Scoil Bhaile Mór Síol Anmchadha
Lawrencetown, Ballinasloe, Co. Galway
Uimhir rolla: 17170T

Date of inspection: 28 April 2010
WHOLE-SCHOOL EVALUATION
A whole-school evaluation of Scoil Bhaile Mór Shíol Anmchadha was undertaken in April, 2010. This report presents the findings of the evaluation and makes recommendations for improvement. The evaluation focused on the quality of teaching and learning in English, Irish, Mathematics and Physical Education. 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.

INTRODUCTION – SCHOOL CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND
Scoil Bhaile Mór Shíol Anmchadha is a co-educational primary school located in the village of Lawrencetown, approximately 13km from Ballinasloe, Co. Galway. The school maintains a steady enrolment pattern which is projected to continue for the foreseeable future. School records indicate that the majority of pupils have very good records of attendance. The following table provides an overview of the enrolment and staffing in the school at the time of the evaluation:

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<tr>
<th>Number</th>
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<tr>
<td>Pupils enrolled in the school</td>
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<td>Mainstream classes in the school</td>
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<td>Teachers on the school staff</td>
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<td>Mainstream class teachers</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teachers working in support roles</td>
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<td>Special needs assistants</td>
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1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT

1.1 Characteristic spirit, mission or vision
The school is under the patronage of the Catholic Bishop of Clonfert. Its strong Christian ethos is guided by a policy statement on religious education and a mission statement which supports openness and inclusiveness. The school seeks to provide a secure learning environment where the uniqueness of each child is recognised, where all aspects of development can be addressed and where the values of love, tolerance, fairness and respect for self and others are nurtured. The board of management, staff and parent body work very effectively in pursuit of these aims and the atmosphere in the school is characterised by teamwork, support, friendship and mutual respect.

1.2 Board of management
The board of management is properly constituted and operates effectively. Minutes of meetings are carefully maintained and indicate that the board’s work of late has focussed on maintenance issues, fundraising activities, acquisition of resources, health and safety concerns and the review and development of school policy. The work of the board is managed in an efficient manner with individual members taking responsibility for specific tasks. The board is regularly informed of the school’s financial situation and an appropriate system is in place to facilitate the tracking of expenditure and receipt of monies. The board is now advised to have accounts certified or audited on an annual basis in accordance with Section 18(1) of the Education Act 1998.

The board complies with guidelines and regulations in relation to the length of the school day, circulation of the school plan and provision of specific policies. The school issues a newsletter at regular intervals and the board should consider adapting an issue of the newsletter to constitute a formal report on the operation of the school in line with Section 20 of the Act. The board
identifies further development of the school’s technological resources among its future priorities. The school’s current action plan covers a period of a year and mainly references priorities as identified by the teachers in relation to curriculum implementation. It would be of value to extend the timeframe for action planning to cover a three-year period and to include in the plan the board’s priorities in relation to accommodation needs, organisational policy development and resource provision.

The board is very conscious of its responsibilities in relation to maintaining the school premises and safeguarding the health and safety of those using them. A health and safety audit was recently completed and safety issues highlighted in it have been addressed. A critical incidence policy has also been formulated. The school building dates from 1940 and was last refurbished in 2001. It provides a general-purposes room, a staff-room, toilet facilities and four classrooms. Three of the classrooms are particularly small and one of these is currently being used as a learning-support/resource room. Further supplementary teaching also takes place in the general-purposes room. Given the demands placed on the existing accommodation, it is recommended that the board should review the overall accommodation needs of the school.

The board values and supports the staff’s engagement in continuous professional development. The principal has engaged with the Leadership Development for Schools service and other staff members have undertaken a range of courses to inform their practice in implementing the curriculum and in modifying it for pupils with learning difficulties and special educational needs. It would be of value now to develop a policy on staff development to reflect the school’s current practice in this area.

1.3 In-school management
The in-school management team comprises the principal, the deputy principal and a special duties teacher. The principal enunciates a clear vision for the school and shares it most effectively with the staff. Daily administrative and organisational tasks are very capably managed. A positive school climate is fostered and a very high level of collaboration is promoted among the staff. Staff members are encouraged to develop their personal skills and to share their strengths and individual talents for the benefit of other staff members and the pupils. Staff meetings are organised each term and the staff is also facilitated in engaging with regional curriculum advisors.

