

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**

**Department of Education and Skills**

**Whole School Evaluation  
REPORT**

**Scoil Mhuire  
Sandymount, Dublin 4  
Uimhir rolla:11894I**

**Date of inspection: 17 May 2010**



**A N R O I N N | D E P A R T M E N T O F  
O I D E A C H A I S | E D U C A T I O N  
A G U S S C I L E A N N A | A N D S K I L L S**

## WHOLE-SCHOOL EVALUATION

A whole-school evaluation of Scoil Mhuire was undertaken in May 2010. This report presents the findings of the evaluation and makes recommendations for improvement. The evaluation focused on the quality of teaching and learning in Irish, English, Mathematics and Geography. 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.

### INTRODUCTION – SCHOOL CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

Scoil Mhuire is an all-girls, Roman Catholic primary school situated in the heart of Dublin 4. The school caters for pupils from junior infants to sixth class. Enrolment figures have remained consistent for the past number of years. Pupil attendance is generally very good.

The following table provides an overview of the enrolment and staffing in the school at the time of the evaluation:

	Number
Pupils enrolled in the school	277
Mainstream classes in the school	8
Teachers on the school staff	12
Mainstream class teachers	10
Teachers working in support roles	1
Special needs assistants	0

It is noted that the board of management is funding the employment of three classroom assistants.

## 1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT

### 1.1 Characteristic spirit, mission or vision

Scoil Mhuire was formally under the trusteeship of the Sisters of Charity and has been under lay leadership since 1993. The school's vision statement was devised during the leadership of the sisters following significant consultation and discussion. The statement emphasises the centrality of the child's individual development and the importance of collective endeavour, communication and partnership. The open and positive atmosphere in the school, the team spirit among the staff, the good efforts made to communicate effectively with parents, the links fostered with the local community and the consistent attention to the welfare of individual pupils and staff members give life to this vision statement. It is now timely that the school community reflect further on the vision statement in the context of the current school population and its needs and explore how it can inform practice and decision making in the coming years.

### 1.2 Board of management

The board of management is properly constituted and meets monthly. Minutes of meetings are maintained and it is reported that accounts of expenditure are certified annually. The board members work diligently in the interests of the school and its pupils. The chairperson visits the school regularly and good communication exists between the board, the teachers and the parents' association. The board operates in accordance with relevant statutory and other regulatory

requirements. Department regulations regarding the length of the school year, the length of the school day, the allocation of teachers and class size are complied with. The board of management employs three classroom assistants using the voluntary contribution from parents.

The board delegates the development of the school plan to the principal and teaching staff. Organisational policies, such as those on admissions, attendance and child protection, have been presented to the board for discussion and approval. It is reported that all curriculum plans and organisational policies have been formally signed on behalf of the board on ratification. A committee involving parents and teachers has been established to review the school's code of behaviour. It is recommended that this policy be developed in line with the guidelines of the National Education Welfare Board (2008) and the provisions of the Equal Status Act 2000 to 2004. While the board is aware of the general learning achievements of the pupils, the need to engage with the principal and teaching staff regarding the quality of teaching and the outcomes of learning was discussed with the board, as was the desirability of supporting and facilitating the school as it develops its own self-review processes.

The school building dates from 1974 and some improvement works have been carried out in recent years. While further upgrades were scheduled as part of the Summer Works Scheme 2010, a planned strategic approach to the development of the school building is required.

The board has identified a number of priority areas in the school that require attention. In order to address the identified and other emerging priorities, it is recommended that the board devise a five-year strategic plan for the school. This plan should be informed by the updated vision statement and should be shared formally with parents and the wider school community. An annual progress report, on the operation of the school and the implementation of facets of the strategic plan, should be presented to the various members of school community.

### **1.3 In-school management**

At present, the in-school management team comprises the principal, the deputy principal and three special-duties teachers. The principal has a long association with the school and is very committed to continuing the traditions established by the Sisters of Charity. She has cultivated a team spirit among the staff and she fosters discussion and debate in decision making. She has established good relationships with the parent body and meets regularly with the chairperson of the parents' association. She is supportive of staff, pupils and parents and is sensitive to their individual welfare needs.

