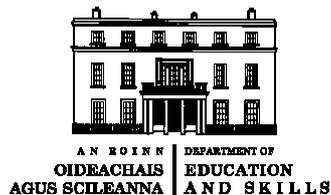


An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Scoil Mhuire, Wolfhill,
Via Athy, County Laois
Uimhir rolla: 17441B

Date of inspection: 10 December 2010



1. Introduction

Scoil Mhuire, Wolfhill, is a two-teacher primary school under the patronage of the Catholic Bishop of Kildare and Leighlin. The school promotes a Catholic ethos which is exemplified in its welcoming atmosphere and its strong links with parents and the local community. A shared learning-support teacher provides support to a number of pupils with special educational needs. Enrolment trends show a gradual decline and the school currently caters for twenty-two pupils. Attendance levels are good for the majority of pupils but the poor attendance of a significant minority of pupils is a cause of concern. The evaluation took place during inclement weather conditions when pupil attendance rates were lower than normal. 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 strong and shared commitment of the board of management, principal, staff and parents to the development of the school is commendable.
- Pupils are educated in a productive, well-resourced environment and a positive learning atmosphere is evident throughout the school.
- Teachers work conscientiously and use a broad range of approaches and methodologies to enhance the educational experiences of pupils.
- Pupils' writing skills in English are well developed throughout the school.
- Pupils are well behaved and they work co-operatively with teachers and one another.

The following **main recommendations** are made:

- A whole-school approach to the examination of local history should be developed and implemented.
- A structured oral language programme in English based on the curriculum should be delivered to provide for the incremental development of pupils' speaking skills.
- Provision for the assessment of pupils' progress should be further developed and the data garnered should be utilised to inform teaching and learning.

3. Quality of School Management

- The quality of management provided by the board of management is good. The board is to be particularly commended for the modernisation and enhancement of school facilities and for the maintenance of the school building to a high standard. Minutes of meetings detail wide-ranging discussions. It is recommended that meetings take place more regularly to ensure the board is in a position to provide effective governance to the school. An agreed report of each meeting should become a standard item on all board agendas. Policies and plans are ratified by the board. Going forward, the board should involve itself and other partners further in the development and discussion of the school

plan. School accounts have been computerised and certified. In line with Circular 11/95, *Time in School*, the practice of releasing junior infants at lunchtime for the month of September should be reduced to the first two weeks.

- The principal provides effective leadership to the school. She has a clear vision based on the school's mission statement and exhibits well-developed administrative, organisational and interpersonal skills. She is supported by a special duties teacher who capably undertakes a range of pastoral and organisational duties. It is recommended that these duties be updated to incorporate curriculum responsibilities and that they be reviewed regularly to reflect evolving school needs.
- The management of material resources is good. The use of information and communication technology (ICT) as a pedagogical tool has been greatly enhanced by the recent installation of modern ICT in each classroom. There is a plentiful range of resources to support curriculum implementation.
- The school has an actively supportive parents' association that is not affiliated to the National Parents' Council Primary. Discussions with parent representatives and the results from parent questionnaires indicate satisfaction with the range of information and with the quality of education provided by the school. To further develop this good practice, the school should consider the benefits of issuing a termly newsletter.
- The management of pupils is good. All teachers interact with pupils in a positive and encouraging manner. Positive reinforcement and affirmation of pupils' behaviour is used throughout the school. Results of pupil questionnaires strongly indicate that the school has successfully created a safe environment where pupils feel assured in their learning. Their involvement in a broad range of co-curricular and extracurricular activities positively enhances their educational experience.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- The overall quality of whole-school planning is good. Organisational policies are clearly written and are context specific. They serve as a useful guide to inform school procedures. The board should satisfy itself that the school's enrolment policy complies with current legislation. A review of the health and safety statement should also be considered.
- Curricular plans for all areas are in place and the school collaborates effectively with a cluster of local schools for planning purposes. On the whole, planning is contextualised to the needs of the school and contains guidance for teachers to inform their individual planning in the multi-class context. Some subjects contain detailed overviews of content for each class level over a four-year cycle and this approach should be considered for the remaining subject areas as they are reviewed.
- School self-evaluation is at an early stage of development. To advance this process, the school is advised to review its three-year planning diary to ensure that policies and plans can be reviewed within an appropriate timeframe. In future, self-evaluation should focus primarily on developing classroom practice and enhancing pupils' achievements.
- The quality of individual teacher's planning is good. There is an agreed approach to planning that adheres to the principles and structure of the curriculum. Planning would be enhanced further if curriculum objectives were used consistently to inform short-term plans and monthly progress records. Many long-term plans clearly delineate the content to be covered and this approach should be used for the remaining plans.

