

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**

**Department of Education and Skills**

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

**REPORT**

**Balscadden National School,  
Ring Commons, Balbriggan, Co. Dublin  
Roll number: 09492W**

**Date of inspection: 4 June 2013**



## Whole-School Evaluation – Management, Leadership and Learning Report

### Introduction

A Whole-School Evaluation – Management, Leadership and Learning (WSE-MLL) was undertaken in Balscadden National School, Ring Commons, Balbriggan, Co. Dublin in June 2013. 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.

Balscadden National School is a Catholic co-educational school under the patronage of the Archbishop of Dublin. It has an enrolment of 222 pupils. Enrolment trends are steady and are expected to remain stable in the coming years. School attendance levels are very good.

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.

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

- The principal is highly committed and approaches his work in a dynamic, innovative and insightful manner.
- The willingness of staff to share responsibility for the organisation of a number of curricular and pastoral areas is praiseworthy, as is their willingness to share their expertise to enhance the quality of education provided in the school.
- The quality of pupils' learning outcomes in literacy is very good, particularly in reading, where children read confidently across a range of texts appropriate to their ability.
- The school has engaged in an effective approach to self-evaluation, with the identification of priority areas for improvement and the implementation of appropriate courses of action.
- The quality of support for pupils with Special Educational Needs (SEN) is very good, with the staged approach to providing support being managed very systematically and effectively.

The following **recommendations** are made:

- There is a need to ensure that all lessons in Mathematics have differentiated learning objectives, particularly for the more able pupils. These need to be outlined explicitly in teachers' planning.
- While a range of worthwhile collaborative learning methodologies is employed, there are some instances where a greater emphasis needs to be placed on ensuring that these collaborative approaches result in good quality learning. To facilitate optimum pupil engagement in learning activities, it is recommended that all participative learning strategies be well planned, appropriately structured and effectively paced.

### Findings

#### 1. The learning achievements of pupils

- Overall learning achievements of pupils are good with a number of examples of very good quality learning achievements. While a range of worthwhile collaborative learning methodologies is employed, there are some instances where a greater emphasis needs to be placed on ensuring that these collaborative approaches result

in good quality learning. Where best practice was observed, participative learning strategies were well planned, appropriately structured and effectively paced. This facilitated optimum pupil engagement in learning activities. In a questionnaire completed as part of the evaluation process, the majority of pupils state that they are making progress in their learning.

- The school has identified numeracy as its priority area for school improvement. Teachers are aware that pupils are achieving well across all strands of the mathematics curriculum, as evidenced by their performance on standardised tests, but that there is scope to develop pupils' problem-solving skills. To this end, the school has designed a worthwhile programme to develop these skills and this programme is being implemented in a purposeful and coherent manner throughout the school. The school recognises that there is a need to further consider how it can best monitor pupils' progress in problem-solving on an on-going basis. Notwithstanding this very commendable effort to target varying pupil ability levels, there is a need to ensure that all lessons in Mathematics have differentiated learning objectives, particularly for the more able pupils. These need to be outlined explicitly in teachers' planning.
- The quality of pupils' learning outcomes in literacy is very good. Pupils read confidently and fluently according to their level of ability. Reading texts are carefully selected to correlate with ability levels. The quality of pupils' independent writing is very good with pupils demonstrating an ability to write well in a range of genres.
- Ar an iomlán, tá cáilíocht na foghlama sa Ghaeilge go maith. Léiríonn na daltaí tuiscint mhaith ar raon leathan foclóra agus tá siad in ann abairtí a structúrú i gceart ó bhéal agus ina gcuid scríbhneoireachta. I roinnt ranganna, léiríonn na daltaí cumas maith a n-abairtí a chruthú ach níl sé seo de nós i ngach rang. Chun an dea-cleachtas seo a fhorbairt tríd an scoil, is gá athbhreithniú a dhéanamh ar an bplean scoile chun leanúnachas agus forbairt a chinntiú i bhfoghlaim na ndaltaí sa labhairt agus sa scríbhneoireacht. *Overall, the quality of pupils' learning outcomes in Irish is good. Pupils demonstrate good understanding of a broad range of vocabulary and they are able to structure sentences correctly both orally and in their writing. In a number of classes, pupils are capable of constructing their own sentences but this is not the case across all class levels. To develop this good practice throughout the school, there is a need to review the school plan to ensure continuity and development in pupils' learning in both speaking and writing.*
- There is a strong commitment within the school to the development of Physical Education, both in terms of curricular and extra-curricular activities. Lessons are very well structured and very well managed, with a strong emphasis on skill development at an appropriately challenging level. There are a number of very good examples of pupil self-assessment and personal target-setting in Physical Education.
- A range of worthwhile and interesting learning experiences have been provided for pupils in Social, Environmental and Scientific Education (SESE). These incorporate a number of active learning methodologies which are successful in engaging pupils' interest. In some instances, pupils' knowledge and understanding of what they had learned could have been better.
- To improve pupils' learning and to assist in the monitoring of pupils' progress, it is advised that teachers outline anticipated learning outcomes more specifically in their planning. This would assist teachers in ensuring that lessons have clear learning objectives.

