An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Scoil Mhuire
An Chúil, Mullingar Co. Westmeath
Uimhir rolla: 03936C

Date of inspection: 16 September 2010
1. Introduction
Scoil Mhuire is a three-teacher co-educational vertical primary school under the patronage of the Catholic Bishop of Meath. There are 66 pupils enrolled in the school. Pupils’ attendance is very good and enrolment trends are stable.
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.

2. Summary of Findings and Recommendations for Further Development

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

- Members of the board of management discharge their duties diligently to provide valuable support for the school.
- The school cultivates a very good relationship with the parents and the local community.
- The principal and the in-school management team provide strong leadership in the curricular, administrative and pastoral realms.
- Teachers and ancillary staff demonstrate diligence and commitment.
- The school’s approach to self-evaluation and action planning is praiseworthy and indicative of a commitment to continual school improvement.
- The quality of teaching and learning in English, Irish, Mathematics and Music is good.
- Supports for pupils with special educational needs are very effective.

The following main recommendations are made:

- As part of its three-year action plan, it is recommended that the school set specific, measurable targets for pupil achievement in literacy and numeracy, using previous results of standardised tests as a baseline.
- It is recommended that a whole-school approach be formulated to further develop pupils’ problem-solving strategies in Mathematics.

3. Quality of School Management

- The board of management is correctly constituted and very supportive of the school. Board members have undertaken training and individual members fulfil duties relevant to their areas of expertise. Meetings are conducted according to recommended procedures. Financial accounts are certified independently.

- The quality of in-school management is very good. The principal provides strong vision-centred leadership for the school and he delegates a range of important curricular, pastoral and administrative roles to the deputy principal and special-duties teacher. Curriculum leadership is especially effective for English, special educational needs, and information and communication technology.
The quality of the management of resources is very good. The school building has been recently extended and painted. Duties are allocated to teachers in an equitable manner. The special-needs assistants and the part-time cleaner and secretary carry out their roles very diligently. The school has a wide range of useful resource materials to support teaching and learning.

Relationships with parents are well managed and co-operative. The school surveyed parents, pupils and teachers for their opinions on various aspects of school life as part of the school's own self-evaluation last year.

The management of pupils is good. In response to the Inspectorate questionnaire, a majority of pupils stated that they liked coming to school. Most pupils reported getting on well with other children in the school and that they feel safe at school. All pupils acknowledge that the teachers talk to them about how to deal with bullying.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

The quality of the school planning and school self-evaluation process is very good. The board of management has been involved in the drafting and ratification of all school policies, while parents have been consulted on administrative policies. It is recommended that parents be consulted more widely in regard to the review of curriculum policies.

A cyclical process of planning, implementation and review is well established in the school. A three-year action plan has been devised collaboratively. While some policies are widely available to members of the school community, the school could explore wider dissemination of the school plan.

Targets identified in the school's action plan are specific and realistic in regard to the interventions and programmes to be implemented. The school has collated and analysed the results of standardised attainment tests in literacy and numeracy. As part of its three-year action plan, it is recommended that the school set specific, measurable targets for pupil achievement in literacy and numeracy, using results of previous standardised tests as a baseline.

Classroom planning reflects the priorities outlined in school policy. The use of assessment data, portfolios and specific indicators as measures of pupils’ academic progress is commendable. It is recommended that these data be combined with more widespread use of assessment-for-learning (AFL) techniques.

Child protection policy and procedures

School authorities provided evidence that, in compliance with Primary Circular 0061/2006, the board of management has formally adopted the Department’s Child Protection Guidelines for Primary Schools. Evidence was provided to show 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.
5. Quality of Teaching, Learning and Pupil Achievement

- Overall, the teaching methods in use effectively engage pupils in their own learning. In response to pupil questionnaires, most pupils commented positively about the clarity of teacher explanations and the interesting nature of their lessons. Computers are often used for lesson presentation and a majority of pupils reported that they often use computers in school.

