

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

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

**Scoil Mhuire Mixed National School**  
**Howth, County Dublin**  
**Uimhir rolla: 18080A**

**Date of inspection: 12 October 2015**



## 1. Introduction

A whole-school evaluation (WSE) was undertaken in Scoil Mhuire Mixed National School in October 2015. The school, situated in Howth, County Dublin, caters for boys and girls from junior infants to sixth class and operates under the patronage of the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Dublin. In recent years, the pupil population of the school has increased rapidly and there are now 363 pupils enrolled. Overall attendance levels are very good. 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.

During the WSE, provision for Irish, English, Mathematics and Drama was inspected. Inspectors observed teaching and learning in eight mainstream class settings and three support teaching settings.

## 2. Summary of Findings and Recommendations for Further Development

The following are the **key findings**:

- The quality of school management is very good.
- The school principal has developed a very warm, nurturing and collaborative school environment successfully where the uniqueness of each child is recognised and where all staff are committed to providing pupils with a rewarding school experience. In reviewing posts of responsibility, priority should be given to curriculum duties to ensure cohesive implementation and monitoring of identified school improvement targets.
- During the evaluation, the management of pupils was very effective and they presented as very attentive and interested learners.
- The overall quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in English and Mathematics is very good. Focused reflection on the consistent and successful implementation of the school's improvement plans in the fields of numeracy and literacy will further enhance provision.
- The highly-committed and active parents' association and general parent body contribute very positively to the life of the school.
- The overall quality of teaching and learning is very good. Greater provision for pupils to engage in a broader variety of collaborative and active learning activities should be implemented more consistently throughout the school to optimise pupil engagement in all learning settings.
- Support sessions are delivered in a structured and affirming manner. Pupils eagerly participate in well-timed, high-quality, hands-on learning experiences.

The following **main recommendations** are made:

- Tá scóip ann chun caighdeán na Gaeilge labhartha a fheabhsú. Moltar plean céimnithe uile-scoile a dhearadh agus a chur i bhfeidhm do labhairt na Gaeilge agus measúnú sa teanga a chur chun cinn trasna na scoile. *There is scope for improving the standard of spoken Irish. A whole-school progressive language plan should be devised and implemented, and assessment in the language should be progressed across the school.*
- A review of current approaches to short-term classroom planning and monthly records is

advised to include a clearer focus on specific curriculum objectives and pupils' skill development.

- It is recommended that current in-class support rubrics be further extended in the fields of both numeracy and literacy.

### **3. Quality of School Management**

- The quality of school management is very good. The board of management is committed to providing a very high-quality educational experience for all pupils and is involved actively in the development of school policy. Very good working relationships have been established with the wider school community. Board meetings are convened at appropriate intervals, minutes are recorded and school accounts are audited externally on an annual basis. The board is commended for its role in responding to the site challenges posed by the increased enrolment of recent years. The school is at an advanced planning stage currently for an extension to the existing building.
- The school principal is very committed to the school. He has developed a very warm, nurturing and collaborative school environment successfully where the uniqueness of each child is recognised and where all staff are committed to providing pupils with a rewarding school experience. He has overseen the introduction of a range of changes and initiatives that have provided pupils with both an enjoyable and stimulating holistic learning experience.
- Formal meetings of the in-school management team are convened and a review of the schedule of the responsibilities and duties attaching to posts of responsibilities is planned. It is recommended that priority should be given to curriculum duties to ensure cohesive implementation and monitoring of identified school improvement targets.
- A broad range of high-quality resources is in place to support teaching and learning. The school is praised for the high quality of corridor displays which serve to consolidate and reinforce current learning. All classrooms present as attractive learning environments. However, there is scope in some settings for an additional emphasis to be placed on the display of pupils' work across a range of curricular areas. Ancillary staff members contribute to the smooth operation of the school.
- During the evaluation, the management of pupils was very effective and they presented as very attentive and interested learners. Pupils' responses to the questionnaires administered during the inspection process indicate that almost all pupils like school and that they feel safe in their classes and on the yard.
- The highly-committed and active parents' association and general parent body contribute very positively to the life of the school. High levels of satisfaction are expressed by parents' representatives with the quality of education provided for their children. This was corroborated in the questionnaire that parents were invited to complete as part of the evaluation process, with almost all of those surveyed agreeing that teaching is good in the school and that their child is treated fairly and respectfully.