The principal has taken primary responsibility for whole-school planning and for tracking pupil progress in the annual standardised assessments in English and Mathematics. She has also identified a number of curriculum and organisational priorities for consideration in the 2010-2011 school year. In addressing these priorities, the principal's capacity to distribute leadership will be central to action planning to enable the school to implement innovations on a schoolwide basis, to monitor progress and to modify practices as required.

The other members of the in-school management team are committed to the school and are supportive of the principal. They carry out their contracted duties diligently. In order to ensure the responsiveness of assigned duties to the current needs of the school, it is recommended that the responsibilities of the in-school management team be reviewed as a matter of priority, as discussed with the team and at the post-evaluation meeting. It is further advised that formal meetings of the in-school management team be scheduled on a regular basis and that the leadership skills of the team be fostered and promoted.

It is strongly recommended that the school leadership now cultivates a culture of school self-evaluation. The encouragement of a whole-school commitment to the implementation of self-review practices and the development of strong curriculum leadership are essential to the success of this process. The support of the *Professional Development Service for Teachers* (PDST) may be helpful to the school as it addresses this development.

#### **1.4 Management of relationships and communication with the school community**

The parents are centrally involved in the day-to-day life of the school. Individual parents are very generous in sharing their talents and skills for the benefit of the pupils' learning. Parents have also been involved in the development of relevant school policies. The parents' association significantly supports the work of the school through organising whole-school events, publishing a bi-annual newsletter, managing the school library and engaging in considerable fundraising activities. Class induction meetings, formal and informal parent-teacher meetings, a text-a-parent service and written communications are used to ensure regular contact with parents. A school website is currently under construction and will provide a further means of home-school communication. While communication between the school and the parent body is very good, it is envisaged that the strategic plan devised by the board will provide clarity for parents regarding the school's priorities and future direction.

#### **1.5 Management of pupils**

Pupil behaviour is very good. The pupils are interested and committed learners. The atmosphere in classrooms is positive and supportive, and the pupils are treated with respect, kindness and courtesy. The leadership in the school is very aware of the importance of fostering positive attitudes among the school population. It has established a committee which includes parent representatives to review the current school code of behaviour. The school is commended on its receipt of a green flag as part of the *Green Schools* initiative and on the significant opportunities given to the pupils to engage in a wide range of extra-curricular activities. The school is exploring the possibility of establishing a student council to facilitate further pupil involvement in school-based decision making.

## **2. QUALITY OF SCHOOL PLANNING**

### **2.1 Whole-school and classroom planning**

Overall, the school's written curriculum plans and organisational policies are of a good standard. In order to ensure the effective implementation of the curriculum plans, it is recommended that aspects of curriculum that have been identified for development be addressed systematically to ensure that desired improvements in teaching and learning are realised on a schoolwide basis.

The quality of classroom planning varies significantly through the school. Some teachers set out focused objectives in relation to skills, knowledge and understanding which are in turn used to guide pupil learning. In other settings, only general outlines of topics to be covered and lists from commercial textbooks are presented. While all teachers record monthly progress on an agreed school template, the quality of these records is similarly inconsistent. It is recommended that a whole-school approach to classroom planning and the recording of progress be agreed and implemented consistently.

### **2.2 Child protection policy and procedures**

Confirmation was provided that, in compliance with Department of Education and Skills Primary Circular 0061/2006, the board of management has formally adopted the *Child Protection Guidelines for Primary Schools* (Department of Education and Skills, September 2001).

Confirmation was also provided 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.

