

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**  
**Department of Education and Skills**

**Whole School Evaluation**  
**REPORT**

**Our Lady of Mercy Convent School**  
**Boosterstown, County Dublin**  
**Uimhir rolla:17970F**

**Date of inspection: 24 March 2010**



## WHOLE-SCHOOL EVALUATION

A whole-school evaluation of Our Lady of Mercy Convent School was undertaken in March 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 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.

### INTRODUCTION – SCHOOL CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

Our Lady of Mercy Convent School is an all-girls, vertical, primary school. It is situated in Booterstown in County Dublin. This Catholic school is under the patronage of the Archbishop of Dublin. The school has attained its second Green Flag. Enrolment figures have declined marginally in recent years. Attendance rates for pupils are excellent.

The following table provides an overview of the enrolment and staffing in the school at the time of the evaluation:

	Number
Pupils enrolled in the school	203
Mainstream classes in the school	8
Teachers on the school staff	12
Mainstream class teachers	8
Teachers working in support roles	3
Special needs assistants	3

## 1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT

### 1.1 Characteristic spirit, mission or vision

The school's stated mission is "*to encourage, challenge and nurture our children and the wider school community as together we grow in body, mind and spirit. Tá ár dTiarna linn.*" There is a strong sense of identity among all who attend, work or are associated with the school. Its Catholic ethos is clearly manifest at assemblies, in the links with the Mercy order and in the school's charity works. The school is committed to, and succeeds in providing a very good, broad and balanced education to the girls in an atmosphere of mutual respect and inclusivity.

### 1.2 Board of management

The board of management functions very competently. It is properly constituted and meets eight times a year. Board members have taken on a wide range of duties and carry these out to a high standard. The board is acutely aware of its legislative duties and management roles and ensures that school policies, procedures and practices accord with departmental circulars and relevant legislation. School accounts are audited. The board plays a very active role in all aspects of school planning. It engages in a collaborative and consultative planning process whereby school policies are developed, ratified and reviewed systematically. The board carries out a phased

maintenance programme each year for the upgrading of the school. It is clearly committed to fulfilling the mission of the school in all aspects of its work which it carries out with pride. The work of the board is communicated to parents through the parents' representative on the board, the presentation of an annual maintenance report at the parents' annual general meeting and through regular newsletters.

### **1.3 In-school management**

The principal is a highly effective leader. She demonstrates excellent management and administrative skills, thereby ensuring the smooth organisation of all aspects of school life. She is up-to-date with curriculum developments and ably leads the school-planning process. With her effective interpersonal and communication skills she succeeds in fostering a culture of reflective thinking among her staff. She is instrumental in promoting the school's ethos and in nurturing a strong sense of identity among all members of the school community. The in-school management team members carry out their work competently and cohesively. Their assigned roles are balanced regarding curriculum, organisational and pastoral duties. The team is very supportive of the principal and plays an important role in attending to school management issues. In this regard the team formally meet with the principal each month, before school begins, and also has opportunities to present and further develop its work at staff meetings.

There is effective management and deployment of teaching personnel. The teachers are enabled to teach in a variety of settings and a policy on class allocation is in operation. There is competent provision for the teachers' and other school personnel's professional development in priority areas such as use of interactive whiteboards, first aid and Stay Safe programme delivery. Comprehensive provision for supporting and mentoring newly-appointed teachers is in place. The school buildings and grounds are in excellent order and are maintained to a very high standard. Excellent work in the areas of recycling and energy conservation is underway in the school. The school successfully promotes participation in a wide range of programmes relating to Science. There is a wildlife garden on the grounds. Notwithstanding the small size of some classrooms, all educational settings are bright and airy. The teachers provide print-rich and mathematics-rich environments. There are curriculum displays prepared in all classrooms and samples of pupils' work are attractively exhibited. Classroom libraries host a good range of fictional reading material. All classrooms are very well stocked with curriculum resources and teaching materials, including interactive whiteboards. There is a library, a computer room, a large general purposes room as well as a school garden on the premises.

### **1.5 Management of relationships and communication with the school community**

There is excellent management of relations with parents and the wider school community. The vibrant parents' association is highly committed to enhancing the quality of their children's experience in the school. Meeting regularly, the parents coordinate a wide variety of events. These include co-curricular and extra-curricular sports and activities, regular fundraising actions and social events. The school garden party, cook book launch, uniform fair and book week are among some of the extensive range of events organised. The parents are also involved in the whole-school planning process and make a significant contribution to the development of some school policies. The school fosters excellent home/school relations and a high level of formal and informal communications is established. The work of the school secretary in this regard and also in the efficient administration of the school is praiseworthy. Communications are enhanced through the use of email, text-a-parent, regular newsletters and notes. Two school reports are issued annually and a parent/teacher meeting is convened each year. A school booklet is provided to parents of new entrants outlining pertinent school information. The teachers provide parents

with practical guidance regarding their children's homework and reading through information leaflets and start-of-year general meetings. Informal communications are facilitated through an open-door policy and parents are welcome to arrange to meet with teachers as requested.

