An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation REPORT

Scoil Mhuire Gan Smál (C)
Glasheen,
Cork
Uimhir rolla: 17105l

Date of inspection: 11 February 2011
1. **Introduction**

Scoil Mhuire Gan Smál is a girls’ primary school situated on the south side of Cork City. The school is under the patronage of the Catholic Bishop of Cork and Ross. The school receives additional funding, staffing and support under the Department of Education and Skills’ *Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (Deis) Urban Band 2* programme. The school has 182 pupils with a high attendance rate of 93%. 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 board of management and parents are very supportive of the school.
- The principal succeeds in developing a positive and inclusive school climate.
- The quality of teaching is very good.
- The pupils are competent and confident learners and are making very good progress in literacy and in numeracy.
- Cuirtear an Ghaeilge chun cinn sa scoil go córasach and sroichtear ardchaighdeán
  
  *Irish is consistently promoted throughout the school and a high standard is achieved.*

The following **main recommendations** are made:

- It is recommended that the board acts to ensure that the length of the school day for infant classes complies with Department regulations.
- The development of the instructional leadership role of in-school management personnel is recommended.
- Further analysis of standardised test results is recommended, together with a regular tracking of the progress of pupils in support programmes.

3. **Quality of School Management**

- The board of management is very supportive of the school. The school's financial processes are effective and include regular tracking of expenditure. It is noted that the length of the infant school day falls short by thirty minutes and it is recommended that the board acts to ensure compliance in this matter.
- The principal succeeds in creating a positive school climate through the openness and respect with which she addresses matters to do with staff, with parents and pupils. She has given dedicated and valuable service and has overseen many worthy initiatives in the school.
There is a well-defined supportive culture among the members of the in-school management team. Duties are carried out conscientiously and diligently and contribute productively to the identified needs of the school. In the further development of instructional leadership, curriculum co-ordination should be afforded a greater prominence. The role of special needs co-ordinator should be assigned to a post-holder.

Arrangements are well established to ensure that teachers receive a variety of teaching experiences while in the school. The pupils’ learning needs, both academic and pastoral, are addressed by staff in a competent manner. During the evaluation, the pupils were courteous and co-operative. The results of the pupils’ questionnaires indicate that they have very favourable attitudes to school life. The school is well resourced in terms of information and communication technology (ICT). While some use of ICT was observed in the course of the evaluation, staff is encouraged to make a greater use of this resource to complement the pupils’ learning.

The parents’ association and the wider parent body support a variety of school events and they fundraise regularly to purchase school equipment. Parents are routinely informed of school activities and pupil progress. Results from parent questionnaires indicate parents are very pleased with the educational provision in the school. To date parents have had a limited role in policy development and staff is advised to consult regularly with parents in the development/review of policies.

The ancillary staff provides a high measure of support and their efforts are greatly appreciated. Corridors and entrance areas are decorated attractively with pupils’ written work and artwork.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

The school has drafted a comprehensive and useful range of organisational and curricular policies. Some very good agreed practices are identified therein. Teachers are advised to ensure a greater clarity around the subject matter to be covered at each class level in order to support spiral learning and to inform teachers’ individual plans.

A customised DEIS plan, for the period 2007 to 2010 has been completed and sets out realistic targets. School management and staff are reminded to set targets for parental involvement, pupil learning and attendance in their new plan.

The school is in the early stages of engaging in the processes of self-evaluation with a regular review of school policies. It is recommended that a more formal process be adopted with particular reference to the Department’s Looking At Our Schools document.

All teachers prepare effective long-term and short-term plans and there is evidence of good preparation of resources to complement pupil learning.

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. A designated liaison person (DLP) and a deputy DLP have been appointed in line with the requirements of the guidelines. Management is advised to present the child protection policy formally to parents.
5. **Quality of Teaching, Learning and Pupil Achievement**

- The quality of teaching and learning throughout the school is very good. An examination of scores attained in standardised tests in literacy and in numeracy indicates pupils are making very good progress.

