An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Bray School Project National School
Bray, County Wicklow
Uimhir rolla:19754J

Date of inspection: 12 February 2010
WHOLE-SCHOOL EVALUATION

A whole-school evaluation of Bray School Project National School was undertaken in February 2010. This report presents the findings of the evaluation and makes recommendations for improvement. The evaluation focused on the quality of teaching and learning in English, Irish, Mathematics and Music. The board of management was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the report; a response was not received from the board.

INTRODUCTION – SCHOOL CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

Bray School Project National School is a multi-denominational, co-educational school under the patronage of the Bray School Project Association. The school has a large catchment area with a majority of the pupils being drawn from the greater Bray area. Overall, pupil attendance levels are good.

The following table provides an overview of the enrolment and staffing in the school at the time of the evaluation:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pupils enrolled in the school</td>
<td>236</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainstream classes in the school</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers on the school staff</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainstream class teachers (includes one curriculum support teacher)</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers working in support roles</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special needs assistants</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT

1.1 Characteristic spirit, mission or vision

The aim of Bray School Project NS is to provide a multi-denominational, co-educational, child-centred, democratically run school. This child-centred approach advocates that each child has a unique set of talents and should be nurtured to develop her/his potential. This vision is reflected meaningfully in the leadership and management of the school, in the welcoming and inclusive learning environment and in the breadth of curricular, co-curricular and extra-curricular provision. A strong sense of shared purpose is apparent among the school community in realising this vision.

1.2 Board of management

The board of management is constituted properly and is very supportive of the work of the school. Individual members have clearly defined roles which are undertaken diligently. The chairperson and board members visit the school and meet with the principal regularly. Meetings of the board are convened on a monthly basis, minutes are maintained carefully and accounts are audited annually. A report on the work of the school is shared with all parents at the annual general meeting of the patron body. The board is operating in compliance with statutory obligations generally and also with departmental regulations regarding the length of the school
year and the retention of pupils. However, the board should ensure that the integrity of the school day for infant pupils is maintained as per the terms of Circular 11/95, *Time in School*.

The board has been involved in developing and ratifying a number of organisational policies. The current review of the school’s code of behaviour, health and safety statement and admissions policy is noted and should proceed as a matter of priority. It is recommended that the board formally ratify, sign and date all curriculum plans and organisational policies. The board’s active engagement in the systematic review of all plans and policies is also advised. Positive and productive relationships between the board and school staff, parents and the local community are reported. The proposed extension of the use of information and communication technology (ICT) as a means of informing parents about all aspects of school life is welcomed.

1.3 In-school management

The in-school management team comprises the principal, the deputy principal and three special-duties teachers. The principal demonstrates commendable commitment to the school’s vision, to the promotion of the pupils’ best interests and to the principle of egalitarianism. He provides effective personal and instructional leadership and visits classrooms regularly to monitor educational provision. The skills and expertise of the teachers are nurtured and innovation in teaching and learning is encouraged. A climate characterised by open communication, supportive collaboration and team work is created successfully. In fulfilling his duties, the principal is ably supported by the members of the in-school management team. Each member of the team has been assigned specific duties which are undertaken conscientiously. Their work contributes to positive initiatives and developments in teaching and learning. In maximising the curriculum leadership role of the in-school management team, it is advised that the members fulfil a more active role in monitoring the effectiveness of curriculum implementation. Formal and informal meetings of the team are held regularly and minutes are maintained.

1.4 Management of relationships and communication with the school community

Bray School Project NS is characterised strongly by its open and welcoming school climate. The school fosters very good relations with its school community. The parent-teacher association, parents generally and the wider school community provide commendable support for the work of the school. They are actively involved in wide range of school and in-class activities. These include the *Green Schools* committee, the Christmas fair, paired-reading activities and an annual arts day. The parents have been involved in the development of a number of organisational policies, including most recently the healthy eating policy. They are provided with regular opportunities to discuss their children’s progress through formal and informal parent-teacher meetings. An annual written report is provided. Practices to support the induction of new entrants are well established. The issuing of information leaflets on aspects of curriculum provision and the introduction of a meeting for parents of new entrants to outline the programme of learning are lauded. Copies of curriculum plans and organisational policies are available to all parents in the school. The annual circulation of an information booklet containing pertinent information for parents is praised.

