

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

**Whole School Evaluation
REPORT**

**Scoil Náisiúnta Bráthair Mícheál Ó Cléirigh
Creevy, Ballyshannon
County Donegal
Uimhir rolla: 17268N**

Date of inspection: 03 October 2013



1. Introduction

Scoil Náisiúnta Bráthair Mícheál Ó Cléirigh is a vertical, co-educational primary school under the patronage of the Catholic Bishop of Raphoe. The attendance patterns of the 196 pupils enrolled are very good. Declining enrolment figures resulted in the loss of one classroom teacher at the end of the last school year. Pupils are now distributed across seven classrooms, five of which are dual grade. During this whole-school evaluation, provision for English, Irish, Mathematics and Science was inspected. 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 is committed to school development and to ensuring a high-quality learning environment where children are enabled to reach their full potential.
- The principal carries out administrative duties to a high standard and prioritises a very welcoming, active and secure environment for pupils.
- Teachers work conscientiously to provide quality education for their pupils and are very committed to their own professional development.
- Pupils are very well behaved and co-operate effectively in a safe and happy environment.
- The parents' association and the wider community offer very good support to the board, teachers and pupils.
- Pupils experience a very broad programme of co-curricular and extracurricular activities.
- The use of the school garden as a context for learning in Science is highly commendable.

The following **main recommendations** are made:

- Moltar a thuilleadh béime a chur ar fhorbairt na Gaeilge mar theanga beo cumarsáide sna seomraí ranga uilig chun cur le líofacht agus saibhreas teanga na ndaltaí [*Further emphasis should be placed on developing Irish as a living communicative language in all classrooms to enhance pupils' fluency and language acquisition*].
- Financial contributions from parents towards tuition for co-curricular activities during school time should be discontinued.

3. Quality of School Management

- The board of management works in a purposeful manner. Members are committed to school development and to ensuring a high-quality learning environment where children are enabled to reach their full potential. The board's role in actively supporting policy

review is commended. It is now recommended that financial contributions from parents towards tuition for co-curricular activities in Music during school time be discontinued.

- The in-school management team comprises the principal, deputy principal and three teachers with posts of responsibility. The principal provides very good leadership to the school community. He has very good rapport with staff and pupils and prioritises a very welcoming, active and secure environment for all. Administrative duties are carried out to a high standard. The principal's commitment to and engagement in team teaching are commended. The deputy principal and other post holders work very diligently and contribute to the successful management of the school. Duties have been reviewed recently and all post holders have curricular responsibilities.
- The management of human and physical resources is commendable. There are ten teachers and one special needs assistant (SNA) on staff. A part-time resource teacher also attends. All staff are enthusiastic, positive and demonstrate a very good work ethic. Teachers undertake considerable continuing professional development linked to school improvement priorities. As a next step, links should be established with the National Induction Programme for Teachers and consideration should be given to nominating a teacher-mentor to support newly appointed staff. The school benefits significantly from the efficient, diligent efforts of its secretary and cleaner/caretaker.
- Learning environments are exemplary; classrooms present very well in terms of print and number-rich displays and are very well resourced. Corridor displays are highly commendable and celebrate the pupils' sporting and cultural achievements as well as their written, creative and environmental work.
- The management of relationships with the school community is commendable. Very clear channels of communication have been established. Amongst other strategies, a very useful web site, monthly news letters and text alerts are provided. Informative end-of-year reports on pupils' progress, including attendance figures and test results, are issued to parents. Support for parents in terms of phonics training and links to e-learning resources via the school web site are praiseworthy. Responses from questionnaires indicate that there is strong parental support for the school.
- The parents' association offers very good support to the board, teachers and pupils and works most industriously to raise additional funding for school needs. Their recent work in establishing a book-rental scheme and in helping to develop the central library is highly praiseworthy. Parents participate in a range of extracurricular activities. Going forward, school management should encourage further the involvement of parents in policy development and review.
- During the evaluation, the management of pupils was very good overall. Pupils manifest as enthusiastic learners. They work co-operatively and interact respectfully with their teachers. Whole-school assemblies, which celebrate a wide range of pupil endeavour, are conducted on a weekly basis. As a next step, the establishment of a student council should be considered. Responses to the pupils' questionnaires indicate that pupils know the school rules, feel safe in class and think their school is a good school.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- The quality of whole-school administrative and curriculum planning is commendable. Going forward, a whole-school policy on pupil supervision should be drawn up. Very

effective action planning is used to progress curricular and organisational priorities at staff meetings.

- Teachers' individual planning is good overall. However, more use could be made of monthly progress records as a means to ensure progression in pupils' learning from year to year. Further shared planning is recommended to help align programmes of learning between split classes. It is advised that some teachers review their timetables to include Irish on a daily basis.
- A good level of school self-evaluation pertains. The school is involved in a continuing process of improvement which includes seeking feedback from both parents and pupils. Very good progress has been made in developing a school improvement plan for literacy in accordance with Department Circular 39/2012.
- 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

