1. Introduction

SN Brighde, Milltown is a 226-pupil primary school under the patronage of the Catholic bishop of Kildare and Leighlin. The school’s mission statement is exemplified in its welcoming atmosphere and focus on the holistic education of pupils. Attendance rates are generally 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 board of management and parent body actively support the work of the school.
- The principal and teaching staff work collaboratively and create a positive learning environment.
- The school is well maintained and provides a good educational environment for pupils.
- The overall quality of teaching and learning in the four subjects evaluated is good.
- Significant emphasis is placed on the pastoral care of pupils.

The following **main recommendations** are made:

- School curriculum plans should be contextualised further to the needs of the school and the process of school self-evaluation should be developed.
- A wider range of approaches and methodologies should be implemented in some classes to meet the learning needs and styles of all pupils.
- Provision for pupils with special education needs (SEN) should be reviewed at the whole-school level.

3. Quality of School Management

- The quality of the work of the board of management is good. Members are clearly committed to the development of the school as a central feature of the local community. The board is commended for developing and maintaining the school building to a very high standard. School finances are managed carefully, but the accounts should now be certified or audited annually. The board plays an active role in the development of organisational policies. Procedures for informing parents on matters relating to the operation of the board should be extended.
- The principal is commended for the creation of a positive school atmosphere and for the strong emphasis placed on the pastoral care of pupils. Members of the in-school management team have an appropriate blend of duties and these are carried out
diligently. These duties were recently reviewed and this good practice should be continued into the future.

- The school is well resourced. The classrooms provide clean, stimulating and well-ordered learning environments. Modern information and communication technology is available in all classrooms and overall, this is used effectively and judiciously. Ancillary staff contribute effectively to the operation of the school.

- The overall management of relationships with the school community is good. The parents’ association plays an active role in supporting the school’s work. Parent representatives and the responses in parent questionnaires indicate very high levels of satisfaction with the operation of the school. A school website currently under development should contribute further to the dissemination of school policies to parents.

- The management of pupils is very effective. Pupils conduct themselves in an exemplary manner and are courteous and respectful in their interactions with adults and peers. School assemblies reinforce the school’s high expectations regarding pupil behaviour. The pupils display great pride in singing the school’s anthem. In questionnaires, the vast majority of pupils indicated overall satisfaction with their educational experience. Pupils participate in a wide range of co-curricular and extracurricular activities, including the Modern Languages in Primary Schools Initiative (French) and the Junior Traffic Warden’s Scheme.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- The overall quality of organisational policies is good and they are well contextualised to the needs of the school. The board is advised to review its enrolment policy to ensure it complies with current legislation.

- There is scope to develop the quality of curriculum plans to reflect further the context of the school and guide teachers’ implementation of the curriculum more closely. The documentation of some of the very good practice observed in whole-school curriculum plans should support its extension to all classrooms. The school is advised to plan for the cyclical review of policies and plans.

- Documentation of the process of school self-evaluation is in its infancy. It is recommended that the school should develop a strategic development plan that sets out clear targets, programmes and timeframes to advance identified school priorities.

- Teachers’ individual planning is good, and they are commended for generally adopting the use of curriculum objectives in their short-term planning. In some cases, further refinement of this approach is required to ensure that the full breadth of the curriculum is implemented and that sufficient detail is provided on how curriculum objectives are to be achieved. Long-term plans provide a clear outline of content to be covered and would be enhanced by the inclusion of more detail from the school’s curriculum plans and information on methodologies, assessment, differentiation and skills development.

- 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 and school staff; 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. It is recommended that a copy of the procedures be provided to all parents
and external tutors working in the school. 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 teaching, learning and pupil achievement is good, with very effective practice observed in some classrooms. Teachers display proficient classroom management skills. Interactions within classrooms are characterised by constructive relationships, generating a pleasant learning environment. Resources were well used in many lessons but there was scope to extend the variety of materials used in some settings. Effective use of a range of methodologies was observed during the course of the evaluation but in some settings, there was scope to introduce more active and participatory approaches to teaching and learning. Written work is recorded neatly using a consistent style of penmanship and is regularly monitored by the teachers. To optimise learning outcomes for all pupils, further provision for specific differentiation is recommended, especially in English and Mathematics.

