An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Scoil Mhuire Réalt na Mara,
Brittas Bay, County Wicklow
Uimhir rolla: 11372B

Date of inspection: 10 February 2011
1. **Introduction**

Scoil Mhuire Réalt na Mara National School is a co-educational, vertical primary school under the patronage of the Catholic Archbishop of Dublin. The attendance of the 150 pupils enrolled is generally good. The board of management was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the evaluation, and the response of the board will be found in the appendix to this report.

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

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

- The dedication of the principal and teachers is lauded.
- Productive working relationships among school staff are promoted successfully.
- Overall teaching, learning and pupil achievement are of a high quality.
- The commitment of the board of management and its clear focus on the improvement of school facilities are praised highly.
- Parents are supportive of the work of the school.
- The pupils are well behaved, courteous and engage in learning with interest.
- The teachers demonstrate very good understanding of the abilities of individual pupils and in general, they cater effectively for their learning needs.
- Levels of pupil achievement in English reading and Mathematics are commended.

The following **main recommendations** are made:

- The board of management and teachers should devise a policy on the retention of pupils and ensure that school practices are in compliance with Departmental circular 32/03.
- The implementation and impact of the school plan should be evaluated more formally on a cyclical basis.
- The school should implement measures to increase parents’ awareness of the work of the school through facilitating their greater involvement in school planning and in-school activities.
- More widespread use of collaborative learning approaches and further fostering of the pupils’ independent learning skills are advised.
- Greater promotion of the pupils’ personal writing and editing skills in English and Irish is recommended.
- Current models of support for pupils with special educational needs should be extended to include increased levels of team-teaching and in-class provision.

3. **Quality of School Management**

- The highly committed board of management provides valuable support and is commended for its role in the ongoing improvement of the school building and grounds. Board members carry out their duties diligently and are involved in the development of aspects of the school plan. To optimise the contribution of the board, matters pertaining to teaching, learning and pupil achievement should be considered more formally on a regular basis. It is recommended that a policy on the retention of pupils in the same grade be formulated to ensure that school practice is in compliance with Departmental circular 32/03. The school’s code of behaviour should be reviewed to reflect its existing approaches to promoting good behaviour and pertinent national guidelines.
• The principal leads and manages the school competently while maintaining the primacy of her role as class teacher. She successfully promotes productive working relationships among the school staff and has established clear procedures and practices to aid the smooth operation of the school. She is ably supported by the members of the in-school management team who fulfil a broad range of duties effectively. As a means of building on the capacity and commitment of this team in leading learning, their role in co-ordinating and evaluating the implementation of the curriculum should be developed further.

• The school communicates with parents regularly regarding events and activities. In recent years, the parents' association and parent body have contributed significantly to fundraising initiatives for the development of the school building. Parents provide praiseworthy assistance with some activities, including the school’s recycling initiatives. In their responses to questionnaires, almost all parents report that the school is well run and that they are happy with the quality of teaching and their child's achievement. It is now opportune to implement measures to increase parents’ awareness of the work of the school through facilitating their greater involvement in planning and in-school activities.

• The school building is maintained to a high standard and enhanced through attractive displays of the pupils' work. A good variety of resources is used effectively to support teaching and learning. While significant advances have been made in the use of ICT as a teaching resource, the school’s awareness of the need to increase the pupils’ use of ICT in their learning is welcomed.

• The management of pupils is very good. The pupils are well behaved and their positive engagement in the range of learning activities provided is lauded. Almost all pupils surveyed report that they have positive relationships with their teachers and with other children. Their participation in whole-school decision making is promoted effectively through the work of the Green Schools' committee.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

• The principal and teachers have collaboratively devised a detailed school plan and curriculum plans are considered annually. As a means of optimising the value of this work, it is recommended that the impact of the school plan be evaluated more formally on a cyclical basis. School self-evaluation measures, including an action-planning approach, should be used to assess the effectiveness of curriculum implementation and to identify and address priority areas for development.

• In the main, individual teacher planning is of a suitable quality. It is now timely to re-examine current approaches to short-term planning and the recording of monthly progress. In so doing, the use of the NCCA planning tool which facilitates the identification of specific objectives should be considered.

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

- Teaching, learning and pupil achievement overall are of a high quality. The teachers use a range of teaching approaches skilfully, explain concepts clearly and ensure that new content builds successfully on the pupils' previous learning. Consequently, good levels of pupil interest and engagement are in evidence. In the questionnaires, a majority of pupils report that they enjoy their lessons and learning. To build constructively on established practices, further promotion of collaborative learning opportunities and the pupils’ independent learning skills is recommended. Individual pupil progress is monitored carefully through the use of a good variety of assessment approaches. Many fine examples of the teachers’ use of assessment outcomes to cater effectively for individual pupils’ learning needs are evident. It is now opportune to exploit the potential of pupil self- and peer-assessment on a school-wide basis.

