Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Saint Beacon’s National School
Mullinavat, County Kilkenny
Uimhir rolla: 19976E

Date of inspection: 12 May 2010
WHOLE-SCHOOL EVALUATION

A whole-school evaluation of St. Beacon’s NS was undertaken in May 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 Irish, English, Mathematics and Geography. 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.

INTRODUCTION – SCHOOL CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

St. Beacon’s NS is an eight-teacher, co-educational school situated in the parish of Mullinavat. It is a Catholic school under the patronage of the Bishop of Ossory. Enrolment in the school is growing steadily. Pupil attendance levels are very 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>167</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainstream classes in the school</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers on the school staff</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainstream class teachers</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers working in support roles</td>
<td>1 full-time, 2 shared</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special needs assistants</td>
<td>1 full-time</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT

1.1 Characteristic spirit, mission or vision

St. Beacon’s NS aims to promote the full and harmonious development of all aspects of the child, including their intellectual, physical, cultural and spiritual growth. During the course of the whole-school evaluation, it was evident that this characteristic spirit was manifest in the breadth of school activities provided and in the positive and respectful interactions between the teachers, the pupils and their peers.

1.2 Board of management

The board of management functions effectively and it provides committed support to ensuring the successful operation of the school. It is properly constituted and meets regularly. Minutes of meetings are maintained and accounts of expenditure are audited annually. The board addresses the key priorities of the school in a focused and diligent manner. These priorities include the maintenance of the school building and sustaining the strong and effective links that exist between the board, the staff, parents and the wider school community. The board plays an active role in the development of the school plan and each element of the plan is considered prior to ratification. At the current time, the school’s enrolment policy provides for the deferral of enrolment of pupils with special educational needs. It is strongly recommended that this policy be
reviewed to ensure it is in full compliance with pertinent equality legislation. It is advised that all curriculum plans and organisational policies be formally dated and signed on ratification.

1.3 In-school management

The in-school management team consists of the principal, the deputy principal and two special-duties teachers. The principal is praised for his commitment in leading and managing the school. He constructively promotes a culture of teamwork, collaborative decision making and positive relations across the school community. He is ably assisted in his role by the in-school management team who carry out their responsibilities with diligence and professionalism. Assigned duties are carefully chosen to reflect the priorities of the school and are reviewed at the end of each school year. The team meets regularly and minutes of meetings are maintained. The commitment of all staff members to the promotion and ongoing development of the school was observed during the whole-school evaluation.

1.4 Management of relationships and communication with the school community

Excellent relationships are in evidence between the school and the parents and wider school community. The school is characterised by its open and welcoming engagement with parents. The school keeps parents informed of school activities and events through the issuing of frequent newsletters, its text-a-parent service and through the regular updating of the school website. Formal parent-teacher meetings are held annually and written reports are provided for parents at the end of each school year.

The active parents’ association enhances the work of the school by working closely with the board of management and the teaching staff to achieve the targets that have been set by the board. These priorities include a recent fundraising initiative to provide information and communication technology (ICT) resources for the school. The parents’ association arranges for musicians, artists and drama groups to visit the school and they organise the school’s book rental scheme. They review school policies and offer opinions for consideration by the board and teaching staff. The parents’ association is lauded for its significant contribution to the range of activities provided in the school.

1.5 Management of pupils

The management of pupils throughout the school is commended. Pupils at all levels present as courteous, cooperative and respectful. The school encourages and promotes the pupils’ personal and collective responsibility through their involvement in a range of activities, including the Green Schools committee and a buddy initiative for younger pupils.

2. Quality of school planning

2.1 Whole-school and classroom planning

The quality of whole-school planning is good. All the school partners are actively involved in a collaborative planning process and the services of the Primary Professional Development Service (PPDS) are employed regularly. Creditable progress has been made in reviewing and updating a wide range of curriculum plans and organisational policies. Curriculum plans offer appropriate guidance to the teachers to aid curriculum delivery. The challenge for the school is to ensure the
consistent, schoolwide implementation of agreed whole-school objectives and practices as outlined in these plans.

