

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**

**Department of Education and Skills**

**Whole School Evaluation  
REPORT**

**Ballynacally National School  
Ballynacally, Co. Clare**

**Uimhir rolla: 18639E**

**Date of inspection: 06 May 2010**



## WHOLE-SCHOOL EVALUATION

A whole-school evaluation of Ballynacally National School 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 English, Irish, Mathematics and Visual Arts. 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.

## INTRODUCTION – SCHOOL CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

Ballynacally National School is a five-teacher, co-educational primary school, located approximately seventeen kilometres from Ennis town. The school operates under the patronage of the Catholic Bishop of Killaloe. Enrolment at the school has remained relatively consistent in recent years and pupils' attendance levels compare favourably with the national average.

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

	Number
Pupils enrolled in the school	104
Mainstream classes in the school	4
Teachers on the school staff	5
Mainstream class teachers	4
Teachers working in support roles	1
Special needs assistants	1

## 1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT

### 1.1 Characteristic spirit, mission or vision

The school's mission statement outlines the aspiration that *'each child should leave Ballynacally National School with a positive self-esteem and that, during their time as pupils in the school, each child will come to recognise their individual talents and accept their own limitations'*. It is evident that all personnel at the school are committed to fulfilling this aspiration. A positive climate is a feature of the school and relationships between staff and pupils respectively are supportive and encouraging.

### 1.2 Board of management

The board of management is properly constituted. It meets regularly and minutes of these meetings are kept. The board demonstrates commitment to all aspects of its role and identifies pupils' welfare as its ultimate priority. The chairperson of the board is effective and she brings a wealth of experience in education and an immense knowledge of the school and local community to bear on the role. The treasurer reports to the board regularly on the school's financial situation. In accordance with Section 18 of the Education Act 1998, school accounts are certified annually.

Issues relating to pupils' safety and security are addressed efficiently. The present arrangement for parking and the drop-off and collection of pupils poses difficulties due to the limited amount of space available outside the school building. In order to ameliorate these risks the board is in the

process of developing the space adjacent to the school as a staff car park. The principal oversees the day-to-day maintenance of the school in conjunction with the school's caretaker, and it is well kept internally and externally. The board identifies the school's limited space as a challenge, particularly the restricted dimensions of two of the mainstream classrooms. It recognises that additional space will be required and intends to address this issue in the near future. In accordance with Section 20 of the Education Act 1998, the board is advised to compile and distribute an annual report on the main developments in the operation of the school.

### **1.3 In-school management**

The principal was appointed in 1994. He cites the cultivation of an affirming environment where high-quality learning experiences are provided to all pupils as his main concern. He demonstrates good management skills and on a daily basis he oversees the efficient functioning of the school. He fulfils his functions in relation to whole-school planning and curriculum leadership with vision and purpose. His commitment to on-going review and development and to teachers' professional development is praiseworthy. Under his leadership it is apparent that there is very good co-operation amongst teachers whose complementary strengths are used to good effect in teaching and learning.

The principal is ably supported in his work by a deputy principal and one special-duties post-holder. In accordance with Circular 07/03 they address a range of duties of a curricular, pastoral and organisational nature. These duties are reviewed annually to ensure that they are aligned to the needs of the school. In addition, the deputy principal and post-holder lead various initiatives and extracurricular activities throughout the school. They fulfil their roles in a proactive committed manner and together with the principal, they oversee regular whole-school review and forward planning.

### **1.4 Management of relationships and communication with the school community**

The school has established very positive links with the parents and the wider community. A proactive parents' association, which is affiliated to the National Parents Council (NPC) works in support of the school to organise fundraising, whole-school events and competitions for pupils at each class level. It also makes arrangements for guest speakers to visit the school and for the provision of tuition in European languages as an extracurricular activity.

The school makes very good efforts to communicate with parents. Formal parent-teacher meetings are held and end-of-year reports are issued to inform parents of their children's progress. The school is in the process of setting up a website and in the future, this will serve as a useful resource for disseminating and accessing information.