1.5 Management of pupils

The pupils are valued members of the school community and are treated with equality, fairness and respect. Their pastoral needs, including those of pupils with specific learning, emotional and social needs, are managed effectively and the pupils’ holistic development is nurtured. In the main, the pupils are eager and motivated in their learning. They co-operate with the school’s rules and code of behaviour and they demonstrate high levels of confidence and self-esteem. The
school actively consults its pupils about educational issues in a manner that is appropriate to their age and levels of maturity. The pupils participate directly in relevant decision making, through their involvement in the student council and the Green Schools committee.

2. QUALITY OF SCHOOL PLANNING

2.1 Whole-school and classroom planning

Overall, the quality of whole-school planning is creditable. The school plan has been devised collaboratively by the teaching staff and co-ordinated by the principal. Curriculum plans are in place for all subject areas and in the main, they provide suitable guidance to inform individual teacher planning. It is recommended that the impact of all curriculum plans and organisational policies be evaluated on a cyclical basis. In so doing, it is advised that action plans be devised and implemented to address identified priorities. The school is praised for its review of planning practices at individual classroom level and its introduction of an agreed whole-school approach to individual teacher planning. Each teacher provides long-term and short-term planning and in the main, such planning is of a competent standard. Monthly records of the progress of the pupils’ learning are maintained by all teachers and are retained centrally by the principal. Consideration should be given to further use of these records to monitor the effectiveness of curriculum implementation at a whole-school level. In the case of teachers working in support roles, it is recommended that these monthly progress reports detail clearly the learning outcomes that have been achieved by individual pupils.

2.2 Child protection policy and procedures

Confirmation was provided that, in compliance with Primary Circular 0061/2006, the board of management has formally adopted the Child Protection Guidelines for Primary Schools (Department of Education and Science, September 2001). Confirmation was also provided 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.

3. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

3.1 Language

Gaeilge
Sa scoil seo déanann na hoidí sár-iarrachd dearcadh dearfach agus suim na ndaltaí i leith na Gaeilge a mhúscailt. Cruthaitear láithrigh suime don Ghaeilge sna ranganna uile agus tá taispeantais d’obair na ndaltaí le moladh go hard. Baineann na hoidí úsáid as raon straitéisí mar ról imirt agus drámaíocht, comhrai beirte, cluiche, dáonta agus amhráin le linn an teagaisce. Cé go cuirtear béim ar fhoclóirí agus ar rheidhmeanna teanga oiriúnacha, labhraíonn formhór na ndaltaí le heaspa muiné agus liofachta. Moltar go láidir aird a dhíríú ar thréimhsí an cheachta agus ábhar cinnte idir fhoclóirí, fhrásaí agus struchtúir a cheartadh go rianúil. B’fhéidir dieanna rialta a thabhairt do na daltaí páirt a ghlacadh i bhfhorumasáid. Úsáidtear leabhair shaolbhair agus leabhair mhóra chun an clár léiththeoireachta a chur i bhfeidhm. Cé go léann na daltaí le hiarracht mhacánta, tá easpa cruinnis agus liofachta le sonrú go forleathan. Moltar na scileanna teanga a
chomhtháthú ar bhealach níos nádúrtha chun cabhrú leis an sealbhú teanga. Déantar sár-iarracht scileanna na ndaltaí sa scribhneoireacht phearsanta a chur chun cinn. Is inmholta an méid de leabhair bheaga atá scríofa ag na daltaí faoi theoir an oide. Glacann siad páirt i gcomórtas Scriobh Leabhair agus is léir go mbaineann na daltaí taitneamh agus tairbhce as an tionscnamh seo. Is inmholta mar a eagraíonn an scoil gniomhalochtaí speisialta do Sheachtain na Gaeilge agus cúrsaí sa Ghaeltacht le haghaidh daltaí sna ha rdranganna gach bliain chun a scileanna sa teanga a fhorbairt agus chun suim sa chultúr a mhús cailt iontu.