### **4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation**

- The overall quality of whole-school planning is good. A collaborative process is adopted in policy formation and review. Comprehensive organisational plans are evident. The

school's admissions and enrolment policy requires immediate review to ensure that it adheres to relevant legislation in respect of the enrolment of pupils with special educational needs. A review of the school's code of behaviour should be undertaken to make more detailed reference to procedures relating to suspension and expulsion.

- The quality of teachers' individual classroom planning is good. All teachers prepare detailed long-term and short-term plans that are specific in terms of the delineation of content. A review of current approaches to short-term classroom planning is advised to include a clearer focus on specific curriculum objectives and pupils' skill development. To enhance the monitoring of progression in learning, the use of a consistent whole-school format for monthly progress records, that outlines concise detail of pupils' skill-based learning outcomes, should be considered.
- The school is endeavouring to implement its agreed actions arising from its involvement in the school self-evaluation process. Overall, a clear impact from the school's self-evaluation of teaching and learning outcomes is evident. While learning outcomes in literacy and numeracy are strong, focused reflection on the consistent and successful implementation of the school's improvement plans in these fields will enhance provision.
- 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

- Ar an iomlán tá múineadh agus foghlaim na Gaeilge ar chaighdeán maith. Cuirtear béim oiriúnach ar theanga a mhúineadh trí mhodhanna teagaisc gníomhacha a úsáid. Go ginearálta, aithrisíonn na daltaí rainn agus amhráin le tuiscint agus taitneamh. Is léir go bhfuil dearcadh dearfach ann i leith na Gaeilge. Cé go léiríonn na daltaí tuiscint chuí ar ábhar na gceachtanna Gaeilge, sonraítear easpa muiníne agus líofachta sa Ghaeilge labhartha. Chun a saibhreas teanga a fhorbairt a thuilleadh, moltar plean céimnithe uile-scoile a dhearadh agus a chur i bhfeidhm do labhairt na Gaeilge. I gcásanna áirithe, baineann oidí úsáid as modh an aistriúcháin. Moltar an chleachtas seo a sheachaint. Tá caighdeán na léitheoireachta agus na foghraíochta go maith. Tugtar deiseanna rialta do dhaltáí scríbhneoireacht fheidhmiúil Ghaeilge a chleachtadh. Maidir leis an scríbhneoireacht, moltar aird níos córasaí a dhíriú ar dhul chun cinn scileanna neamhspléacha agus cruthaitheacha. Moltar freisin measúnú sa teanga a chur chun cinn trasna na scoile.

*Overall teaching and learning in Irish is of a good standard. A suitable emphasis is placed on teaching language through the use of active teaching methodologies. Overall, pupils recite poems and songs with understanding and enjoyment. A positive outlook towards Irish is evident. Although pupils demonstrate appropriate understanding of the content of Irish lessons, a lack of confidence and fluency in spoken Irish is noted. In order to further develop their language acquisition, a whole-school progressive language plan should be devised and implemented. In certain instances, teachers use translation approaches. It is recommended that this practice be avoided. The standard of reading and pronunciation is good. Regular opportunities are given to pupils to practise functional writing in Irish. More systematic attention should be paid to the development of independent and creative writing skills. Assessment in the language should also be progressed across the school.*

- The overall quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in English is very good. Pupils' oral language skills are very well developed, with lessons making very good provision for debate and discussion. Very effective approaches to the teaching of reading

are evident throughout the school. These include differentiated reading programmes and the promotion of comprehension strategies. Reading standards are very good. The quality of pupils' independent writing and work presentation is of a very high standard. The current promotion of a more consistent approach to handwriting is paying clear dividends. Across the school, pupils explore a very good range of poetry; further attention to recitation would be beneficial.

