Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Scoil Bhríde
Mountrath, Co. Laois
Uimhir rolla: 13343E

Date of inspection: 29 September 2010
1. Introduction

Scoil Bhride is located in Mountrath and caters for girls from infants to sixth class. It was originally founded by the Brigidine Sisters in 1809 and has strong community links. The school has not got designated disadvantaged status despite many indicators of disadvantage among the pupil population. There are five mainstream teachers on the staff and four teachers provide support to pupils with social, educational and language needs. 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:

- The board of management and staff are commended for the very attractive and well maintained school building and grounds.
- The staff is very committed and hard working, led by a dedicated principal.
- The pupils were very polite and well mannered during the course of the evaluation and interacted very appropriately with school personnel.
- The quality of teaching and learning in Music is very good.
- The quality of pupils’ spoken Irish is very good.
- The quality of organisational planning is good as policies are context-based.
- The quality of the management of resources is very good.
- The school has a very active parents’ association who do substantial fundraising for the school.

The following main recommendations are made:

- Due to the difficulties of some pupils in literacy and Mathematics it is recommended that the school introduces a number of curricular initiatives which promote parental involvement such as ‘Maths for Fun’ and shared reading.
- It is recommended that teachers use the results of assessments to differentiate work for individuals or groups of pupils and to ensure that they are teaching to the ability levels of pupils in their class.
- It is recommended that the school promotes self-evaluation by using current assessment data to create an accurate picture of pupil achievement. Based on such a picture the school should set SMART targets to ensure continuous school improvement.
- It is recommended that the school reviews its approach to the teaching of phonics, particularly in the junior classes.
- The deputy principal is currently working as a shared resource teacher. It is recommended that this and the duties of each member of the in-school management team are reviewed in light of circular 07/03.
3. Quality of School Management

- The quality of the work of the board of management is good. Roles and responsibilities are very effectively assigned to ensure the school’s material needs are addressed efficiently. The board is commended for its maintenance of the school building and grounds. Financial accounts are audited annually. It is recommended that the board informs itself on pupil achievement in the school.

- The quality of the work of the in-school management team is good. There have been significant changes to the in-school management team in recent times. The principal promotes good staff relations and values her staff. The deputy principal is currently working as a shared resource teacher. It is recommended that this be reviewed in light of circular 07/03. Members of the team are open and committed to school improvement. It is recommended that duties are now reviewed to reflect the school’s current needs.

- The quality of the management of resources is very good. The school is maintained to a very high level. A wide range of curricular resources and supports is available. The school has a very active parents’ association which does substantial fundraising.

- The quality of pupil behaviour is good. Pupils present themselves as earnest learners. They are polite and respectful in their interactions with school personnel. During the evaluation a very high percentage of pupils reported feeling safe in their classrooms and in the yard, and claimed that they were aware of school rules.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- The quality of school planning is good. The staff and board have devised a wide range of organisational policies which reflect the school’s context.

- The planning process is implemented through the annual selection of broad targets and the regular review of existing plans and policies.

- It is recommended that the school focuses on self-evaluation by using assessment data to create an accurate picture of pupil achievement. SMART targets should be established to ensure continuous school improvement.

- Each teacher produces long-term and short-term schemes of work. It is recommended that differentiation for individual pupils or groups with different learning needs is explicitly stated in these schemes.

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

- The quality of overall teaching, learning and pupil achievement shows some scope for development. Active methodologies are used by all teachers across different curricular areas. However, it is recommended that there is less dependence on textbooks and a greater emphasis placed on language skills across the curriculum. It is further recommended that teachers assess pupil learning on a very regular basis, record such information and use assessment data in differentiating work for pupils with different learning needs. Considering the difficulties of some pupils in literacy and Mathematics it is recommended that teachers introduce a number of curricular initiatives which promote parental involvement such as ‘Maths for Fun’ and shared reading.

- The quality of teaching and learning in oral Irish is very good in the majority of classes. Pupils are able to answer and ask questions appropriately. In many classes pupils can speak at length about specific themes. The communicative approach is promoted effectively by a majority of teachers through pair work. It is recommended, however, that a much greater emphasis is placed on songs and poems across the school. The quality of pupils’ reading is good in the majority of classes. The quality of pupils’ written work shows scope for development. Too much emphasis is placed on basic tasks in the textbook. It is recommended that teachers present structured written activities in a variety of genres to promote pupils’ independent writing.

- The quality of teaching in English varies between classes. The very good practices observed during the course of the evaluation included use of big books and technology, and the implementation of DEAR (Drop Everything And Read). The quality of learning and pupil achievement in English shows scope for development. A significant number of pupils experience difficulty with literacy. It is recommended that learning objectives are based on pupils’ ability rather than on textbook content. Teachers are advised to place a greater emphasis on oral language development where pupils have opportunities to use target vocabulary. It is also recommended that the staff implements a structured phonics programme to provide the pupils with appropriate word-attack skills. Clearly differentiated programmes of work need to be prepared and delivered to address the wide range of reading abilities. In a minority of classes very good work was observed in process writing. It is advised that this good work be extended across the school.

- The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in Mathematics shows significant scope for development. It is recommended that teachers provide differentiated programmes to meet specific learning needs. It is further recommended that a greater focus be placed on the development of problem-solving skills, mathematical language and the acquisition of number facts across the school.

- The quality of teaching and learning in Music is very good. Pupils display an enjoyment and confidence when engaging in musical activities. They are adept at using voice, percussion and tuned instruments to express themselves. Their work in composition and recording is particularly noteworthy. Teachers are commended for their structured approach to the teaching of musical literacy.
6. Quality of Supports for Pupils

- Pupils with specific needs have access to a number of supports including a learning support teacher, resource teacher, resource teacher for Travellers and a teacher for English as an Additional Language (EAL). While the school has a policy on the provision of support in line with Circular 02/05, it is recommended that individual teachers’ practice is adapted to reflect this policy.

- The quality of assessment, record-keeping and reporting shows scope for development. There is a need for the school to review its current practice in these areas. Individual Education Plans (IEP) were available for this term only. Previous plans were unavailable and consequently the progress of pupils in receipt of support was difficult to evaluate.

- A number of very good practices are established by some teachers including the use of active methodologies and stimulating resources. ‘Buddy reading’ has been implemented by the learning support teacher.
Appendix

SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

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

We acknowledge the work of the Inspection team. We are pleased that the dedication and commitment of all partners in education in our school has been acknowledged in the report. We strive to create a positive learning environment and we are encouraged to see this achievement reflected in the responses of the parents and children’s questionnaires.

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 inspectors recommendations will help inform our future planning. The Deputy Principal is no longer working as a shared teacher. The Board of Management is satisfied that the duties of the in-school management team have always been carried out in an exemplary manner. We welcome the advice of the inspectorate in relation to literacy and numeracy and at present we are introducing a number of curricular initiatives as recommended. We will further develop our use of assessment and self-evaluation tools to produce an accurate and contextual picture of pupils’ achievement in our school. We hope our engagement with the WSE process will allow us to provide an even more supportive structure for teaching and learning in Scoil Bhride.