### **1.6 Management of pupils**

The management of pupils is outstanding. There are very respectful, positive relations between teachers and pupils and among pupils themselves. The quality of the working relationships among staff contributes in a very significant way to the rich learning experience of pupils. There is exemplary discipline and behaviour by pupils. An inclusive, mutually-supportive atmosphere is nurtured by school personnel. The student voice is promoted through the student council and is listened to and acted upon by school management. The pupils' achievements and efforts are affirmed and celebrated through teacher feedback, positive behaviour strategies in classrooms and awards of merit during assemblies.

## **2. QUALITY OF SCHOOL PLANNING**

### **2.1 Whole-school and classroom planning**

The quality of whole-school planning is very good regarding well-established processes of consultation, systematic review, action planning and strategic planning. It is praiseworthy that all teachers have a copy of the school plan. Very comprehensive organisational policies are ratified, providing clear guidance on school procedures and practices. Planning for all curriculum areas is in place. An inspection of the curriculum plans for English, Irish, Mathematics and Physical Education show that much work has been done to ensure that these plans are comprehensive. In order for the school to maximise its capacity for self-improvement it is important that these plans more closely guide pedagogy and facilitate the development of each curriculum strand as a progression through the school. To this end it is recommended the school develop approaches to monitor and assess both the implementation and the impact of the school plan.

A common template for classroom planning and recording of general progress is in place and in use by all teachers. In general, long-term and short-term planning outlines lesson content and textbook activities. More emphasis on skills-based learning and experiences is recommended with long-term planning providing broad programmes of learning in all aspects of provision. Short-term planning should set out specific objectives in terms of pupils' learning. This will assist in the compilation of progress records regarding the specific learning outcomes for pupils.

### **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 *Child Protection Guidelines for Primary Schools* (Department of Education and Skills, 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*

Tá cáilíocht na foghlama agus an teagaisc go h-ard sa Ghaeilge. Múintear í go cumasach. Leagann na hoidí béim inmholta ar úsáid na Gaeilge go neamhfhoirmiúil ag tionól na scoile, trasna an churaclaim agus úsáid rianúil gach Céadaoin. De thoradh sin tá dearcadh an-dhearfach i leith na Gaeilge ag na daltaí. Baineann luas bríomhar agus struchtúr breá leis na gceachtanna i ngach rang. Úsáideann na hoidí réimse leathan de straitéisí idir drámaí, ról imirt cluichí, tascanna éisteachta, obair i bpéirí agus i ngrúpaí. Éiríonn leo an cur chuige cumarsáideach a chur chun cinn. Déanann na hoidí cleachtadh rialta ar úsáid chruinn na mbriathra, ar bhun fhoclóir agus ar eiseamláirí agus iad ag múineadh téarma nua bunaithe ar théamaí an churaclaim. Chun cur le sin moltar tréimhse níos faide a chaitheamh ar neartú agus daingniú cumas cumarsáid na daltaí agus iad ag úsáid teanga i gcomhthéascanna éagsúla. Tá sé ar chumas na ndaltaí ceisteanna a chur agus a fhreagairt go nádúrtha agus tá dul chun cinn le sonrú tríd an scoil. Is féidir leis na daltaí sna ranganna sinsearacha caint go leanúnach agus go cruinn faoi théamaí coitianta. Tá ard chaighdeán sroichte acu chun a dearcadh agus a thuairimí féin a léiriú go sciliúil. Baineann na daltaí taitneamh nach beag as dánta a aithris agus amhráin a chanadh. Tá caighdeán na léitheoireachta go han mhaith agus léann na daltaí le tuiscint agus go muiníneach. I gcuid de na ranganna tá réimse leathan de ábhair léitheoireachta in úsáid. B'fhiú an cleachtadh sin a leathnú. Tá caighdeán na scríbhneoireachta go h-ard freisin, idir obair phearsanta chruthaitheach agus tascanna sna leabhair obire. Feictear saothar na ndaltaí i gcnuasacha beaga agus thuas ar na ballaí sna ranganna agus tá éagsúlacht breá ag baint lena n-iarrachtaí.

