

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

**Whole School Evaluation
Management, Leadership and Learning**

REPORT

**Scoil Náisiúnta Baile Fálbhach
Lusk, County Dublin
Uimhir rolla: 17472M**

Date of inspection: 4 February 2015



Whole-School Evaluation – Management, Leadership and Learning Report

Introduction

A Whole-School Evaluation – Management, Leadership and Learning (WSE-MLL) was undertaken in Scoil Náisiúnta Baile Fálbhach, Lusk, in February 2015. 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.

Baile Fálbhach National School is a co-educational, vertical, six-teacher school operating under the patronage of the Catholic Archbishop of Dublin. Attendance levels of the 98 pupils enrolled are very good.

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

- The overall quality of pupils' learning in literacy and numeracy is good.
- Pupils are well cared for in the school.
- The staff effectively promotes equality of access for all pupils and ensures their participation in all school activities.
- Teachers display a sincere commitment to the holistic development of pupils.
- Support for pupils with special educational needs is of a very high standard.
- The parents and the wider community provide valuable support and assistance to the school.
- The care provided by the special needs assistants is highly commendable.

The following **recommendations** are made:

- Teachers are advised to employ a wider range of collaborative teaching methodologies and to differentiate the curriculum to meet the learning needs of all pupils.
- The board of management should formulate an action plan for the future development of the school, ensure all policies and procedures are in line with current Department of Education and Skills' guidelines and facilitate parental involvement in the development and review of relevant policies.
- The principal should further develop collaborative curriculum leadership in order to progress the development of teaching and learning in the school.
- In-class support approaches, early intervention and literacy and numeracy initiatives should be developed to enable differentiated learning across the school for all pupils.
- The whole-school planning process, classroom planning and recording of monthly progress (*cuntais mhíosúla*) should be further developed to effectively guide school improvement.

Findings

1. The learning achievements of pupils

- The overall quality of pupils' learning achievements is good. Pupils have very positive attitudes to school and display praiseworthy levels of interest in their learning. School assessment data indicate positive overall levels of pupil attainment in Mathematics and reading.
- In Mathematics, pupils demonstrate good levels of understanding of key concepts and lesson content is connected to their life experiences. In the further development of pupils' numeracy skills, the use of open-ended problems is recommended to facilitate challenge for the more-able pupils.
- The quality of pupils' learning outcomes in literacy is good. A culture of reading has been nurtured and many pupils display commendable knowledge of books and authors. Their reading skills are suitably developed and most pupils participate ably in discussions and language tasks. Teachers make very good provision for the development of phonological awareness. Effective use is made of poetry and rhymes to foster and develop language. While writing opportunities in a variety of genres were evident, a structured whole-school approach to the development of writing, penmanship and spelling is recommended.
- Tá gá le forbairt a dhéanamh ar scileanna labhartha na ndaltaí sa Ghaeilge. Aithrisíonn na daltaí rainn, dánta agus amhráin go muiníneach. Déanann siad an-iarracht úsáid a bhaint as an bhfoclóir atá ar eolas acu. Ba cheart deiseanna rialta a thabhairt do na daltaí ceisteanna a fhreagairt in abairtí iomlána agus aistriúchán a sheachaint. Léann na daltaí go hábalta, ar an iomlán. Tá an léitheoireacht bunaithe ar na téacsleabhair. Moltar úsáid a bhaint as leabhair leabharlainne shimplí agus as úrscéalta Gaeilge chun spéis agus taitneamh a fhorbairt a thuilleadh. Moltar measúnú a dhéanamh ar ghnóthachtáil na ndaltaí sa Ghaeilge ar bhonn uile-scoile.
- *In Irish, there is scope to develop pupils' speaking skills. Pupils recite rhymes, poems and songs confidently. They make very good efforts to use the vocabulary they have acquired. Pupils should be given regular opportunities to answer questions using full sentences and to avoid translation. Pupils read capably on the whole. Reading is based on the textbook. It is recommended that more use be made of simple library books and novels to further develop interest and enjoyment. Pupils' attainment in Irish should be assessed on a whole-school basis.*

2. Quality of teaching

- There is scope for development in the overall quality of teaching in the school. A range of teaching methodologies is employed but scope exists for the greater use of pair work. While some collaborative learning activities were noted, whole-class teaching was the dominant methodology employed during the evaluation. Teachers are advised to place greater emphasis on differentiating the curriculum to meet the learning needs of pupils. Some classrooms are presented as print-rich environments of learning. However, better classroom presentation is required in some instances. In developing play-based learning, staff should consider introducing *Aistear* in the junior classroom. In pupil questionnaires administered during the evaluation, most pupils indicated that they did not use computers during lessons. Opportunities to use information and communications technology, as a teaching and learning tool in all classrooms, should be explored.
- There was considerable variation in the quality of teachers' classroom planning; in some instances such planning was very good but in some instances the planning was poor. Where planning was very good, learning objectives were outlined clearly, activities were differentiated to meet the specific learning needs of pupils and assessment strategies were suitably explicit.
- There is scope to develop the overall quality of whole-school planning. Practical organisational and administrative policies have been devised. While curricular plans are developed for all subjects, some require review or further development. The delineation of content for each class level is recommended.

