

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

**Whole School Evaluation
REPORT**

**Scoil Mhuire na Dea-Chomhairle
Kilkishen, Co. Clare
Uimhir rolla: 13870E**

Date of inspection: 19 September 2013



1. Introduction

Scoil Mhuire na Dea-Chomhairle is a co-educational primary school operating under the patronage of the Catholic Bishop of Killaloe. The school has four mainstream class teachers, a learning support teacher who is shared with a neighbouring school and avails of resource teaching hours as part of a similar clustering arrangement. While attendance rates for the majority of the 104 pupils currently enrolled are very good there is a high level of 20 day plus absences. Measures have recently been adopted to tackle incidences of poor attendance and in the past year the level of 20 day absences has been reduced by one third as against the figure from the previous year. Enrolment levels are stable.

This report presents the findings of a whole-school evaluation undertaken in the school in September 2013. The evaluation focused on the quality of teaching and learning in Irish, English, Mathematics and Social Personal and Health Education (SPHE). The board of management of the school was given an opportunity to comment on the findings and recommendations of the report; the board chose to accept the report without response.

2. Summary of Findings and Recommendations for Further Development

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

- The school has a dedicated and effective team of teachers who are professional in outlook and practice.
- Teachers are committed to professional development and engaging with new and effective methodologies and programmes.
- The principal provides effective leadership to the school.
- The board of management is diligent in meeting its statutory and regulatory obligations and in its support of the school.
- The school is supported generously by parents and the wider community.
- Commendable progress has been made in putting in place effective strategies to address literacy deficits.
- Pupils' contribute significantly towards the creation of a positive school atmosphere and their behaviour during the evaluation was very good.
- Overall levels of satisfaction with the school among parents are very high.

The following **main recommendations** are made:

- The board of management should facilitate a rejuvenation of interest in the Parents' Association (PA) and put in place more effective communication structures between the PA and the school.
- Clear time-bound targets are agreed for some aspects of the school's development plan and this work needs to be completed before dissemination of a summary of the plan to the parent body.

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• A review of the organisation of supports for pupils should be undertaken to ensure that, as far as possible, supports for pupils with literacy difficulties are delivered, in the first instance, to those with the greatest need. |
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3. Quality of School Management

- The board of management operates in an effective manner and supports the school very well. The board is properly constituted, keeps accurate and comprehensive records and individual members undertake responsibility for various tasks and projects. School accounts are certified and financial reports are provided at each board meeting. The issuing of agreed reports of meetings would be beneficial in building and maintaining open lines of communication with parents. The board should review its current organisation of accommodation provision to ensure adequate facilities are available for the principal on release days and for resource teaching.
- The principal provides effective leadership to the school and works diligently to create a positive and respectful working environment and to realise optimal educational outcomes for all pupils. Staff relations are characterised by high levels of mutual support and co-operation. The principal is well supported by the deputy principal, who undertakes a range of administrative and leadership tasks. It is noted that all staff members assist in the leadership enterprise by assuming responsibility for tasks appropriate to their particular strengths and interests. Any future review of posts should focus on further developing curriculum leadership roles and putting in place formal accountability processes with the board.
- The school building and grounds are well maintained and pupils are fortunate to have extensive play areas. Resources for teaching and learning are upgraded as finance permits. Recent additions involved significant expenditure on a school library, a suite of laptops and the Accelerated Reader programme.
- The quality of pupil management is very good. During the evaluation pupils were well behaved, co-operative and friendly. The school promotes a supportive environment for pupils. Questionnaire responses indicate that pupils get on well with their peers and enjoy their lessons and learning.
- Questionnaire responses indicate that parents are satisfied with the educational provision in the school and that there is a very good atmosphere in the school; all respondents felt that the school is welcoming of parents. The parents' association (PA) meets regularly and issues an annual newsletter. The PA has been instrumental in supporting the school through a range of activities, mainly of a pastoral and fundraising nature. Responsibility for running the PA has, over time, devolved to a small group of parents. In order to encourage more involvement by parents in the association, the board of management should now facilitate a regeneration of interest in the PA and put in place more effective communication structures between the PA and the school.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- School records of after-school meetings indicate productive and collaborative engagement by staff in discussions around key areas of planning for improvement and change. Considerable work has been done in recent times, at staff and board level, to ensure that those curriculum and administrative policies most in need of review have been examined, and updated as necessary.