##### *Irish*

A high standard of teaching and learning is achieved in Irish. The language is taught competently. Praiseworthy emphasis is placed on the incidental use of Irish at assembly times, across curriculum areas and with special emphasis on its use every Wednesday. As a result, the pupils are highly motivated towards Irish. In each classroom, well-structured lessons are conducted in a lively manner. The teachers use a wide range of strategies including drama, role play, games, listening exercises, pair and group work. They succeed in promoting a communicative approach to language learning. The regular teaching of grammar, vocabulary and phrases are features of the teaching of the themes of the Irish curriculum. To build on this practice it is advised that extended time be given at the communication phase of lessons to ensure thorough consolidation of new language learning. The pupils can pose and answer questions in a capable manner and clear progression is evident up through the school. The senior pupils can discuss everyday themes in an extended and accurate way. They attain a high standard in communicating their opinions and ideas. They recite poems and sing songs with enjoyment. Very good standards are achieved in reading and the pupils read with understanding and confidence. In some classrooms there is a wide range of Irish reading material in use. This practice merits extension. The standard of writing is high as reflected in the pupils' personal writing and workbook activities. Examples of their writing are celebrated on classroom displays and in compilations; there is good variety evident among this work.

##### *English*

The pupils' oral language skills are very good. In response to teachers' questioning, they display very good ability to talk and discuss, answer questions and share their thoughts and opinions. Teachers facilitate the oral language development of pupils during English lessons and across the various curriculum subjects. In order to challenge and meet the needs of all learners, it is advised that more extended provision for oral language development be provided. Pupils require more

focused, differentiated questioning; opportunities to use language in a variety of contexts; and extended answer time to listen to and learn from one another. Overall, the standard of reading is excellent. A wide and varied range of reading material is available to pupils and all materials, including extension readers and class novels, are extensively used. The school has recently introduced a commercial phonics programme. It is important that key teaching methodologies in this area focus on teaching of letter/sound combinations within a whole-language context. All pupils are exposed to a broad range of poetry and rhyme and engage in recitation and composition at every level. The quality of their recitation is very good and pupils perform regularly at local recitals. The pupils attain very high standards in writing. The development of independent writing among the junior pupils is praiseworthy and booklets of their work are attractively displayed. The teaching of process writing is very effective and pupils are enabled to write for a variety of purposes and within a broad range of contexts regularly. Excellent examples of creative, discursive and persuasive writing were observed during the evaluation. Presentation of work is highly commended, as is the quality of handwriting.

### **3.2 Mathematics**

The standard of Mathematics is very good. Key methodologies regarding operations and mathematical language, outlined in the school plan, are consistently implemented in each class. A good range of manipulative and other teaching resources is available and in use. In some classrooms there are very stimulating mathematics areas, linking Mathematics to the environment. Following a recent whole-school review of practice and assessment results, the teachers now provide pupils with daily opportunities to complete written mental mathematics problems. This is a positive development. It is advised that these tasks be complemented by short intensive, engaging oral mathematics sessions. Each year the school hosts a 'Maths for Fun' week where pupils engage in mathematics games and activities, including ICT-generated problems. Mathematics lessons are taught using the whole-class teaching methodology. Some opportunities for group work are provided, and in-class support is a feature of some provision. Teachers capably engage in the direct teaching of new concepts and model mathematical operations clearly and methodically. The pupils are adept at computation and at recording operations and all work is presented in an organised and neat manner. They display competent understanding of concepts across all strands of the mathematics curriculum and recall number facts capably. In the best practice observed there was provision for group teaching, the relating of Mathematics to real-life situations and assessment for learning. It is important that such good practice be disseminated, particularly in relation to planning and teaching to meet the needs of all learners. It is recommended that extended opportunities be provided for pupils to work as groups to explore and investigate mathematical processes.

### **3.3 Physical Education**

The quality of teaching and learning in Physical Education is excellent. The school provides a broad, balanced curriculum promoting the physical, social and personal well being of all pupils. Lessons are very well organised and highly structured in every aspect. An impressive programme encompassing all strands and aimed at the promotion and enjoyment of general good health is skilfully provided by teachers. They deliver lessons which incorporate warm ups, stretching, development and extension of skills, group work and cool downs. In particular, they ensure that specific skills relating to each strand are taught incrementally. Talk and discussion are features of all lessons. The standard of monitoring is very good and feedback for improvement is provided. Very good resources are in use and pupils are encouraged to set up and clear away in an orderly and cooperative manner. Excellent tasks and activities which promote cooperation, inclusion and self-expression were observed during the evaluation, particularly in the strands of gymnastics,

games and dance. Health and safety issues are addressed most competently. There is excellent provision for athletics. A rich programme of co-curricular and extracurricular sports is also underway. This encompasses tennis, golf, Irish dancing, hockey, Gaelic sports and soccer.