### **1.5 Management of pupils**

The school is committed to managing pupils in a positive manner and favours the adage *Mol an óige agus tiocfaidh sí*. Pupils are well behaved and they approach their work diligently. They engage in their learning eagerly and co-operate with their teachers and peers during whole-class and group activities. Many pupils express themselves articulately and with notable confidence. A weekly assembly is held at which school procedures are reiterated and pupils are affirmed. In order to develop this good practice, it is advised that the school explore ways of further developing listener-speaker relationships in the junior classes. This will lead to more productive engagement in the learning process.

## **2. QUALITY OF SCHOOL PLANNING**

### **2.1 Whole-school and classroom planning**

The quality of whole-school planning is good. A range of organisational policies, including those required by legislation, is available. At present the board is involved in a comprehensive, phased review of all policies and this process is being undertaken conscientiously. Parents are given valuable opportunities to comment on policies and to contribute to the development of policy documents. Once the process of review is complete, the school should consider the benefits of compiling a single suite of documents in the form of a whole-school plan to facilitate ease of access to policies and plans.

Whole-school curricular plans are devised by teachers in a collaborative manner. The quality of these plans is good. In the case of the whole-school plans in English, Mathematics and Irish, good emphasis is placed on documenting continuity and progression from class to class. When the school reviews its whole-school plan in the Visual Arts, it is advised that an outline of the progressive development of pupils' understanding of the concepts and related skills as outlined in the visual arts curriculum be included in the plan. It is also advised that the development of pupils' visual language be addressed in the plan.

The school's assessment policy provides some information about the use of standardised tests and diagnostic testing in the school. It is advised that this policy be further developed to document the school's current assessment practices including a clear statement on its use of *Assessment for Learning* strategies. The manner in which assessment results are recorded, maintained and shared between teachers as pupils advance through the school should also be outlined. The school should consult the publication of the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) *Assessment in the Primary School Curriculum: Guidelines for Schools* when engaging in this work.

Overall, the quality of classroom planning is good. All teachers compile long-term and short-term plans and monthly progress reports. The school recently commenced a review of teachers' planning and a helpful template was devised for the compilation of short-term plans and monthly progress reports. The majority of teachers use this template resulting, for the most part, in a consistent approach to planning throughout the school. To develop this practice, it is advised that in place of generic statements, teachers should document the particular content in terms of learning objectives, to be addressed over a defined period of time.

### **2.2 Child protection policy and procedures**

Confirmation was provided that, in compliance with Department of Education and Science 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

Tá na hoidí báúil don Ghaeilge agus leagtar béim inmholta ar shuim na ndaltaí a chothú sa teanga. Aithrisíonn na daltaí dánta, canann siad amhráin agus bíonn an feadóg stáin á sheinm acu. Chomh maith leis sin, glacann cuid acu páirt i mbanna cheoil na scoile. Mar thoradh ar na dea-iarrachtaí seo is léir go bhfuil tuiscint bhreá ag na daltaí ar a n-oidhreacht chultúrtha.

Tá cáilíocht an teagaisc agus na foghlama sa Ghaeilge go han-mhaith. Cloítear leis an nGaeilge mar theanga an teagaisc le linn na gceachtanna agus úsáidtear í go rialta mar theanga bhainistíochta i rith an lae. Léiríonn formhór na daltaí tuiscint mhaith ar an teanga. Forbraítear na scileanna éisteachta le cúram agus leagtar béim láidir ar labhairt na Gaeilge. Tá sé ar chumas formhór na ndaltaí abairtí simplí a chumadh agus ábhair éagsúla a phlé agus ceisteanna fúthu a fhreagairt. Cruthaítear comhthéacsanna cainte go sciliúil agus leagtar béim ar an bhfoghraíocht agus ar chruinneas teanga le linn na gceachtanna. Úsáidtear luaschartaí, puipéid, bréagáin agus nithe choincréideacha mar fhearas cabhrach san obair seo. Glacann na daltaí páirt fonnmhar in agallaimh bheirte, i rólghlacadh, i gcluichí agus i sceitsí gearra. Bíonn leibhéal na rannpháirtíochta sa ghníomhaíochtaí taitneamhacha seo go han-mhaith.