Irish
In this school, teachers make great efforts to promote positive attitudes to and an interest in Irish. Designated-interest areas in Irish are created in classrooms and displays of the pupils' work are highly praised. A range of strategies, including role play and drama, pair work, games, poems and songs, is employed during instruction. While appropriate vocabulary and language structures are emphasised, a majority of the pupils lack confidence and fluency when speaking. It is strongly recommended that attention be placed on the stages of lessons and that discrete vocabulary and language structures be taught incrementally. Regular opportunities for the pupils’ engagement in real-life communication should be provided. Large-format books and workbooks are used in the implementation of the reading programme. While the pupils read with significant effort, their reading lacks accuracy and fluency. To assist language acquisition, a more natural linkage of language skills is recommended. The pupils’ personal writing abilities are fostered actively. The number of booklets written by the pupils under the guidance of the teacher is lauded. The pupils participate in the Write a Book initiative and it is evident that they enjoy and benefit from this project. The organisation of various activities for Seachtain na Gaeilge and the annual trip to the Gaeltacht for pupils in the senior classes are commended for their contribution to the development of the pupils’ language skills and their interest in Irish culture.

English
The quality of teaching and learning in English is highly praised. The pupils’ expressive language competence is developed skilfully through the provision of discrete oral language lessons and the integration of language learning opportunities with reading and writing activities and with other areas of the curriculum. Almost all pupils express themselves confidently and competently across a range of relevant topics. In a number of classes, the teachers’ provision of structured opportunities for the pupils to engage actively with the views and opinions of their peers is commended. The greater fostering of listener-speaker relationships in some classes is advised. A keen interest in and appreciation of poetry are promoted throughout the school. The pupils recite their preferred poems with enthusiasm and expression. An interest in reading is cultivated successfully and proficient reading standards are in evidence. The school is praised for its adoption of a multi-strategy approach to the promotion of the pupils’ reading competence. This includes the use of phonological programmes, graded reading schemes, large-format books and class novels. These are complemented by the purposeful use of class-based libraries, the school’s reference library, weekly visits to the local library and opportunities to engage with published authors. The pupils’ independent reading is fostered successfully and their ability to critique both their class-based and personal reading material is lauded. The pupils engage in a wide variety of personal and independent writing on a regular basis and a process approach to writing is actively encouraged. In most classes, the pupils play a suitably active role in self and peer editing. It is advised that this good practice be extended to all class contexts. The quality of the pupils’ completed works, as evidenced in classroom displays and anthologies, is highly praised.
3.2 Mathematics

Overall, the teaching of Mathematics is good. Features of effective practice include well-structured talk and discussion, the clear explanation of concepts and the use of the local environment. A variety of approaches is employed including whole-class teaching, group and pair work. Stimulating maths-rich environments have been developed in most classrooms and a suitable range of mathematical equipment is utilised productively to aid the pupils’ understanding. The school-wide emphasis on the promotion of mental mathematics skills is praised. While positive pupil achievement levels are in evidence in the main, a minority of pupils experience difficulty when engaging in specific number operations and in attempting multi-stage problem solving. As a means of enhancing the pupils’ abilities to apply their knowledge and understanding across a range of pertinent contexts, it is advised that more regular opportunities be provided for them to experience learning on a cross-strand basis. In some classes, commendable examples of the promotion of the pupils’ higher-order thinking skills and their ability to independently generate and solve problems are in evidence. The extension of this good practice across all classes and the utilisation of a greater variety of whole-school approaches to problem solving are recommended. One mainstream teaching position is allocated presently to provide curriculum support primarily in Mathematics. While current provision is of a good quality, the diagnosed learning needs of individual pupils should be used more systematically to inform the structuring and implementation of this additional support.

3.3 Music

The quality of teaching and learning in Music is commended. The music programme is integrated effectively with other curriculum areas, particularly in Arts Education. The pupils sing a wide repertoire of songs tunefully. Frequent opportunities are provided for the pupils to display their musical abilities during school assemblies and concerts. The talented school choir performs regularly at local and national events. Opportunities to listen and respond to music are provided appropriately across a range of classes. The pupils’ creative responsiveness and their composing skills are fostered suitably. In the middle and senior classes, the pupils are afforded opportunities to learn the tin whistle, which they perform with interest and enthusiasm. External tutors support the implementation of the listening and responding, and performing strands of the programme. This provision develops the pupils’ instrumental performance competence while also advancing their understanding of a range of musical elements.