While all teachers provide long-term and short-term plans of work, the quality of classroom planning varies from class to class. In some instances, individual teacher planning clearly details the specific curriculum objectives to be addressed, the teaching methodologies to be employed and the manner in which learning opportunities are to be differentiated in response to the pupils' differing ability levels. In other instances, classroom planning is significantly influenced by the textbooks in use and is restricted to an outline of the content to be addressed. The school is currently reviewing its approach to individual teacher planning. It is recommended that classroom planning be based on the primary curriculum and the whole-school curriculum plans, and that continuity and progression in learning from class to class be ensured. Monthly progress records are maintained by all teachers. It is recommended that these records focus more particularly on the specific learning outcomes achieved by the pupils. They should be used constructively to monitor the effectiveness of curriculum implementation at a schoolwide level and retained centrally.

2.2 Child protection policy and procedures

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

Ar an iomlán, sroichte caighdeán sásúil i múineadh na Gaeilge. Cruthaítear láithrigh suime don Ghaeilge sna ranganna uile agus úsáide tar réimse leathan d'acmhainní chun tacú le teagasc agus foghlaim na teanga. Forbraítear gnéithe d'fheasacht cultúir na hÉireann trí chluichí, trí dhamhsa, trí cheol agus trí imeachtaí oiriúnacha a eagrú i rith Seachtain na Gaeilge.

Eagraítear gníomhaíochtaí éagsúla chun scileanna na ndaltaí sa teanga a fhorbairt agus chun a dtuiscint ar an teanga a éiscé. Cé go mbaintear úsáid chuí as cluichí, obair beirte, ról imirt, agus ceistiu, b’fhiú, áfach, raon straitésí níos faisrinsge a chur i bhfeidhm chun cumas cumarsáide na ndaltaí a fheabhsú. Moltar go láidir áird a dhíriú ar dhuine in ainneoin fhoclóir, frasai agus struchtúir teanga a cheartachadh go rianúil. B’fhiú deiseanna rialta a thabhairt do na daltaí páirt a thabhairt do na daltaí sa teanga cumarsáide neamhspleách a chur chun cinn. Aithrisíonn na daltaí roinnt mhaith dánta, rainn agus amhráin i ngach rang.

Maidir le cúrsaí léitheoireachta, cuirtear an bhéim ar dhul chun cinn an dalta aonair agus léann na daltaí le crunnaigh agus le líofacht. Tá raon faisrinsge de théascanna d’úsáid acu. Faigheann na daltaí cleachtadh ar an scríbhneoireacht fheidhmiúil agus scríobhann siad tachascanna éagsúla ar nós a nuacht pearsanta agus scéaltaí beaga freisin. Moltar níos mó deiseanna a thabhairt do na
daltaí a gcuid scileanna scríbhneoireachta pearsanta sa Ghaeilge a thabhairt. Moltar chomh maith
na scileanna teanga a tháthú ar bhealach nádúrtha chun cabhrú leis an sealbhú teanga.

**Irish**

In general, the teaching of Irish is of a satisfactory standard. Print-rich environments and a wide
range of resources are use consistently to support teaching and learning of the language. Aspects
of Irish culture are promoted through games, dance and music and through the organisation of
suitable activities during Seachtain na Gaeilge.

A variety of learning activities is provided to improve the pupils’ understanding of the Irish
language and to develop their language skills. While appropriate use is made of games, pair
work, role play and questioning, it is recommended that a greater range of strategies be
implemented to develop the pupils’ communication skills. It is strongly advised that selected
vocabulary, phrases and language structures be practised consistently. The pupils should be
provided with regular opportunities to participate in authentic dialogue to develop their
independent expressive language skills. The pupils recite a wide repertoire of poems, rhymes and
songs in all classes.