Forbraítear scileanna léitheoireachta agus scríbhneoireachta na ndaltaí go cumasach. Léann siad na téacsleabhair go tuisceanach. Cuirtear fograí agus lipéid ar taispeáint chun léitheoireacht neamhfhoirmiúil a chothú. Éiríonn leis na múinteoirí an léitheoireacht Ghaeilge a nascadh le hábhair eile agus léann na daltaí sleachta léitheoireachta atá bunaithe ar théamaí éagsúla go minic. Tá an cleachtas seo le moladh. Sa scríbhneoireacht, tugtar deiseanna do na daltaí saghsanna difriúla d'obair scríofa a dhéanamh tríd an scoil. Baineann caighdeán an-mhaith leis an obair seo. Chun an dea-chleachtas seo a leathnú, moltar tuilleadh deiseanna a thabhairt do na daltaí, altanna gearra a scríobh go neamhspleách.

*The teachers are well-disposed towards Irish and commendable emphasis is placed on developing the pupils' interest in the language. Pupils recite poems, sing songs and play the tin-whistle. In addition, some of them take part in the school's band. As a result of these good efforts, it is evident that pupils have a good understanding of their cultural heritage.*

*The quality of teaching and learning in Irish is very good. Irish is used continuously as a medium of instruction during lessons and as a classroom management device throughout the day. The majority of pupils demonstrate a good understanding of the language. Listening skills are developed with care and a strong emphasis is placed on speaking Irish. The majority of pupils are capable of structuring simple sentences, to discuss various topics and to answer questions. Contexts for communication are skilfully generated and pronunciation and accuracy are emphasised during lessons. Flashcards, puppets, toys and concrete materials are used as helpful materials in this work. Pupils take part with enthusiasm in paired interviews, in role-play, in games and in short sketches. The level of participation in these enjoyable activities is very good.*

*Pupils' reading and writing skills are competently developed. Pupils read textbooks with understanding. Charts, signs and labels are displayed to promote the informal reading of Irish. Teachers succeed in integrating Irish reading with other subjects and pupils regularly read passages based on various themes. This practice is praiseworthy. In writing, pupils are given opportunities to write in a variety of genres throughout the school. A very good standard is in*

evidence in this work. In order to extend this good practice, it is advised that increased opportunities be given to pupils to write passages independently.

### **English**

The teaching of English is good throughout the school. At most class levels, discrete lessons in oral language are well focussed and a worthwhile emphasis is placed on the extension of pupils' vocabulary. Pupils' competence in oral language skills is developed in a cross-curricular manner. The use of play as a learning medium in the teaching of oral language is advised in the early years as this will help pupils to engage in lessons at a more age-appropriate level. Pupils at all class levels explore and recite a good range of rhymes and poems.

At most class levels, reading and writing are very well taught. All classes feature supportive print-rich environments including flashcards, editing checklists and displays of age-appropriate vocabulary. Pupils read from large-format books, a graded reading scheme and a good supply of supplementary readers and books from the well-stocked class libraries. At some class levels, reading is well modelled by the teacher and accordingly, pupils read with expression demonstrating empathy with themes and characters. It is advised that this practice be extended throughout the school. Phonological awareness is developed systematically at all class levels and pupils' word identification skills are very good. Their comprehension is very well developed through whole-class discussions of text. The conventions of grammar, spelling and punctuation are developed methodically during lessons in reading and writing. Pupils write in a variety of genre including functional and creative writing. Writing across the curriculum is also emphasised and samples of pupils' writing in History and Geography are displayed throughout the school. In middle and senior classes, pupils participate in writing projects including the *Listowel Writers Festival*. They also compile a newspaper *The Ballynacally National Times* in which they report on recent topical events. Handwriting skills are very carefully developed and the standard of presentation of pupils' work is of a particularly high standard.

### **3.2 Mathematics**

Mathematics is well taught throughout the school. Over the course of the evaluation very good lessons were observed. In the middle classes, the structure and pace of lessons and the range of methodologies used were exemplary. During these lessons pupils engaged in the learning process with notable enthusiasm.

Classroom environments are supportive and feature displays of helpful charts, mathematical facts and vocabulary. Many of these resources are teacher-generated and are highly relevant to pupils' learning. Oral mathematics receives appropriate attention throughout the school. At all class levels, pupils manipulate concrete materials to explore and investigate concepts. The classroom and school environments are used most creatively to facilitate this work. Real-life contexts are used as the basis for lessons and this approach facilitates the development of knowledge and the application of skills. Talk and discussion are significant features of lessons. Pupils work in small groups and pairs to identify, discuss and solve problems and they respond very well to teachers' interesting, probing questions. Lessons are carefully differentiated to cater for pupils' varying levels of ability through careful selection of material and the provision of one-to-one teaching. Pupils' understanding of place value is very good and the processes involved in completing number operations are taught in a thorough methodical manner.

