An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

St Munchin’s Christian Brothers School
Shelbourne Road, Limerick
Uimhir rolla: 17942A

Date of inspection: 10 November 2011
1. Introduction

St Munchin’s Christian Brothers School is a Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) urban school with a staff comprising an administrative principal, five mainstream class teachers, three support teachers and one special needs assistant. The school operates under the patronage of the Catholic Diocese of Limerick and the trustee ship of the Edmund Rice Schools Trust (ERST).

The school enrolment is seventy-five pupils. Attendance for most pupils is good. However, chronic levels of absenteeism are evident for a small minority of pupils.

The whole school evaluation focused on the quality of teaching and learning in Irish, English, Mathematics and Science. The board of management of the school 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 works effectively and the voluntary contribution of its members to the school is commendable.
- The principal, ably assisted by the deputy principal, leads and manages the school in a highly effective way.
- The members of the in-school management team work collaboratively and undertake a wide range of roles and responsibilities.
- The staff has developed a high quality school plan which is reflective of the specific context of the school.
- A very high quality DEIS plan has been developed which outlines clear targets that are specific, measurable and attainable.
- Relationships with pupils are positive and founded on a climate of trust and self-respect.
- Very good use of information and communications technology (ICT) was observed.
- Teaching and learning in the majority of the lessons observed were good with some very good practice observed in most settings.
- Special education needs (SEN) provision is well co-ordinated. The quality of learning support and resource teaching is very good with high quality planning in evidence for pupils with SEN.
- The school is highly commended for the analysis of assessment data to track pupils’ progress.
- Overall, the parents and pupils indicate that they are very satisfied with the education provision in the school.

The following main recommendations are made:

- The leadership of the school needs to develop a strategic vision for the long-term development of the school.
- A sustained focus should now be placed on numeracy improvement.
- Curriculum leadership roles should continue to be developed to support the implementation of school improvement strategies.
- The further development of the school’s self-evaluation process is recommended.
- Learning programmes/plans should be supported by a greater level of in-class support.

It is recommended that the parents’ association be re-activated and that the parents become involved in a range of appropriate school-related activities.
3. Quality of School Management

- The quality of school management is good. The board meets termly and minutes of meetings are recorded. School accounts are certified annually and forwarded to the ERST. Meetings of the board tend to focus on the principal's report, school maintenance, addressing chronic absenteeism, security, managing school finances and health and safety issues. The board is involved in whole-school planning process and policies are discussed and ratified after due consideration. The board is commended for ensuring that the physical environment of the school is in an exemplary condition, externally and internally. The school has a range of teaching and learning resources including interactive white boards and these are used effectively to support teaching and learning. It is recommended that the parents’ association be re-activated and involved in a range of appropriate school-related activities. While the school has already been exploring the possibility of amalgamation with the other two schools in the parish, it is now timely, that that board should re-engage with the other schools in relation to this issue. It is recommended that the board would consider publishing an annual report on the work of the school as envisaged by Section 20 of the Education Act 1998 to provide the school community with an insight into the work of the board.

- The principal's work in leading and managing the school is highly effective and he is ably assisted by the deputy principal. He promotes a culture of teamwork and collaborative decision-making within the school. He has established a very high level of personal credibility within the school community and he exemplifies high levels of professional commitment. The members of the in-school management team meet regularly. They work very well together and their decision-making is collaborative. They undertake a broad range of roles and responsibilities very effectively. The in-school management team makes valuable contributions to leading various tracking and monitoring/review processes. Members of this team have been instrumental in leading the development of high quality curricular and organisational plans. There is a need for the leadership of the school to develop a strategic vision for the long-term development of the school. A sustained focus should be placed on numeracy improvement, on the further development of curriculum leadership roles and on advancing school self-evaluation.

- Overall, the parents and pupils indicated through their questionnaire responses that they are very satisfied with the education provided in the school. A significant majority of pupils stated in the questionnaires that their teachers explain things clearly and that their lessons are interesting.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- In general the whole-school planning process is very good. Very good progress has been achieved in recent times by the school staff in reformulating all of the curriculum and organisational policies and plans. A very high quality DEIS plan has also been developed. The DEIS plan, as presented, outlines clear targets which are specific, measurable and attainable. A systematic analysis has been undertaken in respect of the data gathered from standardised tests and from pupils’ attendance records. Furthermore a profile of the pupils’ needs has been compiled. It is recommended that monthly progress records also be used to evaluate the implementation of the curriculum.

- In general the quality of individual teacher planning is good. Learning programmes/plans should be supported by a greater level of in-class support. In some cases the textbook plays a dominant role and this practice should 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. The school is compliant with the requirements of Primary Circular 0061/2006. 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**

• The majority of the lessons observed were good with some very good practice observed in most settings. In most settings, a good range of teaching approaches and strategies was employed and where good practice was observed the teachers were skilful in managing the development of content knowledge, skills and pupil engagement. The SEN teachers provided differentiated support for some groups in mainstream classes. While this good practice is commended the further extension of this practice is recommended in all mainstream classes.