Due attention is afforded to the development of each pupil’s reading competence and the pupils
read with accuracy and fluency. A variety of texts and books is available to support reading. The
pupils engage in functional writing activities in addition to writing their personal news and short
stories. It is recommended that the pupils be provided with more regular opportunities to develop
their independent writing skills. The more natural integration of language learning skills is
further advised to aid the pupils’ acquisition of the Irish language.

**English**

The quality of teaching and learning in English is good. An appropriate emphasis is placed on the
development of the pupils’ oral language skills, including the teaching of discrete oral language
lessons and the integration of language learning with other curriculum areas. A majority of the
pupils communicate competently and confidently across a range of topics. Skilful teacher
questioning elicits good responses from the pupils and their contributions are acknowledged and
affirmed. To further develop the pupils’ language competence it is advised that regular and
structured opportunities be provided for them to engage with the views and opinions of their
peers. An appreciation of poetry is fostered throughout the school with many examples of the
pupils’ own compositions on display. Nursery rhymes are taught effectively in the junior classes
and in all classes, the pupils enjoy reciting from a repertoire of poetry.

A stimulating, print-rich environment is provided in all classrooms and in circulation areas. The
teachers are successful in cultivating the pupils’ interest in reading and they are actively
encouraged to read for pleasure as they progress through the school. Each classroom has a well-
stocked library and a store of supplementary reading material. The pupils’ phonological
awareness is developed in a structured manner and a broad emergent reading programme is
implemented. It is advised that the early introduction of formal reading be reviewed. In general,
the pupils read fluently and they display good comprehension skills. They respond well to a range
of class novels, which are used to complement the graded reading schemes. Due emphasis is
placed on the development of the pupils’ writing skills and on the progression of penmanship and
presentation skills. The pupils experience writing in a variety of genres and for a variety of
purposes and audiences at each class level. A process approach to writing is encouraged. Samples
of the pupils’ completed work are displayed attractively. Regular spelling tests and some dictation
are features of practice across the school to promote the pupils’ spelling competence. It is
recommended that a multi-strategy approach to spelling be adopted in all classes.
3.2 Mathematics

The quality of teaching in Mathematics is generally good. A mathematics-rich environment is in evidence in all classrooms. A variety of teaching approaches is employed including whole-class teaching, group-based activities and pair work. There is a suitable focus in all classrooms on the development of appropriate mathematical language and the pupils’ mental mathematics skills are encouraged. Some good use is made of the school and home environments and a broad range of manipulatives, including ICT, to support teaching and learning. The use of estimation skills is fostered in a variety of relevant contexts and in most settings there is appropriate emphasis on promoting the pupils’ problem-solving skills. In the main, the pupils demonstrate satisfactory understanding of content previously addressed across the strands. However, a greater level of structured differentiation is required to respond to the significant variation in individual pupils’ ability levels in some class settings. The school’s implementation of team-teaching and in-class interventions to support the pupils’ learning in Mathematics is commended and it is recommended that these initiatives be developed further.

3.3 Geography

The quality of teaching and learning in Geography is competent. The pupils’ knowledge and understanding of human and natural environments, and of environmental awareness and care, are encouraged. The teachers generate the pupils’ interest in Geography successfully and use their ideas and existing knowledge as a basis for new learning. ICT, maps, globes, photographs and images, and materials from the immediate environment are used proficiently in lessons. The pupils are provided with some opportunities to participate in collaborative project-based activities and this work should be extended. The teachers successfully integrate learning in Geography with aspects of the programmes in History and Science and with other curriculum areas. The school is commended on its recent achievement of a green flag award for its recycling practices and it is now working towards its next target as part of the Green Schools initiative.