While all staff members carry out tasks in addition to their teaching duties, specific duties have been formally assigned to the deputy principal and a special duties teacher as members of the in-school management team. These post holders diligently carry out a wide range of duties pertinent to the context of the school and they strongly acknowledge the support and assistance that they receive from the other staff members as they work to fulfil their duties.

1.4 Management of relationships and communication with the school community
Praiseworthy attention is given to the management of relationships and communication with the school community and a number of practices operate to very good effect to sustain open channels of communication. A school calendar, the newsletter and pupil diaries provide parents with regular information on school events and classroom work. In addition, evening meetings are organised to provide information and facilitate discussion on policy development, curriculum implementation and investment in teaching materials and technological resources. Parent-teacher meetings and an induction day for new pupils are annual events while parents of pupils with learning difficulties or special educational needs are regularly consulted regarding their children’s education programmes. Parents may also meet teachers at other times and written reports on pupil progress are issued at the end of the school year.
The school has a very active parent association that links purposefully with the principal and other members of the board. The association is kept well informed of school finances and of how grant monies and monies raised through fundraising are used in the school. Representatives of the association reported that there is a high level of parental involvement in fundraising activities. Parents are also very supportive of the pupils’ participation in such activities as shared reading, craft-work, the Green Schools project, swimming, Cumann na mBunscol events, concerts, plays and carol services. The representatives expressed deep satisfaction with the provision in the school and cited the maintenance of good working relations with the stakeholders as one of the association’s main priorities.

1.5 Management of pupils
All members of staff are strongly committed to fostering a positive school atmosphere. Very careful attention is given to the management of pupils and monthly assemblies are organised to facilitate regular discussion of school practices and procedures. The school’s code of behaviour was developed in consultation with parents, and all staff members conscientiously strive to implement it with consistency and fairness. Consequently, a very pleasant, relaxed school atmosphere pertains.

2. QUALITY OF SCHOOL PLANNING

2.1 Whole-school and classroom planning
The quality of whole-school planning is very good. The board, parents and staff are appropriately involved in the planning process and the school plan comprises comprehensive documents that provide clear guidance with regard to organisational practice and curriculum implementation. In consultation with the planning and curriculum support services, the teachers over time have focussed on specific areas to bring about school improvement. The development of the school grounds as a centre for learning, the creation of mathematics-rich classroom environments, the integration of pupils with special educational needs, oral language skills, comprehension skills and folk dancing have all received attention. Whole-school targets are set for literacy and numeracy and are incorporated annually into the school’s action plan. The quality of classroom planning is also very high. Teaching objectives, strategies, methodologies and approaches are clearly specified and the monthly records of work covered are purposefully analysed to monitor implementation of the curriculum and to ensure continuity and progression from class to class.

2.2 Child protection policy and procedures
Confirmation was provided that, in compliance with Department of Education and Skills Primary Circular 0061/2006, the board of management has formally adopted the Department’s Child Protection Guidelines for Primary Schools (Published September 2001). Confirmation was also provided 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.
3. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

3.1 Language

**Gaeilge**

Múintear an Ghaeilge go héifeachtach tríd an scoil agus baintear caighdeán aná-mhaith amach sna ceithre scil teanga. I ngach seomra ranga cothaítear timpeallacht a thacaíonn go láidir le foghlaim na Gaeilge. Cuirtear pictiúir, lipéid, fóg raí gearra agus ábhair phrionta ar taispeáint agus bíonn gnáthrudaí, frapaí agus feisteas drámaíochta ar fáil chun cuidiú le hionchur teanga, tuiscint foclóra agus cruthú suíomh difríúil. Baintear úsáid rialta as druil, aithriseoireacht agus amhránaíocht chun taithí a fháil ar rithim agus struchtúr na teanga. Láimhsítear cluichí teanga agus an drámaíocht go sciliúil chun an teanga ó bhéal a dhainiú agus dul siar a éascú. Is iomhá a roinnt ranganna an Ghaeilge a úsáid le linn eile churaclaim a mhúineadh agus moltar an dea-chleachtas seo a fháil sa scoil. Múintear conas an fheadóg stáin a sheinnt agus treiseáras teochaí ar ghnéithe eile den chultúr Ga elach trí pháirt a ghlacadh i gCórfhéile na Scoileanna agus san Féile Scoldrámaíochta.