## 2. Quality of teaching

- The overall quality of teaching in the school is good with some very fine examples of skilful questioning within well-structured, thought-provoking lessons.

## 3. Support for pupils' wellbeing

- An affirming and ordered learning environment has been created within the school as a whole. Pupils' behaviour is excellent.
- The language needs of some pupils for whom English is an additional language (EAL) are currently being met through their inclusion in learning-support groups. A

whole-school policy for EAL should be developed as a guide to teachers on how best to support these pupils in their general learning.

- The quality of support for pupils with Special Educational Needs (SEN) is very good. A comprehensive policy has been developed. The staged approach to providing support is outlined very clearly and this contributes significantly to the effectiveness of interventions for pupils. Observed teaching was focused and affirming and special needs assistants worked effectively with the support team. While detailed programmes of work are planned carefully to take account of pupils' individual learning needs, there is scope to set more specific targets.
- 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**

- School leadership and management are very good. The school is managed by a supportive and effective board of management. The principal is highly committed and approaches his work in a dynamic, innovative and insightful manner. He actively empowers staff to engage with new pedagogical initiatives. The principal is ably supported by an in-school management team. Members of this team are committed and purposeful in their work which is directed by the school's development plan.
- The willingness of other staff to share responsibility for the organisation of a number of additional curricular and pastoral areas is praiseworthy, as is their willingness to share their expertise to enhance the quality of education being provided in the school. This is indicative of both the strong collaborative culture and the commitment to distributed leadership which is evident within the school.
- The quality of home-school communication is very good. The school communicates effectively with parents through the use of text-a-parent, the website, and regular newsletters. The board maintains close links with the Parents' Association, facilitating the purposeful involvement of the general parent body, both in policy development and in a range of curricular and co-curricular initiatives. Analysis of parents' questionnaires indicates that they are very satisfied with the operation of the school and the quality of education being provided for their children.

#### **5. School Self-evaluation**

- The school has engaged in self-evaluation in a very systematic and productive manner within the context of an overall vision for the development of teaching and learning throughout the school.
- A clear priority has been given to developing effective home-school links that will benefit pupils' learning. Written reports, including the results of standardised assessments, along with regular parent-teacher meetings, inform parents of their child's progress.
- The school has included the perspectives of pupils and parents on specific aspects of curriculum provision. Time has been taken to carefully identify numeracy as the school's current priority area and appropriate evidence has been analysed effectively as part of this process.

#### **Conclusion**

Given the reflective and committed manner in which this school has already embarked on a process of self-evaluation, it is clear that the school has a very good capacity to engage in further worthwhile school improvement.

## **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 Balscadden National School would like to thank the inspectorate for the professional and constructive manner in which they carried out the inspection as well as the courtesy shown to all members of our school community in the course of our Whole-School Evaluation-Management, Leadership and Learning.

We welcome their findings with regard to the high quality of leadership, the willingness of the staff to share responsibility, the quality of the pupils' learning, the effectiveness of our school self-evaluation and the quality of support for pupils with Special Educational Needs.

**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 welcome the report's recommendations which will be used to influence the future direction of our School Improvement Plan. We welcome the report's acknowledgement of the collaborative learning that is taking place in the school and their recommendation in that regard. We also note the report's recognition of our new maths initiative Eureka Maths and the way in which it targets varying ability levels in maths. As our initiative progresses we aim to ensure that the approach to Eureka Maths is generalised to maths teaching throughout the school with a particular emphasis on differentiation. Our school aims to move forward in a spirit of partnership and consultation in all areas of policy formation and school activities to ensure that we achieve positive outcomes for all members of our school community.