3.4 Assessment

A variety of assessment modes is used to monitor the progress of individual pupils. These approaches include teacher observation, teacher-designed tasks and tests, work-samples and some project work. The pupils’ written work is monitored regularly, with some useful feedback being provided. Standardised assessment in English and Mathematics is administered annually from first to sixth classes. A screening assessment in English is also administered in the senior infant class. Overall, there is significant variation from one class setting to another regarding the quality of assessment practices and the manner in which assessment outcomes are used to inform planning and teaching. It is recommended that a more consistent approach to the collection and utilisation of assessment data be agreed and implemented at a schoolwide level. In so doing, consideration should be given to the in-depth analysis of the results of standardised assessment at individual class and school level, in order to inform the planning and delivery of differentiated learning activities.

4. QUALITY OF SUPPORT FOR PUPILS

4.1 Pupils with special educational needs

Supplementary teaching for pupils with special educational needs (SEN) is provided through a combination of in-class support and pupil withdrawal. In accordance with best practice,
individual education plans (IEPs) and individual profile and learning programmes (IPLPs) have now been formulated for all pupils in receipt of additional support. These programmes have been developed in consultation with class teachers and parents and the utilisation of this collaborative approach is praised. When devising education programmes, 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. It is reported that a review of the pupils’ progress is undertaken twice yearly. The utilisation of a more comprehensive range of diagnostic tools to identify and review specific learning targets is recommended. Overall, the provision for pupils with SEN is of a satisfactory standard. Teacher-pupil interactions are supportive and encouraging, and learning resources are employed effectively. In the main, the pupils engage purposefully in a range of activities. In structuring provision for pupils with additional learning needs, the development of more structured models of in-class support is recommended.

5. Conclusion

The school has strengths in the following areas:

- The board of management is highly supportive of the work of the school.
- The school has an active parents’ association, which contributes significantly to school life.
- The school is characterised by a strong sense of community.
- The principal, supported by a dedicated teaching team, facilitates a collaborative working environment.
- The pupils are courteous, confident and respectful.
- The pupils’ interest in reading is actively encouraged and supported.

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

- It is recommended that classroom planning be based on the specific objectives of the primary curriculum and the school’s collaboratively devised curriculum plans to ensure continuity and progression in learning from class to class.
- In the teaching of Irish, the teachers are advised to ensure the more natural integration of language learning skills and the further development of the pupils’ abilities to communicate through the medium of Irish.
- A consistent approach to the collection of assessment data should be agreed and implemented at a schoolwide level. The outcomes of assessment should be used to inform the planning and delivery of differentiated learning activities in response to the range of pupil ability levels.
- An extended range of diagnostic tools should be employed to isolate the learning needs of pupils with special educational needs. The learning targets established for individual pupils should be specific in nature and duly responsive to their individually assessed needs.

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.

Published December 2010
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 and staff thanks the Inspectorate for their professional, courteous and helpful approach to the whole school evaluation. The Board of Management and staff welcome the positive WSE report.

The Board of Management appreciates that the inspection has recognised that the school has a dynamic, hard working and enthusiastic staff. The Board of Management are delighted the report highlights the good standards and exemplary behaviour of pupils, the high quality teaching and professionalism of the principal and staff and the positive and productive working relationship the school has with the parents, BOM and local community.

The Board of Management welcomes the affirmation of the school planning and the effective outcome of the systematic review of curricular plans.

The report highlights the commitment and contribution of the Board of Management, staff and the parents to endure the children achieve to their best ability in education, socially, emotionally, physically and spiritually.

The Board of Management wish to acknowledge:

- Our school is a very important focal point for all our community.
- The commitment of the Board of Management and staff to all the children in our care.
- The stimulation and visually attractive learning environment throughout the school.
- The significant contribution of the Parents association to the work and achievements of the school.

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 of Management notes the recommendations of the report and will incorporate these in our action plan 2010-13.

The Board of Management has amended our enrolment policy to reflect the inclusive practice which has always existed in our school.

Short term planning documents and cuntas míosúil formats have been implemented.

The Board of Management, staff and parents will endeavour to maintain the high standard in the school through the ongoing implementation of the recommendations of the report.