Tá rath ar theagasc na léitheoireachta agus na scríbhneoireachta freisin. Baintear úsáid an-chlisteacht as leabhair bheaga chun scileanna éisteachta agus cumas labhartha na ndaltaí óga a chur chun cinn chomh maith le linn sa léitheoireacht a spreagadh. Is inmholtá go bhfeictear rialtaí mbon fhiorchumású agus iad ag cur ceisteanna ar a chéile faoi nithe difríúla a bhfuil an teanga ina n-áirítear sí. Ba thairbheach tógáil ar an gcleachtas tangrúil seo agus léitheoireacht i gcomhpháirt ar chaitheamh suas tríd an scoil. Cuirtear cumas litrithe na ndaltaí ar ndáltaí ar rithim agus fuascailte ar a chásadh faoi réimse cuí tábhachtaí scríbhneoireachta. An fheadóg stáin a sheinnt agus treiseáras teochaí agus treiseáras teachaí is iomhá a roinnt ranganna an Ghaeilge a úsáid le linn eile churaclaim a mhúineadh agus moltar an dea-chleachtas seo a fháil sa scoil. Múintear conas an fheadóg stáin a sheinnt agus treiseáras teochaí ar ghnéithe eile den chultúr Ga elach trí pháirt a ghlacadh i gCórfhéile na Scoileanna agus san Féile Scoldrámaíochta.

**Irish**

Irish is taught effectively throughout the school and very good standards are attained in the four language skills. An environment which strongly supports the learning of Irish is cultivated in each classroom. Pictures, labels, short notices and printed material are displayed and everyday items, props and drama accessories are available to help with language input, vocabulary comprehension and the creation of different scenes. Regular use is made of drill, recitation and song singing to provide experience of the rhythm and structure of the language. Language games and drama are ably handled to reinforce oral language and facilitate revision. It is customary in some classes to use Irish during the teaching of other curricular areas and it is recommended that this good practice is extended in the school. The pupils are taught how to play the tin whistle and their appreciation of other aspects of Irish culture is enhanced through participation in Córphéile na Scoileanna and in the Féile Scoldrámaíochta.

Reading and writing is also very well taught. Very clever usage is made of little books to develop the younger pupils’ listening skills and oral competency as well as stimulating their interest in reading. It is praiseworthy that pupils are seen engaging in real communication as they question each other about different aspects in the books. It would be beneficial to build on this successful practice and to organise shared reading throughout the school. The pupils’ ability to spell is developed in a systematic manner and an appropriate range of writing tasks is undertaken including lists, news, comprehension questions and personal writing. With the help of small dictionaries, charts, texts and workbooks the pupils are enabled to read with understanding and
to write with accuracy. To maintain these high standards it would be of benefit to formulate sub themes under the major language themes in the school plan in order to provide clear guidance in relation to the range of work that should be undertaken at each class level.

**English**

All strands of the English curriculum are conscientiously addressed at each class level. Praiseworthy emphasis is placed on developing oral language. Language topics are identified in individual teacher planning and are approached through discrete lessons. A range of enjoyable strategies is used to extend vocabulary and the work is closely linked with reading and writing activities. From an early age pupils are encouraged to discuss and ask questions and to communicate clearly and confidently. Pupils are exposed to a suitable range of poetry and are given opportunities to recite rhymes and poems, to read poetry and to respond to it through discussion. The school is encouraged to develop the pupils’ responses to poetry further by exploring over time the full range of techniques and effects used in poetry.

It is praiseworthy that class teachers work in collaboration with the support team to implement a very systematic approach to the development of phonemic and phonological awareness. The school also elicits the support of parents to engage pupils in the reading process. Stories are read frequently in class and, in the junior classes, an array of little books provides interesting material to be explored through shared reading in school and in the home. Pupils experience the serialised reading of class novels in the middle and senior classes and they are skilfully guided to respond to a variety of texts through discussion, art and drama. Pupils display interest in a broad range of authors and they read competently and with confidence.

The pupils are provided with opportunities to explore different genres of writing including news, magazine articles, reports, letter writing, diary entries, descriptions, poetry and story. Pupils regularly practise the writing process and are enabled to use technology as a practical editing tool. A range of successful strategies is used to develop spelling and the teachers adopt a consistent approach to the teaching of handwriting resulting in praiseworthy standards of work presentation.

**3.2 Mathematics**

The quality of the teaching and learning in Mathematics is very good. The provision is thoughtfully co-ordinated in collaboration with the support team. Practical hands-on activity is a regular feature of the practice. Activities are carefully structured and very effectively differentiated for each class level and for individual pupils. The school plan provides clear guidance in relation to the acquisition of mathematical language and there is a definite focus on promoting understanding and correct usage of mathematical language during the organised activities. Story is used to good effect to enhance conceptual understanding and to focus attention on mathematics in real life situations. Estimation skills and problem-solving strategies are appropriately emphasised. Pupils are positive in their attitude to Mathematics. They very obviously enjoy the mathematical games and drill strategies used to enhance memorisation and recall of number facts and they engage fully in set tasks. The pupils, in general, demonstrate a sound knowledge of the concepts covered and record their written computations neatly.