- The school's self-evaluation report reflects a thorough approach to analysing test outcomes, a broad consultation process with staff, pupils and parents, and outlines key strengths and priorities for improvement in literacy. Arising from the report the school has drafted a development plan aimed, in particular, at increasing oral language skills and extending vocabulary. Clear time-bound targets are agreed for some aspects of the plan and this work needs to be completed before dissemination of the plan to the parent body.
- All teachers devise long-term and short-term plans and submit monthly progress reports of their work to the principal. While the quality of some planning is excellent there is need to adopt whole school approaches to the key issues of the identification of learning outcomes and differentiation. A co-ordinated approach to yearly planning would also be beneficial.
- 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

- Good teaching was observed in all settings. Lessons were well planned and structured and appropriately paced. A range of teaching approaches and strategies was employed and the teachers were adept at managing group work, talk and discussion and the use of concrete materials. Highly commendable co-operative learning approaches were employed in some instances and this approach merits extension throughout the school. Skilful, probing questioning was very much in evidence. Effective and productive use of information and communications technology (ICT) was observed. In some settings work was very carefully differentiated for the varying needs of pupils and this approach merits wider application. Much has been done to develop effective assessment practices, including self-assessment by pupils, and this work is ongoing.
- Is léir go bhfuil na hoidí dearfach i leith na Gaeilge agus déanann said iarrachtaí inmholta taitneamh agus spraoi a chomhcheangal le foghlaim na teanga. Úsáidtear rainn agus dánta go héifeachtach chun saibhreas na teanga a roinnt leis na daltaí. I rith an mheasúnaithe tugadh faoi deara méid áirithe den ról-imirt, obair bheirte, cluichí teanga agus úsáid na teanga mar theanga bhainisteoireachta ranga. Chomh maith le sin leagtar béim chuí ar an ngramadach agus ar fhuaimniú ceart na bhfocal. Tá dul chun cinn maith á dhéanamh ag na daltaí i léitheoireacht na Gaeilge agus bunaítear cuid mhaith de na cleachtaí scríbhneoireachta ar na leabhair léitheoireachta agus leabhair oibre. Moltar anois béim níos mó a chur ar fhorbairt na scileanna cumarsáide agus ar fhailleana rialta a thabhairt do na daltaí dul i ngleic leis an scríbhneoireacht phearsanta.
- *It is apparent that the teachers are positive towards Irish and they make praiseworthy efforts to associate fun and enjoyment with the learning of the language. Rhymes and poems are effectively used to share the richness of the language with the pupils. During the evaluation, instances of role-play, pair work, language games and the use of Irish in class management were noted. In addition there is appropriate emphasis on grammar and correct pronunciation. The pupils are making good progress in reading and the majority of written exercises are based on readers and workbooks. It is recommended at this point that a greater emphasis be placed on the development of communication skills and on giving pupils more regular opportunities to engage with personal writing.*
- The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in English is good. Oral language is currently prioritised through discreet oral language lessons and oral homework. Many

pupils are beginning to show the benefits of this approach. Poetry is imaginatively explored. Talk and discussion are integral to teaching and learning. Much effort has recently been expended in motivating pupils to read widely. A school library has been financed and developed and an accelerated reading programme is being implemented. Teachers are consciously focusing on developing comprehension strategies and the combined effects of these initiatives have resulted in generally positive outcomes. Phonological awareness, phonemic awareness, and phonics instruction are prominently employed to teach early reading skills. Written work is well presented in the various classes. In addition to cross-curriculum writing, pupils engage with personal writing and various writing genres are taught in a structured manner. There is scope for a greater emphasis on emergent writing and opportunities for free writing, as well as a more systematic implementation of the school's policy on cursive writing.

- The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in Mathematics is good. Commendable efforts are made to teach Mathematics language and concrete materials are appropriately used to aid understanding of concepts. Mental mathematics was a key component of lessons in all settings observed with some innovative strategies in evidence. Lessons were characterised by high levels of pupil engagement, particularly where mini white boards were used for mental work and where pupils engaged with tasks in small groups. Standardised test results indicate good outcomes for pupils in most strand and skill areas of the curriculum. Solving word problems has been identified by the staff as an area for development and teachers have already planned interventions aimed at enhancing pupils' attainment in this area.
- The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in SPHE is very good. Much good work has been done on classroom and school climate and atmosphere, in terms of promoting mutual respect and co-operation. Teachers were observed to use a range of co-operative strategies to teach well planned lessons in various strands of the curriculum. Where necessary, special programmes are taught to enable pupils overcome the barriers to friendship and peer relationships. Almost all pupils surveyed attest to getting on well with their peers and feeling safe in school, and a significant majority agree that they could talk to a teacher if they were upset about something.

6. Quality of Support for Pupils

- The school has an allocation of twenty hours learning support under the general allocation model. This service is based in the school and shared with a neighbouring school. The school also avails of resource teaching hours which are delivered by a teacher based in a neighbouring school. The support teachers provide high quality support to individual pupils, to small groups and to whole class groups. In order to improve this service further it is recommended that a review of the organisation of supports for pupils should be undertaken to ensure that, as far as possible, supports for pupils with literacy difficulties are delivered, in the first instance, to those with the greatest need.
- Lessons observed were carefully planned and very well delivered to meet the needs of pupils as identified in standardised and diagnostic tests and the reports and recommendations of outside professionals. Individual tracking of pupils' progress indicates that they are benefiting from the supports provided. Greater precision in defining learning targets would facilitate more effective monitoring of progress.