- Tá cáilíocht an teagaisc agus na foghlama sa Ghaeilge go maith. Déantar cúram maith de cheithre shnáithe an churaclaim agus leagtar an phleanáil amach go cruinn. Cé go n-úsáidtear uirlísi measúnaithe éagsúla ag gach leibhéal, d’téadfaí spriocanna agus tascairí nóis cinnte a dhearadh. Úsáidtear acmhainní agus modhanna muintre inmholta, ar an iomlán, chun suim na ndaltaí a mhuscaill agus chun deiseanna cainte a thabhairt dóibh. Tá foclóir cuí ag formhór na ndaltaí agus tá a scileanna labhartha á bhforbairt go céimniúil. Tugtar faoin léitheoireacht go córasach agus léann formhór na ndaltaí le tuiscint agus le fuaimniú ceart. Tá an scríbhneoireacht ar chaighdeán maith. Aithrisítear stóir breá rann agus amhrán i ngach rang.

- The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in Irish is good. The four curriculum strands are addressed well. While various assessment instruments are used at each level, more specific targets and indicators could be devised. In general, praiseworthy methods and resources are employed to awaken pupils’ interest and to give them speaking opportunities. Most pupils have appropriate vocabulary and their speaking skills are developed incrementally. Reading is addressed systematically and most pupils read with understanding and correct pronunciation. Writing is of a good standard. A fine range of poetry is recited in each class.

- In English, there is good differentiation of work for pupils on the basis of their achievement in standardised attainment tests. Standards in reading are generally good. Pupils are enabled to draft, edit and publish their own writing. They write coherently in a wide range of genres. The school encourages pupils to write for inter-schools literary competitions. Specific indicators are used to evaluate oral language competence at each class level. Poetry is explored effectively.

- Assessment results for Mathematics show improvements in pupil achievement over recent years. Appropriate teaching methods are employed to engage pupils in their learning, especially where concrete materials are used. While most pupils demonstrate age-appropriate mastery of computational skills, many pupils require more guidance in relation to problem-solving strategies. It is recommended that a whole-school approach be formulated to further develop pupils’ problem-solving strategies. The in-class support programme and station-teaching system are among the very effective initiatives used to address areas of Mathematics prioritised by staff.

- The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in Music is good. All strands of the curriculum are addressed methodically. Pupils sing a suitable repertoire of age-appropriate songs very tunefully. Senior pupils play the tin whistle skillfully and percussion instruments are used rhythmically in all classrooms. Musical literacy is developed appropriately and pupils compose pieces for the annual school concert. Some teachers retain assessment information for Music.

6. Quality of Support for Pupils

- The quality of interventions for pupils with special educational needs is very good. Support is provided through a combination of in-class and withdrawal models.
• Targets in the individual profile and learning programmes (IPLPs) are devised and reviewed collaboratively with parents and class teachers. Realistic progress was noted in relation to the targets for these children. It is recommended that parents of pupils with low-incidence special educational needs be given a copy of the IPLP prepared for their child.

• Standardised attainment tests, screening tests and diagnostic assessments are administered appropriately. Assessment results are analysed for the purpose of resource provision and programme planning. It is praiseworthy that standardised results for reading and Mathematics are disclosed and explained to parents in the annual written reports for middle and senior classes.

• The quality of home-school partnership is very good. Some parents assist with curricular and extra-curricular activities. The school uses internet and text services to enhance its communication with parents. The re-establishment of the parents’ association would provide another formal communication channel for parents.

• The school implements a book rental scheme and minimises the use of workbooks to reduce financial pressure on parents.

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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 Scoil Mhuire, An Chúil, was satisfied with the positive findings of the WSE report, and was glad that the high quality of planning, teaching and learning in the school was recognised. The Board would like to record their appreciation of the courteous and professional manner of the Inspectorate during the course of the evaluation. The Board also notes the recommendations made in the report (see below)

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

1. The Parents’ Association has been successfully re-established and is in regular communication with the school. They will be regularly consulted during the course of policy development.
2. Standardised testing scores have been analyzed and learning targets have been set over the time period 2011 – 2014 based on these.
3. A whole-school approach to problem-solving strategies has been agreed and is being implemented.
4. The Whole School Plan for Mathematics is being reviewed. As per the recommendations of the Inspectorate, parents are being involved in the process through the use of questionnaires.