Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Scoil Mhuire,
Magherarney, Smithborough, Co Monaghan
09186P

Date of inspection: 20 January 2011
1. **Introduction**
Scoil Mhuire, a primary school under the patronage of the Catholic Bishop of Clogher, is situated in Smithborough, County Monaghan. Enrolment figures have increased over the past number of years with a current enrolment of 87 pupils. Attendance records 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.

2. **Summary of Findings and Recommendations for Further Development**

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

- The school is characterised by a welcoming caring community where pupils’ holistic development is nurtured within a well-organised learning environment.
- The board of management provides effective management and is committed to the continuous development of the school.
- The visionary and effective leadership of the principal is commended.
- The diligent teaching staff works collaboratively in the interest of school improvement.
- The operation of the school is considerably enhanced by the support of the parents’ association.
- Pupils are well-behaved and confident learners.
- Commendable focus is placed on whole-school self-review and development.
- Effective teaching methodologies contribute significantly to pupils’ achievement particularly in numeracy and literacy.
- Tá cumas maith labhartha ag na daltaí sa Ghaeilge.
- Pupils’ artistic skills and self-confidence are effectively developed through drama lessons.

The following main recommendations are made:

- Provision for pupils with special educational needs should be reviewed.
- Pupils’ problem solving skills should be further developed through active learning strategies.
- A whole-school approach to process writing in English and Irish is recommended.
- The assessment policy should be further developed and monthly progress records should be used to advance self-evaluation processes.
3. Quality of School Management

- The board of management functions effectively and makes a significant contribution to the successful operation of the school. Members are assigned clearly defined roles that are conscientiously undertaken. Accounts of expenditure are carefully maintained and regularly reported to the board of management. The board is advised to ensure that accounts are externally audited. The board communicates effectively with the school community and plays an active role in the school planning process.

- The quality of leadership in the school is very good. The dedicated principal is a reflective leader who successfully fosters a shared sense of purpose among partners and continuously promotes school development and review. The cultivation of collaborative decision-making, open communication and mutual respect is a praiseworthy feature of her leadership style. Administrative tasks are meticulously undertaken. The in-school management team undertakes assigned responsibilities with diligence and makes a positive contribution to school development. The regular review of posts and the introduction of formal meetings of the in-school management team would further progress the school’s priorities and monitor the effectiveness of their implementation. A supportive and proactive spirit prevails among all staff members.

- The school is commended for its continuous development of positive relationships with the school community. Effective communication strategies are employed to afford parents regular opportunities to discuss curriculum implementation and pupil progress. Consideration might now be given to the establishment of a school website.

- The quality of the management of resources is very good. Teachers are deployed appropriately and emphasis is placed on their continuous professional development. The ancillary staff contributes significantly to the life of the school. The accommodation and school environs are maintained to a very high standard. Orderly and stimulating learning environments are created and a wide range of resources is effectively used to support pupils’ learning. The use of information and communication technology (ICT) needs to be further developed.

- The management of pupils is very good. Pupils are treated with equality, fairness and respect. They are enthusiastic and motivated in their learning and demonstrate positive levels of confidence and self-esteem. Pupils are provided with some opportunities to play an active role in relevant decision-making, for example through their involvement in the Green Schools initiative. The establishment of a pupil council would prove beneficial in further developing these skills.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- A culture of school self-evaluation and review is successfully promoted in the school. The quality of whole-school planning is good. A collaborative process is employed, involving board members, staff and, in some instances, parents. The further involvement of parents in this process is advised. Administrative policies are clear and informative. A range of curriculum policies has been comprehensively reviewed.

- Overall the quality of the teachers’ individual planning is good. Monthly progress reports are recorded by all teachers. It is recommended that the approach to maintaining these
records be reviewed so that they can be constructively used to monitor curriculum implementation and ensure continuity and progression in learning.

- 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

- Baintear caighdeán maith amach i dtéagasc agus i bhfoghlaim na Gaeilge. Múintear an teanga labhartha go héifeachtach. Tá sé ar chumas roinnt mhaith daltaí abairtí a struchtúrú go cruinn agus cumarsáid a dhéanamh trí mheán na teanga. Moltar an úsáid rialta a bhaineann muinteoirí agus daltaí as an Ghaeilge agus na straitéisí a úsáideann chun an teanga a chur chun cinn sa scoil. Tá sé ar chumas na ndaltaí téacsanna airithe a léamh le cruinneas agus léiríonn siad tuisceant mhaith ar ábhar na léitheoireachta. Moltar bheim a chur ar fhobar bhogharluach na litreach agus pléan fóineolaíochta uile-scoile a dhearadh agus a chur i bhfeidhm. Thabharfadh soláthar breise d’ábhar léitheoireachta deiseanna do dhaltai léitheoireachta a chleachtadh i gcomhthéacsanna níos leithne. Múintear scileanna scríbhneoireachta go dícheallach. Tá caighdeán sásúil á bhaint amach ag na daltaí sa scríbhneoireacht, ach moltar deiseanna breise saor-chumadóireachta a sholáthar dóibh.