- Assessment practices in the school are generally good. Screening and standardised tests are administered and pupils’ individual results are tracked. All teachers generate formative assessment data on pupils, most particularly in English and Mathematics. There is scope to further use this data to inform differentiation in these subjects and to extend assessment practices to other curriculum areas.

- Irish is taught effectively and it is obvious that an earnest effort is being made to cultivate a positive attitude towards Irish. The majority of teachers use an appropriate variety of methodologies during lessons. For the most part, a good emphasis is placed on the communicative approach and the majority of pupils can engage in basic social conversations. Pupils recite rhymes and poems with enjoyment. Reading skills are developed systematically. Pupils achieve a high standard in written Irish in the senior classes. It is advised that pupils’ experiences in reading and writing be enriched further in some classes.

- The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in English is of a high standard. Teachers model language precisely and extend pupils’ thinking through effective questioning. A more consistent and incremental implementation of the oral language objectives from the curriculum is advised. A structured and effective approach to the teaching of phonics is evident. The positive culture of reading in the school nurtures pupils’ interest and fluency in reading. A further focus on the development of comprehension skills during lessons is recommended in some settings. Opportunities to write are provided at each class level and a good emphasis is placed on the writing process. Due emphasis is placed on the exploration of poetry but a greater emphasis on the memorisation of poems is suggested in some classes.
• The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in Mathematics is good. An appropriate focus is placed on oral mental mathematics and the teaching of mathematical language in most lessons. Good use of resources was observed in a number of lessons but the greater use of concrete materials is advised in some settings to introduce and reinforce new learning for pupils. Pupils display a good ability to estimate and problem solve throughout the school.

• The overall quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in Science is good. Commendably, pupils’ previous knowledge was used as the starting point in many lessons observed. In some classes, pupils were observed participating in well-managed experiments where they developed their scientific knowledge and skills. There is scope to enhance this provision in some classes and to provide opportunities for pupils to engage in more open-ended, problem-solving tasks. A two-year cycle of work should be recorded in the school plan to serve as the basis for teachers’ planning and practice.

6. Quality of Support for Pupils

• At a whole-school level, there is scope to develop provision for pupils with SEN. The staged approach to provision should be implemented more consistently, particularly in relation to differentiation at a classroom level and by using ‘classroom support’ plans. The teaching and learning observed in support settings was characterised by affirming teacher-pupil relationships. To assist the development of the recently-formed SEN team, a thorough review of practice is recommended. Approaches to planning and record keeping, use of methodologies and resources, delivery of support, setting of targets, assessment practices and communication strategies should be considered within this review.

• The school is sensitive to instances of disadvantage and supports pupils discreetly. A book rental scheme has been introduced and the school is reviewing its approach to school tours to reduce the financial burden on parents.

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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 B.O.M. of Scoil Bhríde Milltown wishes to acknowledge and thank the inspectors from D.E.S. for their courtesy and hard work during our successful W.S.E. The B.O.M. wishes to take this opportunity to congratulate the staff, parents and especially the children on their continued high standard of achievement in all areas of education. We are extremely proud of our school and all the people who are connected to it.

We believe that the recommendations in relation to S.E.N. provision do not accurately represent our current position. We have reviewed the S.E.N. policy within the last two years and feel that many of the suggestions made were already being implemented and will continue to be implemented. We will continue to strive to provide the best S.E.N. provision possible in line with the recommendation.

We thank the inspectorate for their observation in relation to the wide variety of extra curricular activity in the school. However, we would like to register our disappointment at the discontinuation of the Modern Language Initiative, which has been a huge success in this school for many years.

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 B.O.M. welcomes the key recommendations in the report and has already initiated their implementation. We note the advice given in the curricular areas and will endeavour to develop and evolve all our policies incrementally as suggested.

The specific advice of the inspectorate in relation to the following issues has also been carried out.

- The B.O.M. accounts will be certified annually
- The enrolment policy has been adjusted to comply fully with recent legislation.

We continue to improve our communications and will, quite soon, be launching our School Website.