful and considerate. They are exposed to a wide range of learning experiences and are provided with opportunities to assume increasing levels of responsibility as they proceed through the school. Pupil questionnaires indicate that pupils have a very positive attitude towards school life.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- The school plan has been developed through a collaborative process involving mainly the board and teachers. The plan comprises a wide range of contextualised, useful policies. The board should now collaborate with the parents' association to establish practices that will promote more active engagement of parents in the planning process. Further development of the plan should focus on clarifying the content to be taught at each class level in the dual and multi-grade contexts.
- All teachers provide forward planning and maintain records of work covered. There is a need, in some instances, to clarify long-term curricular content and to provide clearer statements of the expected short-term learning outcomes for the pupils.
- Significant effort has gone into engaging the board, parents, teachers and pupils in school self-evaluation. Test results, checklists, teacher opinion, parent questionnaires and pupil questionnaires provide both quantitative and qualitative data to inform the school's judgements about the quality of teaching and learning in literacy and numeracy. Targets have been identified and implementation of a three-year improvement plan has commenced.
- 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

- The overall quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement is very good. There is a palpable enthusiasm among the staff to explore and adopt new practices. In-class support, team-teaching, the *Aistear* curriculum framework and specific strategies to enhance literacy and numeracy are among the initiatives implemented in recent times. Pupils engage in classroom activities with a high level of interest and they exhibit confidence during oral deliveries. The content and presentation of their written work is predominantly of a very high standard. A range of assessment strategies is used in monitoring pupil achievement. Consideration should be given to extending the range to include standardised tests in Irish.
- Múintear an Ghaeilge go rathúil. Déantar réimse leathan teanga a ionchur go healaíonta sna bunranganna. Cuirtear leis an stór foclóra de réir a chéile agus, ag fágáil na scoile dóibh, bíonn ar chumas na ndaltaí labhairt agus scríobh faoi thopaicí áirithe ag baint úsáide as nathanna saibhre cainte. Baintear úsáid den scoth as leabhair mhóra mar réamhullmhúchán don léitheoireacht fhoirmiúil agus gnóthaíonn na daltaí scileanna maithe léitheoireachta. Múintear cnuasach breá filíochta agus amhrán i bhformhór na ranganna. Chun leanúnachas agus forchéimniú a chinntiú ó rang go rang ní mór, mar atá déanta ag roinnt rangleibhéal, na mórhéamaí teanga a bhriseadh ar fhothéamaí agus réimse na teanga do gach rang a aimsiú. Moltar freisin na heispéireis scríbhneoireachta a leathnú sna meánranganna agus idir chlár gramadaí agus chlár feasachta teanga agus cultúir a chlarú do gach rang sa phlean scoile.

Irish is taught successfully. A broad range of language is skilfully input in the junior classes. This vocabulary is augmented gradually and on leaving the school, the pupils are able to speak and write about certain topics using rich idioms of speech. Excellent use is made of large format books as a preparation for formal reading and the pupils develop good reading skills. A lovely collection of poetry and song is taught in most classes. To ensure continuity and progression from class to class, the main language themes should be broken into sub-themes, as is done at some class levels, and the range of language should be identified for each class. It is also recommended that the writing experiences in the middle classes be broadened and that grammar and language and cultural appreciation programmes be recorded for each class in the school plan.

- English is taught very effectively. Teachers model a rich vocabulary and discrete oral language activities are purposefully focussed on enhancing understanding and use of language. Fluency, good articulation and clear delivery are encouraged as pupils read or present work orally. All pupils are exposed to a range of poetry and some have explored specific poetic techniques. Interest in reading is successfully fostered through use of a variety of materials including class novels. While pupils perform very well on standardised tests, it would be of value to employ a broader range of differentiated approaches to ensure pupils are reading at appropriate levels of success and challenge. Writing skills are very successfully developed and some very fine examples of written work were observed. More regular experiences of the writing process should be facilitated at some class levels and the implementation of the school policy on cursive handwriting should be reviewed.
- The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in Mathematics is very good. Practical activities are well organised at most class levels, enabling pupils of different abilities to engage in suitably challenging activities. There is scope at some class levels to ensure that strategies to aid recall of number facts are appropriately paced and practised regularly, and that visual prompts are prominently displayed. A whole-school approach to problem-solving has been adopted and the manner in which mainstream and support personnel work together to present problems, to explore mathematical language and to guide pupils in using specific problem-solving strategies is praiseworthy. It is

recommended that attention also be focussed on ensuring that pupils record solutions to problems in an appropriate manner.

- A conscientious effort is made to cover all strands of the science curriculum. Teacher demonstration, practical investigation, visual aids, reading materials and work-sheet exercises are among the strategies used to enhance knowledge and understanding. Where very good practice was observed, pupils engaged with materials and their thinking was challenged as they created fair tests and used prior knowledge to inform predictions and investigations. There is scope at some class levels to engage pupils more actively in their learning, to ensure learning is consolidated as part of the lessons and to extend the manner in which findings are recorded and shared. Senior pupils gave very impressive accounts of scientific processes explored. It is praiseworthy that the school maintains a biodiversity garden, participates in the Green Schools and the Discover Science initiatives and links with the local environmental awareness officer.

6. Quality of Support for Pupils

- This is an inclusive school where the quality of support for pupils is very good. A concise, coherent policy statement guides practice. Comprehensive profiles and individual education programmes are informed by professional reports and in-school diagnostic testing. Progress records are very carefully maintained. It is recommended that copies of the individual education programmes prepared for pupils with special educational needs be provided to their parents.
- Support provision entails early intervention in literacy and numeracy, in-class support and withdrawal of groups and individual pupils to address specific learning needs, including those of high ability achievers. Teaching and learning activities are skilfully matched to the pupils' needs and are very thoughtfully structured and paced. Commendable use is made of the school's technological resources.

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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 Ballintleva N.S. wish to thank the Department of Education and Skills Inspectorate, for the professional and productive manner in which the evaluation was conducted in our school.

The Board of Management was also pleased to note that the report recognised the value placed upon professional development, the overall quality of teaching and learning in our school, the positive relationships and shared goals of the management, staff, parents and pupils of our school.

The recommendations in the report are being implemented and will be phased in on a continuous basis.

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 school is committed to a culture of continuous development and is engaging wholeheartedly in the implementation of its three year plan, together with the further development of the school plan, as well as enhancing its Assessment for and of learning, in order to promote cohesion and collaboration among the partners in education in Ballintleva N.S.