**3.3 Physical Education**

The school’s programme in Physical Education encompasses a broad range of activities including movement, small games, dance, adventure trails, athletics, football, hurling, camogie, rugby, basketball and swimming. A comprehensive school policy statement outlines the programme of activity at each class level and provides practical guidance on differentiating the activities for pupils with special educational needs. Teachers draw on a range of programmes including the Primary Schools’ Sport Initiative and Special Olympics Ireland to plan activities. During class
lessons, pupils listen attentively to clearly expressed instructions and they engage readily in activities focussed on promoting physical dexterity, fitness, problem-solving, teamwork and social interaction. The activities are very carefully structured to suit the different capabilities of the pupils. Appropriate resources are used to very good effect to engage pupils in a suitable range of activities. Outdoor adventure trails are successfully organised and pupils clearly enjoy and benefit from learning Irish set dances and folk dances from other European countries. It is commendable that at some class levels the Irish language is used at appropriate times to give instruction and to praise efforts.

3.4 Assessment
The staff uses a wide range of assessment techniques including teacher-designed tests and tasks, checklists, reading logs and portfolios of work. Standardised tests in English and Mathematics are administered annually and the results are carefully analysed to assist in setting whole-school targets. A variety of suitable strategies is used to engage pupils positively in assessing their own learning. Pupils also compile portfolios of their own work which are then passed from class to class. Support teachers choose from a wide range of appropriate tests and skilfully use them to screen pupils for supplementary teaching, to diagnose specific areas of difficulty and to plan teaching and learning activities. Written progress reports are issued to parents at the end of the school year and the school is now encouraged to review their report templates in the light of recent work carried out by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment.

4. QUALITY OF SUPPORT FOR PUPILS

4.1 Pupils with special educational needs
The quality of the support for pupils with learning difficulties and special educational needs is commendable. The school’s support team comprises a learning-support/resource teacher based in the school, a visiting learning-support teacher, a full-time special needs assistant and a part-time special needs assistant. A comprehensive policy statement underpins the support practice in the school. In line with this policy, a high level of collaboration occurs between the support team and the mainstream class teachers. The teachers also regularly engage with the parents and with professional personnel involved with the pupils. Guidelines have been prepared in specific curricular areas to inform differentiation for both pupils with learning difficulties and those with exceptional abilities. Guidelines have also been prepared for the special needs assistants who are very caring and attentive to the pupils and who play a significant role in enabling them derive maximum benefit from class activities.

The support provision is effectively managed. It incorporates early intervention at senior infant level and supplementary teaching is organised on a withdrawal basis for small groups and individual pupils as required. Comprehensive individual programmes are designed for each pupil in receipt of supplementary teaching and the stated learning targets are focussed on the pupils’ needs as identified through class assessments, diagnostic testing and analyses of professional reports.

5. Conclusion
The school has strengths in the following areas:
- The school has a dedicated and forward-thinking board of management.
- Parents engage in a wide range of activities in support of the work of the school.
- The school plan is an informative document that clearly impacts on the school as an organisation and effectively guides curriculum implementation and support provision.
• The quality of teaching and learning and the quality of support provision are of a very good standard.
• Whole-school self-evaluation and review are embedded in the culture of the school.
• The pupils are very well managed and the staff’s commitment to the welfare of the pupils is praiseworthy.

The following key recommendations are made in order to further improve the quality of education provided by the school:
• The board should establish the practice of having the school accounts certified or audited on an annual basis.
• The period for action planning should be extended from one to three years and the board’s organisational priority areas, including accommodation and resource provision, should be included in the action plan.
• Chun tacú leis an dea-obair sa Ghaeilge b’fhiú forbairt a dhéanamh ar an bplean scoile agus réimse na teanga ba chóir a thabhairt faoi ag gach rangleibhéal a chlárú go soiléir ann. To support the good work in Irish it would be of benefit to develop the school plan and to record clearly in it the range of language that should be undertaken at each class level.

Post evaluation meetings were held with the staff and the board of management where the draft findings and recommendations of the evaluation were presented and discussed.