• Tá éagsúlacht mhór le sonrú in éifeacht an teagaisc agus na foghlaíma sa Ghaeilge. Ar an iomlán, bhí éagsúlacht mhór i gcumais labhartha na ndaltaí. Áfach, bhí sé lag ar an iomlán tríd an scoil. I ranganna áirithe, leagtar bheim ar obair i bpéiri, grúpobair agus drámaí. Múintear dánta agus amhráin go cuí i ranganna áirithe. Tá scileanna léitheoireachta formhór na ndaltaí ar chaighdeán agus tóibín an ndaltaí lag ar an iomlán. Tá sé tráthúil anois d'hoireann na scoile féachaint chugig breis béisce a chur ar na tréimhsí cumarsáide i ngach ceacht chun fhorchumharsáid a dhéanmhdh agus chun inniúlacht na ndaltaí a theaghlach. Níor mhiste scileanna na léitheoireachta a mhúineadh go córasach. Bhí duine deiseanna níos rialta a chur ar fáil do dhaltaí chun scribhneoireacht a pháirseanta de chineálacha éagsúla a chleachtadh. Moltar a chinnití anois go bhfoghlaimionn na ndaltaí cnuasach oiriúnach filíocht a ghlannmheabhair i ngach rang.

*There is a wide variation in the effectiveness of teaching and learning in Irish. In general, there were different levels of oral language competence in evidence throughout the school. However, overall it was weak. In some classes emphasis is placed on pair-work, group-work, and drama. Poetry and songs are taught well in some classes. Most of the children’s reading skills are of a low standard and the written work of most of the children is of a poor standard overall. It is timely for the staff to put additional emphasis on the communicative phases in every lesson to enable authentic interaction to occur and to support the development of the children’s comprehension. Reading skills should be taught systematically. Greater opportunities should be provided for pupils to experience a wider range of genres in personal writing. It is also recommended that the children would memorise a range of suitable poems in every class.*

• The quality of teaching in English in mainstream classes is good. The successful implementation of a number of initiatives is beginning to impact positively on pupils’ learning outcomes and the staff deserves praise for introducing these initiatives. Some progress has been made in respect of the DEIS targets set by the school in literacy. However, significant challenges remain in relation to improving the attainment levels of the majority of pupils in literacy. To improve standards, it is recommended that increased time be spent on literacy development, as outlined in *Circular 0056/2011*. This should be used to deliver a discrete oral language programme in all classes and to provide formalised intensive reading lessons in all classes incorporating the relevant reading skills.
• The quality of teaching and learning in Mathematics ranges from satisfactory to good. Teachers ensure that a broad and balanced curriculum is delivered throughout the school. Some mathematics lessons observed were linked to the pupils’ real-life experiences. The language of Mathematics is taught effectively in all settings. In most settings, concepts are presented in well-paced, clearly structured lessons and carefully explained. The appropriate use of concrete materials was also observed. To improve attainment in Mathematics, increased time should be given to Mathematics, as outlined in Circular 0056/2011. An agreed lesson structure should be developed for all mainstream classes. A mathematics culture should be developed in the school and in the grounds through the provision of maths trails and maths-rich environments. A greater emphasis on oral Mathematics in all lessons and more frequent use of concrete materials is recommended. Collaborative problem solving should also be developed through the discussion of authentic problems based on real-life contexts. Additional mathematics resources need to be provided in all classes and more differentiated teaching in some class levels is required.

• The quality of teaching in Science is good. Skills development received commendable attention in most settings. A broad range of topics is taught from all the strands of the curriculum. A good range of resources is available to support teaching and learning in Science. Display areas have been created in most classrooms. Active learning was promoted in all lessons observed. In general, there was good pupil participation and engagement throughout the lessons.

• It is evident from the DEIS plan developed by the school that data are being utilised effectively to identify and target areas for intervention in the future. Systems are now in place to monitor the progress of the interventions being implemented in the school and their impact on pupils’ learning, especially in literacy and numeracy. These good practices are highly praised. All teachers prepare end of year reports. These are sent to parents and a copy is maintained on file in the school.

6. Quality of Supports for Pupils

• The special education needs (SEN) team is managed very effectively by the SEN co-ordinator and there is evidence of collaborative practice amongst team members. The teachers of pupils with SEN have undertaken professional development courses appropriate to their role and reflective of the particular needs of the school. The team is effective in the dissemination of knowledge and skills acquired during their participation in these courses. Teachers create stimulating and supportive teaching environments and provide an appropriate range of resources to support the needs, abilities and learning styles of the pupils identified for support. Very effective individual education plans (IEPS) have been drafted with the appropriate involvement of parents.

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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

In response to the WSE report, the board of management would like to highlight the changing context in the school. The staffing in the school has been reduced to three mainstream class teachers and a teaching principal. The suppression of the administrative principal post will bring new challenges to the management of the school. The board of management and staff recognise these challenges and the school’s leadership is in the process of developing a strategic vision for the long term future of the school.