- The quality of teaching and learning in Mathematics is very good. Lessons have a clear structure with very good emphasis on the discussion of concepts. Very good provision is in place for the development of pupils' number skills. High-quality provision is in place for connecting content to pupils' life experiences. Resources are very well employed with pupils being provided with a range of hands-on practical activities. Good provision is in place for the development of problem-solving skills but in some contexts, additional emphasis should be placed on collaborative problem solving and on differentiation for more-able pupils. It is recommended that greater emphasis be placed on developing the school as a mathematics-rich environment and on the development of mathematics trails.
- The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in Drama is good. The pupils are provided with well-structured opportunities to engage collaboratively in improvisational drama. A range of drama strategies including teacher-in-role, still imaging, mime and freeze-frames is used to enable pupils to enter into the fictional world. Drama contracts should be implemented and reviewed at the beginning of each lesson. To ensure appropriate continuity and progression in the pupils' learning, a more structured whole-school approach to how the curriculum in Drama can be holistically integrated across the entire learning experience should be considered. Further opportunities for pupils to reflect on and discuss their learning would enhance provision in this area.
- The overall quality of teaching and learning is very good. Lessons have a very clear structure and are delivered in a lively and engaging manner. Overall, a clear emphasis is placed on providing pupils with an affirming learning culture. Ample resources are in place to support the very good-quality teaching. In a few instances, teachers should create further opportunities for pupils to use resources independently during lessons. Overall, teachers deliberately connect lesson content to pupils' life experiences and a good range of methodologies is in use. Greater provision for pupils to engage in a broader variety of collaborative and active learning activities should be implemented more consistently throughout the school to optimise pupil engagement in all learning settings. The school should place additional emphasis on providing wider opportunities for pupils to engage with learning activities which involve information and communications technology (ICT). Pupils have opportunities to engage in a number of Arts Education learning programmes that contribute to their engagement in a broad curriculum.

## **6. Quality of Support for Pupils**

- The overall quality of support for pupils with special educational needs (SEN) is good. Using a range of assessment data, which includes, where relevant, consultation with support professionals, the school identifies and creates individual education plans (IEPs) and individual pupil learning profiles (IPLPs) for all pupils in receipt of support. These plans are clear in design and scope with targets and actions being detailed. In some cases, targets should be more specific. To improve provision further, ways in which parents can support the learning targets should be included in these plans. Teachers in support settings are commended for their recent reviews of models of support delivery. Such reviews have resulted in the development of in-class support rubrics and the review of resources. It is recommended that current in-class support rubrics be further extended in both the fields of numeracy and literacy.

- Support sessions are delivered in a structured and affirming manner. Pupils participate eagerly in well-timed, high-quality, hands-on learning experiences. While there are benefits to the practice of teachers in support settings meeting to plan collaboratively, current practices should be reviewed in terms of their impact on tuition time. The majority of teachers teaching in the support setting currently are new to this position. With the needs of the pupils as its focus, the school should strategically examine the team's professional development requirements. The special-needs assistants (SNAs) provide valuable support to pupils.
- The quality of home-school partnership is very good. A broad range of procedures is in place to facilitate regular and effective communication between home and school.
- There would be merit for the school in considering further the findings from the questionnaires administered as part of this WSE. For example, parents' and pupils' views, as expressed in the questionnaires, should prompt further consideration of pupil self-assessment, communication with parents on the content of the school's relationships and sexuality (RSE) policy, and pupils' understanding of various types of bullying.

# **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 welcomes the extremely positive Whole School Evaluation inspection report with its affirmation of our inclusive school environment, effective school management, high quality teaching/learning across curricular areas, strong community links and most supportive parent body. The Board was also pleased that high satisfaction ratings, which bore witness to the report's findings, were reported from questionnaires issued to parents, teachers and pupils during the evaluation period by the inspection team. The school's compliance with all current Child Protection procedures/Safety requirements and its ongoing engagement with the School Self-Evaluation process was also noted.

### **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 welcomes the report's 3 recommendations which will be addressed:

- (i) Current in-class support rubrics should be further extended in the fields of literacy/numeracy
- (ii) A plan to address Oral Irish throughout the school should be devised
- (iii) A review of current content based short-term classroom planning/monthly reports should be undertaken

The Board would like to highlight an area which was not included in this otherwise excellent report. This is our wonderful **Music Makes Magic** – a whole-school project which has enabled all 363 pupils to learn violin/viola/cello. This exciting musical odyssey has also seen the formation of our school orchestra. It is hoped to develop a community orchestra soon.