- Ar an iomlán, tá ardchaighdéan le sonrú i múineadh agus i bhfoghlaim na Gaeilge agus i ngnóthachtáil na ndaltaí. Cothaítear atmaisféar Gaeilach trí dea-úsáid a bhaint as an nGaeilge neamhfhóirmiúil, as rannta agus amhráin agus as an bhfeadóg stáin. Gpacann na daltaí uile páirt go fonnmharr sna ceachtanna agus dá bharr sin, tá cumas labhartha d’fhormhór na ndaltaí le moladh. Sroichteas caighdeán an-mhaithe léitheoireachta agus taispeánann na daltaí cumas maith ábhar na léitheoireachta a phlé. Cé go bhfuil forbairt le feiscint i gcumas scribhneoireachta na ndaltaí, tá gá aird níos córasaí a dhíririú ar dhul chun cinn a scileanna scribhneoireachta neamhspleáchacha.

Overall, a high standard of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in Irish is in evidence. An Irish atmosphere is promoted through the effective use of informal Irish, poems and songs and the tin whistle. The pupils participate enthusiastically in lessons and consequently the oral ability of a majority of pupils is praised. A very good standard in reading is achieved and pupils demonstrate a well-developed capacity to discuss reading material. While the development of the pupils’ writing skills is evident, more systematic attention should be placed on the progression of their independent-writing abilities.

- The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in English generally is good. The pupils have regular opportunities to develop their oral language skills and consequently, most pupils express their views and engage with the opinions of others competently. The consistent approach to fostering interest in and responsiveness to poetry is commended. Reading achievement levels are very good as a result of the school’s effective implementation of a wide range of teaching approaches. All pupils report that they are doing well at reading. While much of the pupils’ written work is of a laudable quality, further promotion of personal writing and editing skills is recommended. In so doing, regular exposure to the breadth of genres should be ensured.

- High quality teaching, learning and pupil achievement are in evidence in Mathematics. Mathematical concepts are considered in an in-depth manner, including their practical application in everyday life. Collaborative learning opportunities and a wide range of pertinent resources are used productively to consolidate understanding. The pupils’ estimation and problem-solving abilities are promoted skilfully. Most pupils believe they are doing well at Mathematics.

- Teaching and learning in Physical Education is good. In the absence of indoor facilities, good efforts are made to implement a range of physical education strands. Lessons are structured, resourced and implemented competently. Through the introduction, practise and consolidation of discrete skills, progress in the pupils’ abilities is evident. Provision is enhanced through a combination of the involvement of external GAA and IRFU tutors, participation in inter-school and community-based sporting events and the purposeful use of educational outings.
6. Quality of Support for Pupils

- Support for pupils with special educational needs (SEN) is of a high quality. The SEN team’s capacity to identify, plan and respond to the learning needs of individual pupils is commended. The pupils’ achievement is evaluated systematically and ensures that programmes of learning are continually responsive to their changing learning needs. Through the implementation of well-designed lessons, the pupils demonstrate continuing progress in the achievement of their learning goals. Teacher-pupil interactions are highly affirmative and succeed in fostering the pupils’ self-belief. Praiseworthy levels of communication between SEN personnel, class teachers and parents are evident. In order to build on existing good practice, it is recommended that the current, primarily withdrawal, model of support be extended to include increased levels of team-teaching and in-class provision.

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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 Management and staff would like to thank the Inspectors for the professional, courteous and thorough manner in which they carried out the W.S.E. in our school. We appreciate that they confirm the main strengths of the school which are recognised throughout the school community.

The inspectors acknowledge the school’s high academic standards, the strong teamwork amongst the staff, the good relationships between staff, pupils and parents, the effective work of the Board of Management, the dedicated work of the office of the secretary and other ancillary staff and the strong support of the Parents Association.

It is significant that the Inspectors note the difficulty in implementing the full range of the P.E. curriculum because of the lack of facilities and we would urge the Department of education to make sure that all schools have equal opportunities in this area by providing proper resources.

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 the staff appreciate any ideas, advice and recommendations given by the Inspectors at the various meetings and in the report. The Board of Management, Principal and staff will undertake the recommendations stated in the W.S.E. and will work out a plan of action in order to implement them effectively.