- The school is praised in their efforts to promote Irish throughout the school. Effective strategies are utilised to increase communication among pupils. Productive use is made of information and communication technology (ICT) in the teaching of Irish to complement the learning. The pupils participate actively in the learning and their recitation and singing were of a high standard. The pupils read with fluency and understanding. A wider range of reading material should be acquired to improve the pupils’ reading skills further. A high standard is achieved in pupils’ writing.

- In English, oral language is successfully integrated with reading, with writing and with poetry. In a number of classes, very good practice was identified in exploring language and in the development of skills. A more consistent implementation of discrete oral language should be undertaken on a whole-school basis. In many classes, pupils recite a wide range of verse with confidence and expression. Overall, very good standards in reading are achieved. Throughout the school, classroom activity is complemented with literacy lift-off, with station-teaching and with peer tutoring. Class libraries are used to good effect to address the varying ability levels of pupils. A very high standard in writing is achieved throughout the school. An emphasis on good handwriting routines was observed in some classes and this good practice should be extended further.

- The quality of teaching and learning in Mathematics is very good. From an early age, pupils engage in effective strategies to develop their competencies. The creation of Mathematics’ environments in classrooms is praiseworthy in consolidating pupil learning. There is a consistent use of mathematical language during classroom activity. Mental arithmetic is used effectively for revision and reinforcement purposes. The use of concrete material and the interactive white-board is widespread to complement pupils’ learning. Problem-solving, together with an emphasis on the development of mathematical skills is promoted productively during lessons. An increased use of calculators during problem-solving activity is recommended. Many lessons incorporate productive talk and discussion sessions. Overall, the pupils’ recording in copybooks is of a high standard.

- Teachers make very good use of Drama as a methodology. Teachers link Drama consistently with oral language development in English and a productive thematic approach is adopted. Resources are used to good effect in the course of pupil activity. Talk and discussion are used to varying degrees to develop understanding and a greater discursive engagement with pupils is advised. A good focus on the elements of Drama was observed in some classes.
• The teachers’ assessment practices allow for a range of approaches. Many teachers maintain assessment data in folders and this practice is to be encouraged at each level in the school. A more formalised system of target setting and tracking is recommended in accordance with assessment for learning (AfL) processes. The teachers are committed to a regular sharing of information as the pupil progresses through the school. The results of standardised tests are carefully tabulated. An increased analysis of results is recommended to further inform future teaching and learning interventions.

6. Quality of Support for Pupils

• The teaching staff has compiled a detailed plan that guides practice in the area of special education. The process of devising individual education plans (IEP) is inclusive. In most cases, good informative detail is recorded in the IEP with clear targets, learning profiles and a period for review documented. A greater consistency is recommended in the level of detail recorded in the IEP and in short-term plans. Teachers undertake a wide variety of interventions that includes a combination of withdrawal and in-class support. There is a clear identifiable focus on early intervention. Greater differentiation is needed in the narrative writing initiative.

• The special needs assistants (SNAs) are diligent and conscientious. They are proactive in supporting pupils as needs arise in classrooms.

• The home-school liaison co-ordinator (HSCL) in close collaboration with parents, with the principal, with the school completion programme personnel, succeeds in developing a positive supportive structure between the home and the school. Therein, an increased involvement of parents in supporting classroom activity is recommended. In conjunction with the School Completion Programme (SCP), a complementary programme of worthy activities that focus on social development has been devised to support pupils.

• The staff makes a worthy effort to create an inclusive environment for pupils with English as an additional language (EAL). The planning, programme delivery and assessment procedures are good. Effective strategies and a wide range of resources are utilised to complement the learning programme. Pupils are making good progress in oral language development. These teachers are also deployed in the areas of learning support/resource and management is reminded that the focus of the language teachers should be on EAL pupils.

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