3.4 Assessment

A policy to guide assessment practice at a whole-school level has been devised recently. A variety of assessment modes is in evidence in individual classrooms. These include the use of portfolios, checklists, recorded teacher observations, teacher-designed and commercially produced tests and pupil self-assessment. Standardised tests in English and Mathematics are administered annually from first to sixth classes. In order to capitalise on the use of these tests, it is recommended that all standardised assessment be administered and scored by the individual class teachers. A range of suitable screening assessments is administered in infant classes. As a means of maximising the impact of assessment activity, it is recommended that the outcomes of assessment be analysed more systematically at individual classroom level. This analysis should be used to further inform individual teacher planning and to ensure higher levels of differentiated teaching and learning. It is further advised that the range of assessment modes in use be extended and that the pupils’ progress in each curriculum area be assessed regularly.
4. QUALITY OF SUPPORT FOR PUPILS

4.1 Pupils with special educational needs

A detailed policy to guide provision for pupils with special educational needs (SEN) has been devised and it incorporates a staged approach to assessment, identification and programme planning. Overall, the provision for pupils with SEN is of a satisfactory standard. A range of screening and diagnostic tools is used in the identification of pupils in need of supplementary teaching. Following the analysis of assessment outcomes, a variety of interventions is implemented. They include early-intervention initiatives, in-class and parallel-teaching interventions and the withdrawal of pupils for individual and/or group-based support.

In structuring provision for pupils with additional learning needs, it is recommended that prevention initiatives and well-structured, team-teaching interventions be implemented more intensively. In so doing, opportunities for the pupils to learn within the context of their peers should be maximised.

Individual education plans (IEPs) and individual profile and learning programmes (IPLPs) are prepared for all pupils in receipt of additional support. These plans are drawn up by the support teachers in consultation with class teachers and parents. The involvement of senior pupils in the formulation and review of their learning targets is praised. When devising IEPs and IPLPs, the support teachers are advised to ensure that, in all instances, the learning targets established for individual pupils are specific in nature and are duly responsive to their individually assessed needs. The preparation of guidelines for special needs assistants (SNAs) to assist them in supporting individual pupils is commended. The SNAs support the school appropriately in contributing to the inclusion and care of pupils with additional learning needs. The support teachers interact in an encouraging and affirming manner with their pupils. In most instances, supplementary teaching is well designed and implemented.

The pupils are making satisfactory progress in accordance with their differing abilities. They participate purposefully in a good variety of learning activities and their self-confidence is fostered successfully. Regular communication with class teachers, parents, local schools and external agencies is a commendable feature of provision. A good range of teaching and learning resources is employed suitably. The greater use of ICT to support the learning of pupils with SEN is advised.

4.2 Other supports for pupils: disadvantaged, minority and other groups

The school’s commitment to the inclusion of all its pupils is central to its vision and is discernible in its supportive learning environment. The engagement of Bray School Project NS with local schools for pupils with disabilities is commended. This links programme serves to foster the pupils’ understanding and appreciation of diversity through joint curriculum and social initiatives.
5. CONCLUSION

The school has strengths in the following areas:

- Bray School Project NS is characterised by a strong sense of community.
- The principal provides effective leadership which is reflective of the stated vision of the school.
- The principal and teaching staff work collaboratively and are commended for their commitment to the ongoing development and improvement of teaching and learning in the school.
- The dedication of the board of management, the parent-teacher association and parents generally is lauded and they make a very positive contribution to the work of the school.
- The quality of teaching and learning in English is highly praised.
- Integration opportunities are used consistently in implementing the primary curriculum and they serve to reinforce and consolidate learning effectively.
- The central, decision-making role afforded to the pupils through formal school structures and day-to-day activities is praiseworthy. The pupils demonstrate high levels of confidence and cooperation.

The following key recommendations are made in order to further improve the quality of education provided by the school:

- The board of management should ensure that the integrity of the school day for infant pupils is maintained as per the terms of Circular 11/95, Time in School.
- In implementing the programme in Irish, it is recommended that discrete vocabulary and language structures be taught incrementally and that regular opportunities for engagement in real-life communication be provided.
- In Mathematics lessons, it is advised that more regular opportunities be provided for the pupils to experience learning on a cross-strand basis.
- In structuring provision for pupils with special educational needs, it is recommended that prevention initiatives and well-structured, team-teaching interventions be implemented more intensively.

Post-evaluation meetings were held with the staff and the board of management where the draft findings and recommendations of the evaluation were presented and discussed.

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