### **3. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING**

#### **3.1 Language**

##### ***Gaeilge***

Múintear an Ghaeilge le cumas sna bunranganna. Cuirtear béim chuí ar éisteacht agus ar labhairt na teanga. Bíonn struchtúr léirithe agus cuspóirí soiléire ag baint leis na ceachtanna. Tugtar deiseanna do na daltaí foclóir agus frasaí cuí a fhoghlaim agus a chleachtadh. Úsáidtear cluichí, rannta agus amhráin go héifeachtach mar mhodhanna múinte. Soláthraítear an-chuid áiseanna le haghaidh na gceachtanna agus baintear úsáid chuí as an gclárábán idirghníomhach, leabhair oibre, pictiúir agus fearais nithiúla. Moltar, áfach, nasc níos láidre a dhéanamh idir théamaí na gceachtanna ó sheachtain go seachtain chun leanúnachas agus forbairt a chothú i gcumas cumarsáide na ndaltaí. Úsáideann formhór na múinteoirí sna bunranganna an Ghaeilge mar theanga teagaisc sna ceachtanna agus moltar an cleachtas seo a chur i bhfeidhm ar fud na scoile. Go ginearálta, baineann caighdeán maith le gnóthachtáil na daltaí sna ranganna seo agus cothaítear dearcadh dearfach i leith na Gaeilge.

Sna hardranganna, cuirtear béim láidir ar fhilíocht agus ar ghraiméar na Gaeilge. Caitheann na daltaí i rang a sé trí lá sa Ghaeltacht gach bliain agus tá an tionscnamh seo le moladh. Sna hardranganna, áfach, bunaítear cuid mhaith de mhúineadh na Gaeilge ar théascleabhar caighdeánach. Dá bharr sin, ní bhíonn ach deiseanna teoranta ag na daltaí éisteacht leis an teanga agus í ag labhairt go rialta. I bhfómhór na ranganna sinsearacha, ní leagtar amach cuispóirí sóiléire ná struchtúr cóir do na ceachtanna. Cuirtear raon teoranta de ghníomhaíochtaí scríbhneoireachta ar fáil do na daltaí. Moltar go gcloífeadh ábhar na gceachtanna agus na modhanna múinte a úsáidtear leis na cinn atá leagtha amach sa phlean scoile agus go leagfaí béim sa bhreis ar úsáid agus ar dhaingniú an méid atá foghlamtha ag na daltaí. B'fhiú tuilleadh seansanna a sholáthar do na daltaí tabhairt faoi scríbhneoireacht phearsanta agus iad a mhealladh chun a smaointe féin a chur in iúl trí mheán na Gaeilge.

##### ***Irish***

Irish is taught competently in the junior classes. Appropriate emphasis is placed on listening to and speaking the Irish language. Lessons are well structured and have clear learning objectives. The pupils are given opportunities to learn appropriate vocabulary and phrases and to practise the language taught. Games, rhymes and songs are used effectively as teaching strategies. Lessons are well resourced with appropriate use of the interactive whiteboard, workbooks, pictures and concrete materials. It is recommended however, that lesson themes are linked more systematically from week to week to maximise continuity and progression in the development of the pupils' language competence. Most teachers in the junior classes use Irish as the language of instruction and it is recommended that this practice be implemented through the school. Overall, good learning outcomes are evident in these classes and a positive attitude to Irish is promoted.

In the senior classes, a good emphasis is placed on learning Irish poetry and grammar. Annually, the pupils in sixth class spend three days in the Gaeltacht and this initiative is praised. However, much of the teaching of Irish in the senior classes is based on the content of a commercial text

book. As a result, the pupils are afforded limited opportunities to listen to or speak the Irish language on a regular basis. In most senior classes, lessons lack clear learning objectives and are inadequately structured. A limited range of writing activities is provided for the pupils. It is recommended that the content of lessons and the teaching methodologies employed reflect those outlined in the school plan and that more emphasis is placed on practising and consolidating the language learned. The pupils should engage in more personal writing activities and be encouraged to present their own thoughts and ideas through the medium of Irish.