Many pupils demonstrate good knowledge and understanding across the strands of the curriculum. In the infant classes, appropriate emphasis is placed on the strands early mathematical activities and number. In general, pupils at this level demonstrate good understanding of number concepts. However, it is advised that more regular revision and consolidation of material would

be of benefit to all pupils in junior classes. In the middle and senior classes, pupils approach challenging problems with confidence and the majority of pupils achieve very good standards across the curriculum.

### **3.3 Visual Arts**

The school is commended for the many opportunities given to pupils to engage in practical work in the Visual Arts through two- and three-dimensional media. Many fine samples of pupils' work adorn the classrooms and corridors including portraits, silhouettes, shape collages, friezes and felt pictures. It is evident from these displays that pupils' creativity and inventiveness are well developed. Pupils demonstrate very good ability to discuss the processes involved in generating their work as well as the uses and limitations of art materials which they have employed. The strand unit looking and responding is addressed to a limited extent. It is advised that a broader range of work be undertaken in this aspect of the curriculum in order to develop pupils' aesthetic awareness by studying the work of artists.

Work carried out in other curricular areas, most notably in literacy, provides interesting stimuli for work in the Visual Arts. Through use of various media, pupils depict characters and scenes from books in a most creative manner. In middle and senior and classes, lessons are effectively integrated with concepts in Mathematics and Science. The integrated approach taken to the development of pupils' problem-solving skills using art materials is worthy of particular praise. At some class levels, teachers use appropriate visual language incidentally during lessons. It is advised that this worthwhile practice be extended throughout the school and that formal development of appropriate language be addressed as a central focus in all lessons. It is also recommended that more specific attention be paid to the development of pupils' understanding of the concepts and related skills as outlined in the visual arts curriculum.

### **3.4 Assessment**

Overall, the school's assessment practices are effective. Class teachers administer tests regularly in aspects of the curriculum using short tests, activity sheets and checklists. Pupils' written work is corrected regularly as a means of assessing progress on an ongoing basis. Individual pupil files, which contain pupils' test results and samples of their work, are maintained and these are shared with teachers as pupils advance through the school. This is an effective way of tracking pupils' progress. From first to sixth class, standardised tests are administered annually in Mathematics and English. At whole-school level, these test results are analysed to identify pupils who may be in need of additional support. It is advised that this practice be extended to include an analysis of results to inform teaching and learning, by identifying particular aspects of literacy and numeracy to be targeted in the mainstream classes. This will help to raise the attainment levels of all pupils in the school, including pupils who are not identified as being in need of additional support. The school's commitment to early identification of pupils' needs and to early intervention is praiseworthy. The *Middle Infant Screening Test (MIST)* is administered to pupils in the second term of senior infants. In addition, pupils' auditory sequential memory is assessed by the learning-support teacher at an early stage in junior infants, with a view to identifying pupils' needs at a very early stage of their schooling. This is very good practice. A range of diagnostic tests is used to provide further information on the needs of pupils who present with learning difficulties. These include the *Dyslexia Screening Test – Junior (DST-J)*, *Neale Analysis of English reading*, *Quest*, *Aston Index*, *Jackson Phonics Test*, and the *Schonell spelling and reading tests*. Pupils' cognitive ability is assessed using the *Otis-Lennon Mental Ability Tests* and the *Cognitive Ability Tests (CAT)*.

## **4. QUALITY OF SUPPORT FOR PUPILS**

### **4.1 Pupils with special educational needs**

Two teachers provide support to pupils with special educational needs. The quality of this provision is very good. The school's comprehensive special educational needs policy was reviewed this year. It provides very good guidance to all parties who support pupils and has had a positive impact on practice throughout the school. In the case of learning support, the school's policy for the identification and selection of pupils who will receive support incorporates the staged approach.

