Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Scoil Mhuire
Ballyhogue, Bree
Enniscorthy, County Wexford
Uimhir rolla: 17841R

Date of inspection: 24 November 2011
1. Introduction

Scoil Mhuire is a rural, co-educational, vertical primary school under the patronage of the Catholic Bishop of Ferns. It participates in the Department’s School Support Programme under the DEIS action plan for educational inclusion. There are fifty-five pupils enrolled and attendance levels are very good. The board of management was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the evaluation, and the response of the board will be found in the appendix to this report.

2. Summary of Findings and Recommendations for Further Development

The following are the main strengths of the work of the school:

- The school is characterised by its positive and welcoming school climate.
- The board of management, the parents’ association and the general parent body display praiseworthy commitment to supporting the work of the school.
- The principal and staff fulfil their roles diligently and they demonstrate a laudable dedication to meeting the pastoral care needs of pupils.
- The pupils present as enthusiastic, hard-working and committed learners.
- Overall, the quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement is commendable.

The following main recommendations are made:

- The board of management is advised to develop its policy role and to address teaching, learning and pupil achievement matters on a regular basis.
- The curriculum leadership role of the in-school management team should be developed further.
- The impact of school planning and school self-evaluation on learning outcomes for pupils should be strengthened.
- It is recommended that discrete oral language lessons be implemented consistently and that the school’s approaches to emergent reading and writing be developed further.
- The pupils should experience a broad visual arts programme, with an emphasis on fostering creativity and individuality of response.
- A review of current provision for pupils with special educational needs is advised.

3. Quality of School Management

- The board of management demonstrates praiseworthy commitment to supporting the work of the school. In particular, it is commended for its role in the maintenance and development of the school building and grounds, and its careful attention to health and safety matters. The recent introduction of the external certification of financial accounts is
noted. It is recommended that the board develop its policy role, and that all school policies be formally considered and ratified. Immediate attention should be given to the enrolment policy and code of behaviour to ensure full compliance with pertinent legislation and national guidelines. It is further advised that the board, under the guidance of the principal, address teaching, learning and pupil achievement matters on a regular basis.

• The principal is successful in promoting a positive school climate and a culture of team work. She is ably assisted by the deputy principal who fulfils assigned duties competently. In order to utilise the potential of the in-school management team fully, it is recommended that its curriculum leadership role be developed further. In particular, staff meetings should be used consistently to evaluate pupil achievement and promote school improvement. The results of completed questionnaires confirm that almost all parents consider that the school is well run.

• Despite mainstream classrooms being located in a mix of permanent and temporary accommodation, the teachers are lauded for the provision of a stimulating learning environment. A good range of teaching and learning resources, including ICT, is used effectively. The impact of workbooks on curriculum delivery in junior classes, however, should be examined.

• The school is characterised by its open and welcoming atmosphere. Relationships between school and home are of a high quality, with almost all parents confirming that they are happy with the school and that it is welcoming of them. The long-standing parents’ association is very supportive of the work of the school. It contributes substantially to the variety of activities provided for pupils and the range of resources in use.

• The pupils present as enthusiastic, hard-working and committed learners. Their pastoral care needs are managed effectively and positive pupil-teacher relationships are strongly in evidence. In completing the pupil questionnaires, most pupils report that they like coming to school and almost all confirm that everyone is treated fairly and that they get on well with the other children.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

• There is scope for development in the quality of school planning and school self-evaluation. While plans for all areas of the curriculum have been collaboratively devised by the teaching staff, they need to reflect the content of the primary curriculum and the particular needs of the school more fully. Development priorities in teaching and learning should be clearly identified, including through the systematic assessment of pupil achievement, and addressed through an action planning approach.

• Individual teacher long-term and short-term planning, and the recording of monthly progress, is of a satisfactory standard overall. It is advised that existing planning arrangements for co-teaching between mainstream and support teachers be reviewed.

• Confirmation was provided that the board of management has formally adopted the Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-primary Schools (September 2011) without modification. While the school devised its original child protection policy in 2007, full compliance with the requirements of Primary Circular 0061/2006 was not demonstrated. School authorities provided evidence that arrangements are being put in place to ensure compliance with the requirements of the recently published Circular 0065/2011 and Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools as a matter of priority.
5. Quality of Teaching, Learning and Pupil Achievement

- Overall, the quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement is commendable. The teachers draw on a good range of teaching approaches that are matched well to the pupils’ learning needs and stages of development. The pupils are skilfully facilitated to work both collaboratively with their peers and independently. They display praiseworthy levels of interest and motivation, and a commitment to doing their best. All parents expressed the view that teaching is good in the school. Most pupils report that they find their lessons interesting and that they enjoy their lessons and learning. The majority of teachers use a suitable range of assessment approaches to evaluate the quality of pupil learning outcomes and their written work is well monitored in all classes. It is recommended that the commitments outlined in the recently ratified assessment policy be implemented fully on a schoolwide basis.

