

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

**Whole School Evaluation
REPORT**

**Our Lady of Mercy National School
Stradbally, Co. Waterford
Uimhir rolla: 13020D**

Date of inspection: 14 January 2014



1. Introduction

Our Lady of Mercy National School is a rural primary school in County Waterford that caters for girls from infants to sixth class and for boys from infants to first class. It is under the patronage of the Catholic Bishop of Waterford and Lismore. The school population has declined in recent years and there are currently 39 pupils enrolled. Pupil attendance rates 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 work of the board of management is effective in supporting the school.
- The principal is very committed to the school and diligent in the discharge of his duties.
- Parents, along with the parents' association, provide valuable support to various school activities.
- The school building and its surroundings are maintained to a high standard.
- The pupils are courteous, mannerly and positive in their learning.
- The overall quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement is commendable.

The following **main recommendations** are made:

- Sa Ghaeilge, ba chóir plean uile-scoile a dhearadh agus a chur i bhfeidhm chun scileanna teanga na ndaltaí a fhorbairt go céimniúil leanúnach, a scileanna labhartha ach go háirithe. *In Irish, it is recommended that a whole-school plan be devised and implemented to develop the pupils' language skills in an incremental, continuous manner, in particular their speaking skills.*
- The school should implement an oral language programme for English which identifies clear learning outcomes for pupils to be developed progressively through the school.
- A policy on learning support, in line with Department policy as outlined in Circular 02/05, should be developed that clearly sets out the school's criteria for the selection of pupils for supplementary teaching, as well as practices in this area.

3. Quality of School Management

- The work of the board of management is effective. The members share their talents and interests to purposefully support the work of the school. They are committed to the future development of the school and are aware of the challenges that face the school regarding the ongoing fall in enrolment.

- The newly appointed principal is very committed to the school and diligent in the discharge of his duties. He has developed a strong sense of co-operation between members of the school community. He is positively supported by the deputy principal whose duties are carried out diligently. While these duties are wide ranging, they should be reviewed regularly to ensure that they reflect the ongoing needs of the school.
- The school building and its surroundings are maintained to a high standard and orderly learning environments are created to support pupils' learning. A range of appropriate teaching and learning resources is used effectively throughout the school. The ancillary staff makes a significant contribution to the smooth running of the school.
- The quality of communications and relationships with the school community is good and parents receive regular updates on school matters. The parents, along with the parents' association, provide valuable practical and financial support to the school. The results of the parent questionnaire demonstrate that all parents are happy with the school and feel that their child is doing well in school.
- The management of pupils is very good. During the evaluation, the pupils were courteous, mannerly and positive in their learning. In the pupil questionnaires, all pupils expressed the view that their school is a good school and that they feel safe in their school.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- The quality of school planning is good. A wide range of organisational policies provide useful direction and guidance. As curriculum plans are reviewed, there should be further emphasis placed on the direction they provide to individual teachers in relation to continuity in teaching approaches and progression in pupil learning between classes.
- The school has begun to engage appropriately in school self-evaluation with a particular focus on aspects of numeracy. While agreed actions are already having a positive impact on pupil learning, specific targets should now be set for each priority area.
- The quality of teacher planning is generally good. Teachers provide long-term and short-term schemes of work and monthly progress reports. It is recommended that all plans and reports be based on curricular objectives and pupil learning outcomes rather than on textbook content or topics being addressed. Differentiated pupil outcomes should be documented as necessary.
- Confirmation was provided that the board of management has formally adopted the *Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools* without modification and that the school is compliant with the requirements of the *Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools*.

5. Quality of Teaching, Learning and Pupil Achievement

- The quality of overall teaching, learning and pupil achievement is commendable. Positive learning environments are created and teacher-pupil interactions are affirming. Lessons are paced appropriately and some effective active teaching approaches are used to enhance pupil learning. Additional use of collaborative methodologies is advised to further increase pupil participation during lessons in all classes.