The learning support teacher (LST) is based at this school and is shared with one other school. The resource teacher (RT) is based at a nearby school and is shared with two other schools including Ballynacally National School. Both teachers provide a combination of individual and group support to pupils and most pupils are withdrawn from the mainstream classroom for this support. In addition, the resource teacher provides some in-class support to pupils. The school implements effective early intervention strategies and the learning-support teacher and the mainstream class teacher engage in team teaching to intensively support the development of pupils' literacy skills in the infant classes. A music therapist, who works under the guidance of the class teacher, supports pupils with special educational needs. This support takes the form of whole-class support and group support.

The learning-support room is very attractively arranged. Creditable efforts are made to develop the environment to support pupils' development in literacy and numeracy and a very good range of resources is used in the course of lessons. A prefabricated building, which is adjacent to the main school building, is provided for the resource teacher. This space is also used for the storage of materials and to accommodate a pre-school and after-school club for pupils attending the school. As a result of this arrangement, the development of the environment has been very limited. It is advised that the school explore ways of developing this space to include an attractive reading and library corner, thematic displays, and a play corner. This will facilitate more child-centred teaching and learning and it will allow for greater flexibility and spontaneity when choosing activities to address pupils' full spectrum of needs. It is also advised that the learning environment be personalised to pupils by developing displays of their written work, their work in the Visual Arts and displays relating to pupils' interests.

The LST and RT engage in comprehensive planning. They work in collaboration with the pupils' parents and the class teacher to devise plans in the form of individual pupil learning profiles (IPLPs) and individual education plans (IEPs). All plans include details of pupils' results in standardised and diagnostic tests. Time-bound targets for development are identified for each pupil and these targets are monitored frequently. Teachers' observations of pupils' general progress, behaviour and levels of engagement are recorded on a daily and weekly basis. Both teachers are commended for their diligence in this regard.

Over the course of the evaluation, lively engaging sessions were observed and for the most part, pupils' levels of participation were very good. Teachers and pupils interact in a positive manner and pupils are affirmed regularly for their efforts and successes.

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

No pupils from disadvantaged or minority groups were enrolled in the school at the time of the evaluation. The school keenly supports the participation of all pupils in the life of the school.

## 5. CONCLUSION

The school has strengths in the following areas:

- A positive, supportive school atmosphere is in evidence and there is strong commitment to the development of pupils' full potential.
- The board of management is dedicated to the welfare of pupils and staff.
- The principal displays very good management skills in leading whole-school development and in promoting teachers' professional development. He fosters positive relationships with the whole-school community and ensures that all partners are well informed.
- The teachers are hard-working and they are committed to the provision of high-quality learning experiences for pupils.
- Pupils engage well in activities and they demonstrate pride in their work. Many pupils achieve very good standards across the curriculum.
- The provision for pupils with special educational needs is very good and the inclusion of all pupils is a feature of the school.

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

- It is recommended that the school provide for broader learning experiences in the Visual Arts, to include work in the strand unit looking and responding. The school should plan for a more progressive approach to the development of pupils' visual language and their understanding of the skills and concepts outlined in the visual arts curriculum.
- It is recommended that the school continue its worthwhile review of teachers' planning and that teachers' plans should document the particular content to be addressed over a defined period of time.
- It is recommended that the school develop its assessment policy to provide further detail in relation to ongoing assessment of pupils, as well as the recording, maintenance and use of assessment to inform teaching and learning for the benefit of all pupils in the school.
- It is recommended that the school explore ways of developing the space used for resource teaching in order to generate an environment which is more conducive to addressing pupils' full spectrum of 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.

# **Appendix**

**SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT**

**Submitted by the Board of Management**

### **Area 1 Observations on the content of the inspection report**

- Content of report very accurate to school workings.
- WSE undertaken professionally and thoroughly by Inspector.
- WSE process very positive experience for our school community. We are proud of this report.

### **Area 2 Follow-up actions planned or undertaken since the completion of the inspection activity to implement the findings and recommendations of the inspection.**

- Staff will prioritise Visual Art policy review immediately after our English policy review is complete.
- Staff are now recording the particular content to be addressed in short-term plans.
- We have amended our assessment policy, and practice, to provide for improvements in our assessment to infant teaching/learning.
- The BOM, Principal, RT and school secretary are busy developing the space for Resource Teaching now.