An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
Management, Leadership and Learning

REPORT

Ballymore National School
Ballymore, Portnablagh
County Donegal
Uimhir rolla: 18250W

Date of inspection: 6 June 2014

AN ROINN OIDEACHAIS AGUS SCILEANNA | DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Introduction

A Whole-School Evaluation – Management, Leadership and Learning (WSE-MLL) was undertaken in Ballymore National School in June 2014. This report is based on a selection of lessons observed in a range of learning settings in the school, interaction with pupils and review of their work, meetings with the principal and with board and parent representatives, completed parent and pupil questionnaires, and a selection of school documents. 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.

Ballymore National School is a co-educational school under the patronage of the Church of Ireland Bishop of Derry and Raphoe. The school participates in the Department's action plan for educational inclusion for rural schools: *Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS).* Enrolments have increased steadily in the past number of years. Currently, the school has an enrolment of 31 pupils. Attendance levels are very good. There are two mainstream class teachers including the teaching principal, two support teachers and two special needs assistants on staff.

The school has **strengths** in the following areas:

- The board of management and the parents' association support the school very well.
- The principal demonstrates very effective leadership skills.
- Very high standards are achieved by the pupils.
- There is a high level of collaboration in evidence in teachers' planning and approaches to teaching.
- Information and communication technology (ICT) is used very successfully to support teaching and learning.
- The school presents as a very happy and caring environment.

The following **main recommendations** are made:

- Assessment approaches in Irish should be extended*. (Ba chóir an cur chuige maidir le measúnú a mhéadú sa Ghaeilge.)*
- Consideration should be given to developing a school website.

Findings

1. **The learning achievements of pupils**
   - The learning achievements of pupils across the areas evaluated are highly commendable. Of particular note are their achievements in English, Mathematics, Social, Environmental and Scientific Education (SESE), Drama and the Visual Arts. The pupils' achievements in a wide range of areas are celebrated on corridor displays. Responses from questionnaires, completed as part of the evaluation, indicate that almost all pupils enjoy their lessons and learning. All parents agreed that their child is doing well in school.
   - Pupils' literacy skills are developed to a very high level. Pupils have acquired a good vocabulary and read with fluency. The implementation of an oral language programme as part of the school's actions for improvement is proving very successful. Pupils can recite, recall and sequence stories orally and in written form to a very good standard. The standard of handwriting is very good and the quality of the written projects on display is particularly noteworthy. Word-study activities and free-writing tasks completed in both classrooms are of a very high standard.
   - Learning in Mathematics is very good with the majority of pupils achieving very well in this area. Pupils demonstrate a very good understanding of concepts across the

strands. They engage actively in a range of suitably challenging, relevant and interesting learning tasks. They are confident in their knowledge of place value, tables and shapes. Enrichment activities are provided for the more able pupils. Questionnaire responses indicate, however, that a minority of pupils do not know how well they are doing in Mathematics. Further self-assessment by pupils in this area should be considered.

- Tá scileanna labhartha, léitheoireachta, tuisceana agus scríbhneoireachta na ndaltaí go maith sa Ghaeilge. Pléann na daltaí réimse topaicí atá clúdaithe acu sna ceachtanna go maith. *(In Irish, the pupils speaking, reading, comprehension and writing skills are good. Pupils can discuss a range of topics which have been covered in lessons with confidence.)*
- The pupils' learning in SESE is very successful. The Green Schools' committee is actively engaged in raising environmental awareness. The pupils engage in regular investigative activities and ICT is used effectively by them to research topics and project themes. In questionnaires, the majority of pupils indicated that they use computers during lessons.
- Pupils with additional learning needs and special educational needs are performing well in accordance with their abilities.

2. **Quality of teaching**

- The overall quality of teaching in the school is very good. Teachers plan collaboratively and create attractive learning environments. ICT is used very effectively and teachers design stimulating resources to enhance the teaching of Irish and Mathematics in particular. A range of methodologies is used very effectively and activities are organised very well.
- The quality of teaching provided for pupils with additional and special educational needs is effective. Support is given both through in-class intervention and withdrawing pupils in small groups and individually, as appropriate. Regular reviews of progress take place and there is ongoing collaborative planning between support and class teachers.
- Team teaching is used very effectively to promote inclusion and to support learning in literacy and numeracy.
- Various forms of assessment are used including standardised tests for English reading and Mathematics, checklists, teacher observation, and analysis of samples of work to assess pupils' progress across the curriculum. Useful progress folders are maintained by teachers for every pupil from junior infants to sixth class. Some self-assessment strategies are used by pupils during lessons. Current assessment approaches in Irish should be extended.

3. **Support for pupils' well-being**

- Teachers affirm pupils regularly and effectively. School assemblies are organised regularly and pupils are constantly encouraged with praise, star charts and positive feedback. Commendably, the pupils were involved in drawing up school rules and the anti-bullying charter. Initiatives such as '*Gaeilgeoir na Seachtaine'*; '*Student of the Week'* and '*Writer of the Week'* and other positive reinforcements are used to encourage pupils to do their best in school. In questionnaire responses, most pupils agreed that they feel safe in the class and in the playground.
- The school is a nurturing, learning environment and pupils with special educational needs are very well cared for by the teachers and special needs assistants.
- Confirmation was provided that the board of management has formally adopted the *Child Protection for Primary and Post-Primary Schools* without modification and that the school is compliant with requirements of the *Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post Primary Schools.*

4. **Leadership and Management**

- The work of the board of management is very effective in support of the school. The members participate in policy review and support staff in their continuous professional development.
- Home-school communication is very good and reports on pupils' progress are communicated to parents. A parents' association (PA) supports the school with commendable commitment. Lines of communication between the PA and the teachers are very effective. A school website would be beneficial to further enhance home-school communication.
- The teaching principal, who is retiring in September 2014, provides very effective leadership to the school community. Her commitment to the educational achievement of every pupil and her proactive approach in developing a positive team spirit among staff members are particularly praiseworthy. She has established very successful relationships with the parent body. The special duties' teacher supports the principal in a very effective way and a positive work environment prevails. The school secretary provides invaluable support to the principal and staff in the smooth operation of the school.

5. **School Self-evaluation**

- There is very good engagement with school self-evaluation (SSE). Over the last two years, the school has participated in a professional learning community which includes other schools in the locality. The principal took a leading role in guiding this professional forum.
- The staff undertook a review of literacy in 2012/2013. The school improvement plan for literacy is based on the effective analysis of a wide range of assessment data including parent and pupil questionnaires. Targeted actions are impacting very positively on pupils' learning in literacy. Work has begun on reviewing numeracy with specific targets and actions already in place.

Conclusion

The school's capacity to engage in school improvement is very good given the positive, collaborative approaches that are in evidence amongst the teaching staff. The work completed to date will provide good direction to and support for the future principal.

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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 Ballymore National School fully endorses this Whole School Evaluation Report. We welcome the findings of this report and are pleased that the dedication and commitment of all the stakeholders in the school have been recognised in such a positive manner.
We particularly welcome the report's findings that the quality of teaching and learning is of a very high standard. This is indeed a tribute to the professionalism and commitment of the staff.
The Board also acknowledges the part played by the parents, Parents Association and the students of the school.
The report gives the Board of Management the confidence that the work of the school is being carried out to the highest standard and gives us clear direction for the future.
The excellence of our outgoing principal has been rightly acknowledged and we have every confidence that our new leader will follow in her footsteps and maintain the high standards reflected in the 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

We fully acknowledge the recommendations of the report.

1. The standardised Irish tests have been purchased and testing will begin shortly.

2. The school website is currently under construction.