- Good standards are achieved in teaching and learning in Irish. Oral language is taught effectively. Pupils are capable of constructing sentences accurately and can communicate to a certain degree through the medium of the language. The regular use of Irish by teachers and pupils is commended as are the strategies employed to promote the language in the school. Pupils are enabled to read certain texts with accuracy and demonstrate good understanding of the reading material. Emphasis should now be placed on the development of phonological awareness for which a plan should be delineated and implemented at whole-school level. A greater variety of reading materials would afford pupils opportunities to practise reading in broader contexts. Writing skills are diligently taught. Pupils achieve a satisfactory standard in writing, but further opportunities for free writing should be provided.

- The overall quality of teaching and learning in English is very good. Pupils’ oral language skills are suitably developed and they communicate confidently across a range of themes. Further development of a discrete oral language programme on a whole-school basis would enhance this provision. Pupils’ literacy skills are effectively developed and many achieve a very high standard in reading. Pupils engage in a wide range of functional and creative writing tasks. Some very good examples of process writing across a variety of genres are in evidence, particularly in senior classes. It is recommended that this good practice be emulated in all classes and that a whole-school approach to process writing be implemented.

- The quality of teaching and learning in Mathematics is very good. Effective whole-class teaching, incorporating class discussion and appropriate differentiated activities, is effectively employed to develop pupils’ understanding of concepts. Mental calculations are an integral part of many lessons. Pupils are enabled to use specific mathematical language accurately. In some classes, pupils’ higher-order thinking and problem-solving
skills are skillfully developed. A greater variety of whole-school approaches to problem-solving is recommended.

- The quality of teaching and learning in Drama is very good. A safe environment is strategically created to enable pupils enter the fictional world with ease. Suitable stimuli are employed to engage pupils in appropriate activities that encourage spontaneity and creativity. Pupils are effectively enabled to cooperate and create fictional relationships through interaction and enactment with others. Reflection on drama is gainfully facilitated. Pupil participation in drama festivals and school performances enriches the drama experience.

- In general teaching and learning is of a good quality. Teaching methodologies include effective whole-class teaching, group and pair work. Further activity-based learning should be employed to develop pupils’ independent learning and problem solving skills.

- Staff has adopted a comprehensive approach to the analysis of standardised assessment results enabling them to identify overall trends and patterns of achievement. The assessment policy should be further developed to include assessment strategies for all areas of the curriculum.

6. Quality of Support for Pupils

- A whole-school policy guides provision for pupils with special educational needs (SEN). This policy needs to be revised, however, to ensure that it incorporates the staged approach and appropriate interventions for pupils. In review, it is recommended that early intervention programmes and well-structured, team-teaching interventions be implemented more intensively. In some support settings provision for pupils with special education needs is very good. Individual plans are clearly devised and regularly reviewed. Positive pupil progress in the achievement of intended learning targets is in evidence. Programmes implemented for the development of motor skills is particularly commendable. In other settings however, there is need to create attractive, print rich environments, to develop appropriate learning plans and to regularly maintain suitable progress records. It is recommended that further collaboration take place between mainstream and support teachers in devising plans for pupils and in allocating specific roles for all partners in their implementation. The work of the special needs assistants contributes considerably to the inclusion of pupils with SEN.
Appendix

School response to the report

Submitted by the Board of Management
Area 1: Observations on the content of the inspection report

- The BOM would like to thank the inspector for the courteous and professional manner in which the WSE was conducted and also the affirmation and encouragement given. The numerous strengths identified are very pleasing.

- The BOM is delighted that the collaborative nature of the work of all parties in our school community has been recognised.

- Equally, the BOM also welcomes the observation that pupils’ high achievements in their learning and the use of effective teaching methodologies by our teaching staff are inextricably linked. Similarly observations detailed in the report of the subjects inspected truly reflect the high standard of education provided in the school.

- As a BOM who consistently seek to develop and improve our school, we are very pleased that the focus that is placed on whole-school self-review and development is recognised. We also welcome the recommendations within the report and see highlighted areas as further potential for school development.

- The BOM are confident that teaching and learning in the school is of a very good quality and are pleased that this is recognised by the inspectorate.

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

- IT facilities within the school continue to be further developed and the IT policy has been reviewed.

- Staff members have engaged with outside agencies re input in the area of Team Teaching which will be introduced in the next academic year.

- Staff is working collaboratively in the development of a standard monthly progress record that will aim to contribute to the self-evaluation process.

- Staff have identified supplementary reading material to be used to broaden the reading experiences of children as Gaeilge.

- A working group, involving parental representatives, has initiated the review and redrafting of The Healthy Eating Policy.

Other recommendations will be addressed in due course with the support of all the education partners in Scoil Mhuire, Machaire Aíre.