- Múintear an Ghaeilge go sásúil sa scoil. Baintear dea-úsáid as achmhainní, obair bheirte, raínn, amhráin, agus cluiche cainte chun suim na ndaltaí a mhúscailt. Tá foclóir cuí ag formhóir na ndaltaí agus tá a scileanna labhartha á bhfoinsear go céimniúil. Moltar tuilleadh deiseanna cainte a chruthú dóibh chun a féin-mhuinín i leith labhairt na Gaeilge a neartú. Léann formhóir dóibh le criúnneas agus le liofacht as an dtéacsleabhar. Moltar úsáid rialta a bhaint as ábhair léitheoireachta breise agus fior leabhair Ghaeilge. Tá béim láidir ar an scribhneoireacht fheidhmhuil ach b’fhéarraidh an toradh dá leagfaí níos mó béime ar an scribhneoireacht neamhspleách.

The teaching of Irish is satisfactory. Good use is made of resources, pair work, rhymes, songs and language games in generating the pupils’ interest. A majority of pupils have acquired appropriate vocabulary and their speaking skills are being developed progressively. It is advised that additional speaking opportunities be created to strengthen their confidence in using the Irish language. A majority of pupils read accurately and fluently from the textbook. The regular use of additional reading materials and real books in Irish is advised. There is a strong emphasis on functional writing and outcomes would improve with a greater emphasis on independent writing.

- Teaching, learning and pupil achievement in English is of a good standard overall. While a majority of pupils express themselves with suitable confidence and competence, it is advised that discrete oral language lessons be taught consistently in all classes. Commendable reading standards are in evidence. The pupils display a good ability overall to critique their reading material and most report that they think they are doing well at reading. Good progress is also in evidence in the pupils’ writing skills and the quality of their independent writing across a range of genres is praised. In order to exploit language learning at infant level fully, it is recommended that the school’s approaches to emergent reading and writing be developed further.

- Good quality teaching, learning and pupil achievement is in evidence in Mathematics. New concepts are addressed through skilful talk and discussion, the purposeful use of resources and well-designed opportunities for collaborative learning. Almost all pupils demonstrate laudable understanding of content previously addressed and most also report that they think they are doing well at Maths. In order to improve learning outcomes further, the school is advised to attend to the systematic development of the pupils’ problem-solving skills.

- In the main, teaching and learning in the Visual Arts is of a satisfactory standard. During the course of the evaluation, fine examples of the pupils’ art works were in evidence as they engaged imaginatively with a wide variety of media and tools. It would be beneficial, however, to ensure consistent exposure to a broad visual arts programme, with an
emphasis on creativity and individuality of response. In so doing, it is further advised that an explicit emphasis be placed on developing the pupils’ capacities to look at and respond to their own art work, as well as to the work of internationally renowned artists.

6. Quality of Support for Pupils

- Presently, learning support/resource teaching (LS/RT) provides for pupils with special educational needs through pupil withdrawal, parallel teaching and in-class support. It is recommended that the organisation of provision be reviewed at a whole-school level to ensure that best use is made of the school’s LS/RT allocation in meeting pupils’ identified learning needs. Current provision is characterised by positive teacher/pupil interactions, participation in well-structured learning tasks, the effective use of ICT and other resources, and good pupil progress. The quality of special needs assistance is also praised. In order to improve the quality of provision further, it is advised that education-plan targets are specific and measurable in all instances and that all priority learning areas are addressed. It is further advised that: support teachers are facilitated to meet with pupils’ parents at appropriate intervals; pupil progress is monitored and recorded systematically; and such records are maintained appropriately.

- Funding received by the school under the School Support Programme is used successfully to facilitate pupils’ participation in a range of school activities.

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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 school’s board of management and staff wish to thank the DES inspector for her courtesy and professionalism during the WSE. The board is encouraged by the report’s recognition of the commitment of the board of management, the parents’ association and the general parent body in supporting the work of the school. The board is also encouraged by the recognition of how diligently the principal and the staff fulfil their roles. Finally and most importantly we are grateful for the acknowledgement that the quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement is commendable.

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 commenced and will continue to examine and implement all recommendations contained in the report, as part of the school’s on-going process of self evaluation and planning.