- A whole-school approach to the recording of monthly progress records, which enables the tracking of teaching across all strands of the curriculum and the monitoring of school improvement initiatives, should be established.
- The quality of teaching provided for pupils with special educational needs is very good. Interactions between teachers and pupils are focused and affirming. Individual education plans (IEPs) have clear learning targets and pupils are making good progress. Parents are consulted regularly and are provided with a copy of their children's IEP. The school should review the organisation of learning-support teaching and develop team teaching and in-class models of support. Early intervention programmes and literacy and numeracy initiatives should be implemented to enhance provision for all pupils.
- A range of assessment approaches is in use by teachers and an assessment policy has been developed. Tracking of pupils' test results from year to year, to monitor progress in literacy and numeracy, has commenced. The school is advised to further develop its assessment policy and to employ models of assessment for learning across all curriculum subjects.

3. Support for pupils' wellbeing

- Pastoral care provision is of a high quality. Positive, respectful relationships were observed in classrooms. Pupils are highly commended for their courteous behaviour during the evaluation.
- In questionnaires administered during the evaluation, almost all pupils indicated that they feel safe in the school. Parental questionnaires indicate that almost all parents think their children are treated fairly and respectfully in school.
- 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*.

4. Leadership and Management

- There is scope for development in the quality of the work of the board of management. The board meets regularly. Minutes are carefully maintained and school accounts are certified annually. However, despite these good practices, there are significant issues to be addressed. Currently, the length of break-times exceeds the Department's guidelines. The board should review the current structure of the school day to ensure compliance with Department circular 11/95. The board is advised to review the admissions policy and the code of behaviour so that they reflect the school's inclusive ethos and are in line with current Department guidelines. The complaints procedures for parents should be developed and implemented in line with the five-stage procedures agreed by the Irish National Teachers Organisation and the Catholic Primary School Management Association. School policies should be reviewed and ratified by the board. Members of the board should avail of further training in school management. The board should also consider issuing an annual report to parents on the operation of the school.
- The teaching principal carries out day-to-day management responsibilities in a capable manner. While some work has been undertaken on curriculum leadership, more work needs to be done. Models of distributed leadership should be explored and curricular leadership prioritised. A strategic plan for the future development of teaching and learning in the school should be developed. Since pupils are still gathering on the yard after the school's start time of 09.20, the in-school management team, in consultation with the board, should ensure procedures for morning assembly align more closely with circular 11/95.
- The middle-management team comprises the deputy principal and a special duties teacher. Responsibilities are carried out in an effective manner. For example, the roll books and registers are maintained carefully. The team should hold regular formal meetings, minutes should be maintained and agreed actions recorded.
- Parents actively support the school and the parents' association has affiliated to the National Parents Council recently. The parents' association should now elect a committee and members should avail of training. There is a need to extend the

channels of communication with all parents and to enable parental involvement in policy formation. Responses to questionnaires administered during the evaluation reveal levels of dissatisfaction among a considerable number of parents with regard to communication and the management of the school. This dissatisfaction should be examined by the board with a view to identifying the underlying causes and taking steps to address them.

5. School Self-evaluation

- There is scope for development in the quality of school self-evaluation (SSE). In advancing the process, targets should have a stronger evidence-base. The school is advised to better incorporate the voice of parents and pupils within the SSE process. Assessment strategies should be further developed to assist with target setting and monitoring of progress.

Conclusion

The school's capacity to develop further and engage in school improvement is dependent upon effective leadership and collaboration among all the partners.

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 Hedgestown National School welcomes this affirmation of the overall high standards of learning in literacy and numeracy in the school and the high levels of commitment shown by the teachers to the holistic development of pupils as set out in the report. The Board is very happy that the care provided by the staff for all the pupils is commended in this evaluation. The Board of Management is delighted with the recognition of the care given to Special Education by the teachers and the Special Needs Assistants and acknowledges the high level of administrative work carried out in the school as identified in the report. The Board would also like to acknowledge the valuable contribution that parents and the wider community provide to our 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 and teachers will continue to work closely together to implement the recommendations in this report. Since its completion the staff has prioritised certain recommendations. The school timetable has been updated, policies will continue to be ratified over the coming months and will continue to be published on the school website, in-class support has commenced in the school and staff has undergone relevant training and plans are in place to standardise class planning.

The Board will continue to support the school community in its efforts to develop further the good practices witnessed in action during the recent evaluation.