Child protection policy and procedures

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, 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.

5. Quality of Teaching, Learning and Pupil Achievement

- The quality of teaching and learning in this school is good. Productive learning environments have been created throughout the school. There is evidence of effective management of the multi-class context in the delivery of the curriculum. Teachers give clear explanations and make skilful use of questioning to check and reinforce pupils' understanding. Written work is regularly monitored and the standard of presentation is high. Overall, there is a good balance between whole-class teaching and opportunities for pupils to work in pairs and small groups. On the whole, pupils can discuss their learning with confidence and learning outcomes are good.
- The overall quality of assessment of learning is good. Standardised tests in Mathematics and English are administered annually and results are tracked. Judicious use is made of screening, non-reading intelligence tests and diagnostic tests. Assessment for learning records include work samples, reading records, checklists and teacher-designed tests. The recording of baseline data on pupils in the infant classes is recommended and the school should explore further strategies to collect, collate and use data on pupils' progress across the curriculum. The school's assessment policy should be reviewed to inform developments.
- Ar an mórgóir, múintear an Ghaeilge go héifeachtach. Tá dearcadh dearfach i leith na Gaeilge á chothú tríd an scoil agus baintear úsáid as Gaeilge neamhfhoirmiúil go minic i rith an lae. Múintear téamaí an churaclam go comhsheasmach ar fud na scoile. Tá structúir maith ar na ceachtanna agus tugtar deiseanna do na daltaí teanga nua a úsáid. Moltar áfach go ndéanfar forbairt bhreise ar ghnáthchumarsáid agus líofacht na ndaltaí sa Ghaeilge. Tá scileanna léitheoireachta agus scríbhneoireachta á saothrú go céimniúil ach d'fhéadfaí béim sa bhreis a chur ar forbairt na saorscríbhneoireachta. Dírehtar aire chuí ar chruinneas gramadaí a fhorbairt. Aithrisíonn na daltaí raon leathan rann agus dánta.
- *Overall, Irish is taught effectively. A positive attitude to Irish is cultivated throughout the school and frequent use is made of informal Irish during the day. A whole-school approach is adopted in the teaching of the curriculum themes. Lessons are well structured and provide opportunities for the pupils to acquire and apply new language. It is recommended, however, that pupils' conversational and fluency skills be developed further. Pupils' reading and writing skills are developed systematically but more emphasis could be placed on developing independent writing skills. Appropriate attention is focused on aspects of grammar. Pupils recite a wide range of rhymes and poems.*
- The overall quality of teaching and learning in English is good. While some attention is paid to oral language development, it is recommended that every teacher uses the curriculum as a basis for their oral language programme and that time is dedicated weekly to oral language development. Further attention should be paid to ensuring that

pupils are developing phonological awareness in the infant classes and are practising correct letter formation. Pupils' reading skills are well developed and pupils are given regular opportunities to engage with a wide variety of differentiated reading materials. Very effective practice is evident in English writing throughout the school where varied opportunities to write in different genres are provided and good emphasis is placed on the writing process. The pupils' experience of poetry is very positive and they listen to, learn, recite, write and respond to age-appropriate rhymes and poems.

- The quality of teaching and learning in Mathematics is of a high standard. In the infant and junior classes, good use is made of talk and discussion to teach relevant mathematical language and pupils engage fruitfully in appropriate learning activities with concrete resources. The practical relevance of Mathematics is reinforced throughout the school. Most pupils can competently perform number operations and are positively disposed to Mathematics. A whole-school approach to problem-solving has been devised and implemented. A greater emphasis should be placed on mental mathematics at the outset of lessons.
- On the whole, the quality of teaching and learning in History is good. Pupils are exposed to a broad and balanced curriculum over two four-year cycles. It is recommended that a more systematic and sequential approach to the treatment of local history be planned and introduced. In some cases, a further emphasis could be placed on developing pupils' skills in history by ensuring that they are encouraged to critically evaluate and synthesise information. In the middle and senior classes, pupils undertake projects on a regular basis and include new learning on the class timeline. Pupils demonstrate good levels of interest in topics covered and discuss them with confidence.

6. Quality of Support for Pupils

- Pupils in receipt of learning support receive high quality instruction in a supportive learning environment. Planning and record keeping is of a high standard and pupils' individual plans are shared with classroom teachers. Lessons are focused on identified learning needs and productive resources are used to support learning. Consideration should be given to extending provision to pupils experiencing learning difficulties in Mathematics and to providing a greater balance between withdrawal and in-class support.

Published, June 2011