### ***English***

Overall, English reading is taught effectively in the junior classes. The programme is well organised and managed and is supported by excellent print-rich environments. A phonological awareness programme is implemented consistently. The pupils are provided with individualised reading material to develop their reading skills and records of their progress are maintained diligently. Each class has a library and a very good range of books is available to the pupils. Large-format books and class novels are used as appropriate to develop particular reading and comprehension skills. Very good standards of reading were noted in these classes. The reading standards are also good at the senior level but the teaching approaches used do not provide for the range of pupil abilities. In most of the senior classes, all pupils explore the same textbook and little attention is given to differentiating reading activities, to challenging the more able pupils and to fostering independent reading skills. It is recommended that the pupils in these classes be exposed to a wider variety of reading material and be encouraged and challenged to engage with the material at a more in-depth level. The teachers are advised to engage in greater levels of group teaching to ensure that reading materials are explored comprehensively and creatively. Good use is made of the school library and the pupils borrow books on a regular basis.

Handwriting is of a good standard throughout the school and functional writing skills are taught consistently in all classes. Some very good examples of the pupils' personal writing were noted in a few classes. In these particular situations, the writing process was scaffolded for the pupils, tasks were differentiated and very good feedback was provided to the pupils on their efforts. Book reports, individual stories, poetry, cooperative writing and character profiles were some of the writing themes explored. It is recommended that a systematic approach to the teaching of personal writing be implemented through the school to ensure continuity and progression in the pupils' writing competence from class to class.

The pupils express themselves quite competently in all classes. The language of specific themes is taught and practised in the junior classes. In the senior classes, oral language competence is advanced through the integration of language learning with various curriculum areas. Continued attention to the development of the specific oral language skills as outlined in the primary curriculum and the promotion of confidence in the pupils' self-expression are advised.

### **3.2 Mathematics**

The quality of teaching in Mathematics varies through the school. Key elements of good practice were noted in a number of classes. These included well-structured lessons, the use of active-learning approaches, mathematics-rich environments, pupil access to relevant resources and manipulatives, the application of mathematical concepts to real-life problems and a focus on developing mental mathematics skills. It is recommended that these practices be replicated at every class level. Copy work is generally well structured, neat and tidy and is corrected regularly. Some differentiated approaches to accommodate the pupils' differing needs are employed but these are not implemented consistently through the school. Pupil achievement levels in mathematics vary widely. To cater for this range of abilities, it is recommended that group teaching of Mathematics be implemented in all classes and that activities be provided that

challenge the pupils at an appropriate instructional level. Further attention to the development of the pupils' mental mathematics and problem-solving skills at all class levels is advised.

### **3.3 Geography**

Some good examples of geography teaching were observed during the course of the whole-school evaluation. These included structured lessons focusing on the promotion of early graphical skills, the examination of photographs and artefacts, the development of a sense of place, and the integration of learning in Geography with other curriculum areas. There is evidence that pupils in some classes have developed a good geographical knowledge and can confidently discuss the topics and content areas previously covered. The pupils are enthusiastic in the promotion of recycling and litter management and are working confidently towards the next target in the *Green Schools* programme. Some classes are well resourced for the teaching of geography and good use is made of information and communication technology (ICT). However, the further display and use of maps in all classrooms is advised to advance the pupils' graphical skills. The emphasis on investigating the local environment in some classes is noteworthy and this focus should now be extended to all classes.

### **3.4 Assessment**

The school is commended on the efforts made to assess pupil progress using a variety of tools in different classes. These include standardised assessment in English and Mathematics, checklists, work samples, teacher-designed tests, pupil profiles and reading records. Some diagnostic testing is carried out in the special educational needs setting. Some good work has been undertaken in tracking the progress of individual pupils using the results of standardised assessment. The outcomes of the assessments are communicated orally to parents at the annual parent-teacher meeting. It is recommended that the school examine and analyse the trends and patterns in assessment outcomes at a schoolwide and individual classroom level. These data should in turn be used systemically to inform whole-school curriculum delivery and to provide programmes of work designed to meet the needs of individual pupils.

