

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Scoil Mhuire National School,
Loch an Gháir, Mullingar
Co. Westmeath
Roll Number: 18812P

Date of inspection: 23 November 2011



AN ROINN | DEPARTMENT OF
OIDEACHAIS | EDUCATION
AGUS SCILEANNA | AND SKILLS

1. Introduction

Scoil Mhuire NS is a co-educational, primary school under the patronage of the Catholic bishop of Meath. It is located in Loch An Gháir; a rural community outside Mullingar, Co. Westmeath. At the time of the evaluation, there were 179 pupils on roll and attendance rates were very good. The board of management was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the report; a response was not received from the board.

2. Summary of Findings and Recommendations for Further Development

The following are the **main strengths** of the work of the school:

- The school has an excellent physical environment.
- Commendable self-evaluation processes, including target setting, based on analysis of standardised test results, and systematic review of policies, are in place.
- Very good quality supports are available to pupils with special educational needs.
- The management of pupils is effective.
- The quality of teaching and learning in English and Mathematics is good.

The following **main recommendations** are made:

- Teaching and learning in History should reflect the content objectives and the key skills of the *Primary School Curriculum 1999*.
- Moltar béim a leagan ar chothú chumas cumarsáide na ndaltaí sa Ghaeilge agus córas céimnithe d'fhorbairt teanga na ndaltaí a chur i bhfeidhm. *The fostering of pupils conversational abilities in Irish should be emphasised and an agreed developmental programme for pupils' language skills should be implemented.*
- In order to further enhance partnership within the school, the board of management and parents' association should meet together annually to agree a joint programme of work.

3. Quality of School Management

- The board of management affords good governance to the school. The board very successfully managed the school's building project and is commended for the high quality physical environment it provides for the school. It also engages in a systematic review of school policies. This is good practice which should be continued. The board is advised to explore means of increasing its communication with parents, staff and the school community.
- The principal displays good leadership capabilities. These include the ability to lead initiatives and to nurture a collegiate atmosphere amongst his colleagues. He has prioritised effective self-evaluation within the school. This is commendable and all members of the school community are encouraged to engage with it. The deputy

principal adopts a key leadership role within the school. She successfully undertakes her assigned duties and works closely with the principal in all areas of school life.

- The vast majority of parents, in their responses to the questionnaire administered during the evaluation, express high levels of satisfaction with the school. They agree that it provides a safe environment for their child, that its facilities are good and that it enjoys a good reputation in the community. The parents' association is very active and provides valuable support to the school. In order to further enhance partnership within the school, it is recommended that the board of management and parents' association meet together annually to agree a joint programme of work.
- Resources are well managed. The school's physical environment is maintained to a very high standard. Classroom and school resources are well organised and teachers make good use of information and communication technology in their teaching.
- Overall, the management of pupils is effective. School routines are very capably managed, positive pupil-teacher relationships exist and, in most cases, classroom discipline is very good. The pupils themselves, in their responses to questionnaires administered during the evaluation, affirm that they feel safe in school, are treated fairly there and that they know school and class rules.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- Administrative policies are of a good standard. They have all been recently revised and some are available on the school's website. This is commendable practice which should be further developed. Future planning priorities include the development of a data protection policy and the revision of policies on relationship and sexuality education, special educational needs and homework.
- There is scope to develop the school's curricular plans. Revised plans should provide explicit guidance on appropriate content for each class level, including specific direction on the implementation of the menu curriculum in History. They should also ensure a broad, balanced and developmental treatment of all strand units, concepts and skills of the curriculum.
- Overall, teachers plan well for their teaching and prepare purposeful long-term and short-term plans. Some very good examples of specific planning for differentiation were noted. More focused planning for the development of pupils' skills in Social, Environmental and Scientific Education and for the development of their communication skills in Irish is recommended.
- Very good quality plans are prepared by teachers in support settings. The school should ensure that parents of pupils with low-incidence special educational needs receive a copy of their children's individual educational plans.
- The school is carefully monitoring its pupils' attainments in standardised tests and has identified specific targets in literacy and numeracy for the coming year. This is very good practice. Consideration should now be afforded to the tracking of individual pupil attainments in standardised tests as they progress through the school.
- Confirmation was provided that the board of management has formally adopted the *Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-primary Schools* (September 2011) without modification. The school is compliant with the requirements of Primary Circular 0061/2006. School authorities provided evidence that arrangements are

being put in place to ensure compliance with the requirements of the recently published Circular 0065/2011 and *Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools* as a matter of priority.