### **3.4 Assessment**

A good range of assessment modes is in use by teachers. These comprise teacher-devised tests and tasks, portfolios, work samples, the use of standardised literacy and numeracy tests and also diagnostic tests, including language assessment for EAL pupils. The school's comprehensive range of tests provides the teachers with a good level of data. Good analysis is underway in using the outcomes of the Sigma-T and Micra-T results to target low-achieving pupils for additional support. Teachers administer regular tests in tables, spellings, Mathematics and in other areas and, in many classes, these results are recorded methodically. The pupils' work is corrected regularly and some excellent practice in marking for improvement was noted. In some instances the learning objectives of lessons was shared with pupils at the outset of lessons and closely assessed at lesson closure. The challenge now for the school is to use the outcomes of all assessments including tests, homework and work samples, in order to inform a profile of each pupil's learning and inform her future learning targets. Records of pupils' standardised assessments are maintained centrally. Relevant information is shared with parents at the annual parent/teacher meetings and in bi-annual written reports.

## **4. QUALITY OF SUPPORT FOR PUPILS**

### **4.1 Pupils with special educational needs**

An effective policy regarding the educational provision for pupils with special educational needs (SEN) is in place. It places strong emphasis on the early identification and remediation of learning difficulties. A learning support/resource teacher (LSRT) and resource teacher (RT) provide assistance to targeted pupils in a very supportive manner. Pupils are selected for learning support based on the outcomes of standardised testing and on teacher observation. There is regular communication between support teachers and mainstream-class teachers. Educational programmes of learning for all pupils with special educational needs are compiled using a consultative approach involving parents, class teachers, the principal and support teachers. The identified targets need to be more specific and focused in terms of exact learning outcomes within the timeframe outlined. The outcomes of diagnostic assessments, recorded on the education plans, should closely inform these targets and corresponding programmes. There is provision for both withdrawal and in-class support. All support settings are attractive, well resourced and well organised. Lessons are very capably taught and the teachers use a variety of methodologies and teaching resources to ensure that pupils learn in an enjoyable, social and productive manner. Three special needs assistants attend to the support needs of their targeted pupils in an effective and supportive way. They make a significant contribution to the care needs and well being of targeted pupils.

### **4.2 Other supports for pupils: disadvantaged, minority and other groups**

Our Lady of Mercy Convent School is an open, welcoming and inclusive school. It ensures that pupils are treated fairly and that mutual respect is fostered. The pupils are encouraged to appreciate and celebrate diversity within the school community and beyond in the wider world. They are enabled to participate in the diverse range of co-curricular activities and events during school time. A full time language-support teacher provides very good support to EAL pupils. This

provision, informed by a comprehensive EAL policy, incorporates very good assessment of learning needs, tailored programme planning and delivery to EAL pupils. Excellent resources are in use during instruction. There is very good promotion of interculturalism in the school, informed by the school's intercultural policy. Each year the school celebrates 'international day' and a range of activities celebrating diversity are scheduled, bringing members of the wider school community together.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

The school has strengths in the following areas:

- The principal is a very effective leader. Her work is informed by the school's mission and this mission is clearly shared by the school community.
- There are very good standards attained in all four curriculum subjects inspected.
- There is excellent order in the administration, management and organisation of the school.
- The collegiality and excellent working relations among staff contribute significantly to the calm and positive working atmosphere.
- The work of the board of management is very effective.
- There is outstanding management of pupils in this welcoming and inclusive school.
- The parents' association provides praiseworthy support to the school.

The following key recommendations are made in order to further improve the quality of education provided by the school:

- A review of planning, to include a greater emphasis on planning for learning, is recommended. All planning should take more account of skills-based learning, and short-term planning requires greater specificity in terms of the pupils' learning objectives.
- The outcomes of assessment should better inform teaching and learning to meet the needs of all pupils.

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.

*Published November 2010*



# **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 wishes to record its appreciation of the courtesy, professionalism and encouragement shown to all members of the school community by the inspection team.

The Board welcomes the recognition of the commitment of the school community to a broad and balanced education in our welcoming and inclusive school. The strengths identified, and the recognition of the high standards being achieved, affirm the diligent efforts of our caring staff.

The on-going collaboration between all of the partners in education is formally acknowledged in this report. The Board takes this opportunity to sincerely thank all who play such a vital role in our school community: staff, parents/guardians, local community members and most importantly our pupils.

#### **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 recommendations of the WSE report have been acknowledged by the Board of Management and Staff. As reflective practitioners, we welcome the suggestions for further review and development proposed in the report. This work has already commenced.

The Board, Staff and wider school community remain committed to our Mission Statement. Together, we will work to respond to all the future learning and pastoral needs within our school.