- Overall, the assessment of pupil learning is good. Standardised tests in literacy and numeracy are administered annually and pupil progress is assessed through written tests and the correction and monitoring of pupil work. It is now advised that the range of assessment approaches used be developed further and that the progress of individual pupils be tracked systematically.
- Tá caighdeán an teagaisc agus na foghlama sa Ghaeilge measartha cé go bhfuil dea-chleachtas le sonrú i gcomhthéacsanna áirithe. Moltar plan uile-scoile a dhearadh agus a chur i bhfeidhm chun scileanna teanga na ndaltaí a fhorbairt go céimniúil leanúnach, a scileanna labhartha ach go háirithe. Ní mór an dea-chleachtas a bhaineann le straitéisí cumarsáide a leathnú ar fud na scoile. B'fhiú chomh maith béim níos treise a chur ar Ghaeilge neamhfhoirmiúil agus cultúr Gaelach na scoile a neartú. Forbraítear scileanna éisteachta na ndaltaí go torthúil agus forbraítear a gcuid scileanna léitheoireachta go rialta i ngach rang. Léiríonn cuid de na daltaí caighdeán réasúnta maidir lena scileanna scríbhneoireachta ach moltar deiseanna breise a thabhairt dóibh chun a saor scríbhneoireacht a fhorbairt a thuilleadh.

The quality of teaching and learning in Irish is fair although good practice is in evidence in certain contexts. It is recommended that a whole-school plan be devised and implemented to develop the pupils' language skills in an incremental, continuous manner, in particular their speaking skills. It is necessary to extend current good practices regarding communicative approaches through the school. It would also be worthwhile to place a stronger emphasis on informal Irish and to strengthen the Irish culture within the school. The pupils' listening skills are developed successfully and their reading skills are developed systematically in all classes. Some pupils demonstrate reasonable writing skills but it is advised that additional opportunities be provided for them to further develop their independent writing skills.

- Teaching, learning and pupil achievement in English is of a good standard. The pupils recite a range of poetry with expression and most pupils speak confidently during class discussions. However, it is recommended that the school implement an oral language programme which identifies clear learning outcomes for pupils to be developed progressively through the school. The teaching of reading is carried out to a very good standard. The school is now well positioned to extend the use of differentiated reading programmes to further enhance pupils' attainment in reading. The pupils write in a variety of genres but they would benefit from a more structured, whole-school approach to writing with a greater emphasis on creative, independent writing.
- The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in Mathematics is commendable. The development of the pupils' mathematical language and the use of mathematical games and concrete materials form an effective part of the well-structured lessons observed in most classes. This good practice should be extended. Much progress has been made in the areas of mental mathematics and problem solving. Pair work and group work are used effectively in these areas.
- The quality of teaching and learning in the Visual Arts is good. The high standard of pupils' artwork is evident in the displays in each classroom and in public areas throughout the school. The school has brought in local artists to work with the pupils on a number of occasions and this has contributed to their enjoyment and their skills development. Further attention should be given to developing the pupils' appreciation of the elements of art, and more regular opportunities should be taken to look at and respond to their own work and the work of other artists.

6. Quality of Support for Pupils

- Currently, the majority of supplementary teaching time available to provide support for pupils with additional learning needs is used for the teaching of English, Mathematics and Irish to two mainstream classes. While this arrangement may be beneficial to some pupils, it is recommended that a school policy that is in line with Department Circular 02/05 be developed that clearly sets out the school criteria for the selection of pupils for support as well as practices in this area. Where support teaching is provided on a withdrawal basis, the quality of teacher-pupil interaction is very good. Further use of diagnostic testing is recommended and learning programmes for individual pupils should be based on the outcomes of such assessment. The areas of early intervention and prevention should be further developed.

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 of Our Lady of Mercy N.S., Stradbally, Co. Waterford welcomes this report which affirms the learning achievements of the pupils, the quality of teaching, the leadership and management of the school and the support provided by our parents and school community, in enabling us to provide high quality learning opportunities for our 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 and staff acknowledge the recommendations made in the report. The implementation of the recommendations has been prioritised as part of the school's development plan.