- The overall quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement across the curriculum is commendable. Teachers are innovative in their approach and there were some instances of exemplary teaching noted during the evaluation. Pupils' responses to questionnaires indicate that teachers explain things clearly and tell them how to improve their work. Some responses, for example in respect of opportunities to work in groups and to have regular access to computers, would benefit from further discussion at school level. From their questionnaire responses, parents think that teaching is good and that their children are doing well.
- Ar an iomlán baineann caighdeán réasúnta maith amach sa Ghaeilge. Úsáidtear an dramaíocht go héifeachtach chun a chinntiú go bhfuil na daltaí ag baint taitneamh as foghlaim na teanga. B'fhiú a chinntiú, áfach, go bhfuil forbairt chórasach ag teacht ar an ábhar teanga atá a mhúineadh ó rang go rang. Ar an iomlán, moltar a thuilleadh béime a chur ar fhorbairt na Gaeilge mar theanga beo cumarsáide sna seomraí ranga uilig chun cur le líofacht agus saibhreas teanga na ndaltaí. Cé go léann na daltaí go caighdeán sásúil, ba thábhachtach taithí níos struchtúrtha léitheoireachta a chur ar fáil. Ar an iomlán, tá caighdeán sásúil ar an scríbhneoireacht neamhspléach a chleachtadh. Moltar anois deiseanna breise chun scríbhneoireacht neamhspléach a chleachtadh. Moltar freisin an measúnú a fhorbairt agus an *Triail Ghaeilge Dhroim Chonrach* a úsáid ó rang a dó chun na hoidí a chur ar an eolas faoi dhul chun cinn na ndaltaí.
- *Reasonably good standards are achieved in Irish overall. Drama is used effectively to ensure that the pupils are learning the language in an enjoyable manner. However, there is a need to ensure that there is systematic development of the language content taught from class to class. Overall, further emphasis should be placed on developing Irish as a living communicative language in all classrooms to enhance pupils' fluency and language acquisition. While pupils read to a satisfactory standard, it would be important to provide a more structured reading experience. The standard of writing is satisfactory overall. It is recommended now that pupils have additional opportunities to undertake independent writing. It is further recommended that assessment is developed and that the Drumcondra Irish Test for Ordinary Primary Schools be used from second class upwards to inform teachers about the pupils' progress.*

- Provision for English is strong. Guided by the school improvement plan for literacy, oral language and listening skills receive particular attention. In many classrooms, there is purposeful use of pair and group talk; this should be strongly promoted in all classrooms. The development of pupils' reading is effective. Junior pupils' word identification skills are well addressed and, for more senior pupils, reading fluency development is good. Approaches such as team teaching, readers' theatre and the use of class novels are commended. Overall results in standardised tests of reading are very good from year to year. Pupils are afforded various opportunities to write and many write confidently. However, further focus on spelling, punctuation and handwriting is necessary. Poetry is well addressed but further attention to memorisation and recitation would be beneficial.
- Provision for Mathematics is effective. There is good emphasis on mental calculations and the development of problem-solving skills. Pupils' knowledge of tables and number facts is appropriate. During the evaluation, very good use of resources and emphasis on the use of accurate mathematical language were observed in every classroom. Team teaching, introduced in certain classes, is working successfully to date. Overall results in standardised tests are very good from year to year. Further clarification about the mathematical language to be taught at each class level and the development of further mathematics trails would be beneficial.
- The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in Science is good. Features of effective practice include the promotion of scientific skills through hands-on collaborative investigations and the exploration of the local seashore habitat. The use of the school garden as a context for learning in Science is highly commendable. Examples of completed work are displayed in classrooms and pupils demonstrate good understanding of the concepts taught. Areas for development in some classrooms include the reinforcement of scientific skills, the planned development of scientific language, the further interrogation of the pupils' ideas through questioning, *Know, Want to know, Learned* (KWL) grids and the use of concept maps.
- Assessment practices are successful overall. Teachers' record keeping is good and their introduction of assessment for learning (AfL) approaches shows considerable promise. Pupils' written work across the curriculum is well monitored and, in many cases, feedback strategies are consistent with best practice.

6. Quality of Support for Pupils

- Provision for pupils with additional and special educational needs is commendable. Three teachers provide specific support in this area; two are based in the school and one visits from another school. A special needs assistant works very effectively to support pupils with additional needs in the mainstream classrooms.
- The priority learning needs of pupils with additional and special educational needs are well identified in individualised planning. Specific learning targets are outlined and defined achievement criteria are included. Interactions observed in the learner-friendly supplementary teaching settings were very affirming and encouraging of the pupils. Learning outcomes are very good.
- Early identification and intervention procedures are working very well. Support teachers work very successfully alongside class teachers in providing very inclusive, effective supports for pupils in literacy and numeracy. Some very effective withdrawal intervention using small-group support is also facilitated. Support should be maximised for children identified with the most need, however. In particular, pupils with severe reading difficulties

should receive very regular small-group support. Further collaboration with the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) and the Special Education Support Service (SESS) will be beneficial.

- The quality of pastoral care is very good in this school. The overall climate is positive and child friendly and this is reflected in the confident attitudes of most pupils. They are facilitated to part-take in a very wide range of co-curricular and extracurricular activities. These include many sporting activities, quizzes, book fairs and charity, *Green-School* and choir events. Of particular note is the pupils' participation in samba drumming and, through it, their participation in community events.

Appendix

SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

Submitted by the Board of Management

Area 1: Observations on the content of the inspection report

The Board of Management of Scoil Naisiúnta Bráthair Mícheál Ó Cléirigh welcomes the many positive findings in the W.S.E. report. The affirmation of the work done by the teachers, ancillary staff, pupils, parents and board of management was very encouraging.

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 board of management and staff have analysed the report are working together to commence a process of implementing the recommendations.