## **4. QUALITY OF SUPPORT FOR PUPILS**

### **4.1 Pupils with special educational needs**

The quality of support for pupils with special educational needs is good. A very good range of teaching approaches is employed to support the pupils' individual learning needs. The teaching environment is attractive and very well resourced. Following the administration of a range of diagnostic tests, comprehensive individual education plans are drawn up for each pupil in consultation with the class teachers. The primary approach to meeting the needs of pupils with additional learning needs is by withdrawal from the mainstream class setting. It is recommended that the current model of support be extended to include prevention, early intervention and in-class, team-teaching approaches. In order for this to be realised, it is essential that clear criteria for the selection and discontinuation of supplementary teaching be implemented. Opportunities to experience established good practice in other schools and to engage in pertinent professional development courses should be facilitated.

### **4.2 Other supports for pupils: disadvantaged, minority and other groups**

The school is welcoming of all pupils, is committed to the welfare of each individual pupil and treats all pupils equally and with respect. A strong sense of belonging to the local community is fostered in the school. A number of pupils for whom English is an additional language attend the school. They are aided to develop their English language competence with the support of the school's supplementary teaching provision. The school's involvement in a recent Comenius

Project and the visit by Spanish teachers to the school each year, afford the pupils a broader international experience. The pupils are also enabled to make a genuine contribution to society through the school's involvement in various charitable initiatives. This is particularly evident in the Christmas concert which raises considerable monies for charity each year.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

The school has strengths in the following areas:

- There is a very good team spirit among the teachers and the principal and staff members provide a caring and positive learning environment for the pupils.
- There is a very good emphasis on developing the pupils' reading skills in English in the early years, and overall, the standard of reading in the school is very good.
- The board of management, principal, staff and the parent body are very committed to the school and contribute significant time and effort to support the pupils.
- The pupils are well behaved, display positive attitudes towards their environment and engage in a wide range of school-based, extra-curricular activities.
- ICT is used widely and effectively in the presentation of lessons.

The following key recommendations are made in order to further improve the quality of education provided by the school:

- In consultation with the members of the school community, the board of management is advised to formulate and implement a comprehensive, five-year strategic plan to guide the development of the school.
- The principal and in-school management team should encourage and foster a culture of self-review in the school. They should lead a comprehensive review of the learning outcomes being achieved by the pupils and use this information to inform whole-school curriculum delivery within and across class groupings.
- It is recommended that group-teaching approaches be implemented in all classes and that learning activities, particularly in English and Mathematics, be further differentiated to ensure that the pupils are challenged and supported appropriately.
- In the proposed review of teaching and learning in Irish, greater emphasis should be placed on the practice and consolidation of the language.
- It is recommended that the current model of learning support be developed to ensure that it includes prevention, early intervention and in-class, team-teaching approaches.

Post-evaluation meetings were held with the staff and the board of management where the draft findings and recommendations of the evaluation were presented and discussed.

*Published February 2011*

# **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 would like to thank the inspectors for the professional and courteous manner in which the Whole School Evaluation was carried out. We are pleased that the report affirms much of the positive work being done in our school and in particular the reference to the very good team spirit among the teachers, principal and staff who provide a caring and positive learning environment for the pupils.

#### **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 welcomes the recommendations of the Whole School Evaluation and has already put in train procedures to further enhance the development of the school.

- The BOM as part of the recommendation will develop a 5 year strategic plan for the school encompassing our Vision Statement by continuing the lively process of consultation with the Whole Community
- Group teaching is used effectively and appropriately in Scoil Mhuire and we continue to develop this strategy as recommended in the Report.
- In Scoil Mhuire an equal emphasis is put on all aspects of the Irish curriculum. We use Irish cross-curricularly e.g. Seachtain na Gaeilge, Irish plays, informal conversation, use of Irish language media. As a result of the Whole School Evaluation Report we are continuing to develop further initiatives to promote the use of Irish throughout the school day. Along with this we still ensure that the children continue to develop a solid grammatical foundation to enhance their Irish literacy skills.
- In the area of learning support, team teaching is being implemented. As recommended, learning support is developing best practice with reference to recommendations made by
  - liaising with other schools
  - joining the Learning Support Association of Ireland
  - studying international best practice

The community of Scoil Mhuire acknowledge the benefit of the Whole School Evaluation as part of our ongoing process of development in all areas within our aim to place the child as the centre of our collective endeavour.