5. Quality of Teaching, Learning and Pupil Achievement

- The overall quality of teaching is good. In most classes, lessons are clearly presented and routines are capably managed. Some very good examples of teachers explaining concepts, clarifying meaning and consolidating learning were observed. In some cases teachers were advised to increase the emphasis on group-based learning and on active methodologies. A greater emphasis on differentiated group-work at all levels is also recommended.
- Tá scóp chun cáilíocht an teagaisc agus na foghlama sa Ghaeilge a fheabhsú. Baintear úsáid mhaith as straitéisí mar obair bheirte strúchtúrtha agus déantar obair fhiúntach le filíocht agus, i gcásanna, ar ghramadach. Ar an iomlán, ní mór breis béime a chur ar chothú chumas cumarsáide na ndaltaí, ionas go bhfuil siad in ann comhrá nádúrtha a dhéanamh trí Ghaeilge. Chuige sin, ní mór a chinntiú go múintear idir fhoclóir, briathra agus structúir chainte cinnte i ngach ceacht. Ba chóir, freisin, forbart córasach a dhéanamh ar scileanna labhartha na ndaltaí de réir mar a théann siad tríd an scoil. D'fhéadfaí eispéireas níos saibhre a sholáthar sa scríbhneoireacht, trí thaitní sa bhreis a thabhairt do na daltaí scríobh sna seánraí éagsúla.
- *There is scope to improve the quality of teaching and learning in Irish. Good use is made of strategies such as structured pair work and valuable work is completed on poetry and, in some cases, on grammar. Overall an increased emphasis should be placed on developing pupils' communicative abilities, so that they are able to engage in natural conversations. In order to achieve this, teachers should ensure that lessons focus on developing pupils' vocabulary and their mastery of verbs and language structures. Pupils' communication skills should also be systematically developed as they progress through the school. Pupils' experiences in writing could be enriched through providing them with increased opportunities to write in different genres.*
- The quality of teaching and learning in English is good. Phonological awareness is well taught through the implementation of a structured phonics scheme. As pupils progress through the school, the explicit teaching of strategies before, during and after reading is a feature of lessons. All teachers teach discrete oral language lessons, and, in some cases, these lessons are related to specific curriculum objectives. This is very good practice which should now be extended to all classes. Most pupils' writing skills are well nurtured and they write in a broad range of genres and plan for, draft and edit their writing.
- Teaching and learning in Mathematics are effective. A good emphasis is placed on oral mathematics and on the subject-specific language of Mathematics. Overall discussions are well-managed, concepts are clearly explained and opportunities for group-work and skill development are provided. Some very good use of concrete materials and of mathematical games was also observed. It is advised that a greater emphasis be placed on collaborative problem solving at all levels in the school.
- Current provision for History is fair. Some good quality teaching was observed involving well-structured discussion, opportunities to examine artefacts and group work. Pupils have also engaged in productive project work in History. Overall, however, there is scope to broaden learning programmes in order to ensure that they reflect the content objectives of the curriculum. A greater emphasis should be placed on the development of the pupils' understanding of concepts such as cause and effect and the fostering of

empathy at all levels throughout the school. Teachers are also advised to engage in frequent revision and consolidation of learning so that pupils can discuss their learning with confidence.

- Assessment practices are very good. In support settings assessments are based on specific objectives and utilised to plan for pupils' future learning. Effective assessment strategies are also implemented in mainstream classes. These include teacher-designed tests, checklists and records of attained objectives.

6. Quality of Support for Pupils

- The quality of teaching and learning in support settings is very good. Instruction is clear and focused. A broad range of methodologies is utilised. Programmes include the development of key skills in English and Mathematics and focused interventions based on the diagnosed needs of pupils. The practice of basing learning activities on class texts for some groups in receipt of support should be reviewed. It is also recommended that the focus of in-class support in Mathematics be on the development of independent problem-solving skills.