An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Scoil Muire Banríon
Edenderry, Co. Offaly
Uimhir rolla: 18364O

Date of inspection: 05 December 2011
1. Introduction

Scoil Muire Barriόn, Edenderry, is a boys’ school under the patronage of the Catholic Bishop of Kildare and Leighlin. Two hundred and fifty two pupils are enrolled in ten mainstream classrooms from second to sixth class, and attendance is 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.

2. Summary of Findings and Recommendations for Further Development

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

- Collective staff experience, led by a long-serving principal facilitates a consistent approach throughout the school.
- The overall standard of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in the four subjects observed is of a high standard.
- Pupils’ pastoral care needs are prioritised consistently, thus ensuring the inclusion of all pupils in every aspect of school life.
- Teachers’ classroom management skills combined with a culture of mutual respect ensures the effective management of pupils.
- Pupils are courteous and pleasant at all times. They are self-confident learners and show due regard for their school and its environs.
- The school is very well resourced. Information and Communication Technology is used optimally to support teaching and learning.

The following main recommendations are made:

- It is recommended that the school embark on a formal school self-evaluation process which includes a focussed plan of action to ensure the cyclical review of policies and procedures.
- A further focus on the use of curriculum objectives and the elucidation of specific methodologies is recommended for short-term planning.
- A review of the organisation and delivery of special education support is advised.

3. Quality of School Management

- The board of management is properly constituted and board members are cognisant of their roles and responsibilities. Suitable minutes of the board’s regular meetings are maintained. The board has formulated a range of curricular and organisational policies. It is recommended that each policy be signed, dated and ratified in a timely fashion. To this end, it is advised that a strategic plan be devised to support a cyclical approach to whole-
school planning. To enhance teachers’ professional development and to ensure continuity of personnel, it is recommended that a policy which promotes teacher mobility within mainstream and between mainstream and special education settings be devised and implemented. Financial procedures are managed carefully but should be certified externally in line with Section 18(1) of the Education Act 1998. Board members avail of training provided by the Catholic Primary School Managers’ Association.

- The school’s dedicated principal, who will retire next year, has given long and committed service to the school. He is highly respected among the wider school community and has provided continuity and stability to generations of boys. He displays a transparent leadership style and is a highly visible presence in the school. He manages and supports staff effectively and is committed to the pastoral and educational welfare of all pupils.

- The principal is capably supported by a committed in-school management team who carry out their assigned duties diligently. This team concentrates on school development and improvement. Post-holder duties are reviewed every three years or more frequently if circumstances demand. Team members are proud of their school. Their collegial outlook contributes notably to the positive school climate.

- The commendable range of resources available to support teaching and learning is well utilised. Information and Communication Technology (ICT) plays an integral part in providing focussed learning opportunities for pupils. The interactive whiteboard is used particularly well as a learning tool throughout the school.

- The parents’ association supports the work of the school. Parents are mainly involved in fundraising and in extra curricular events. Communication between home and school is very effective with the school’s website being a particularly useful channel of communication. Written reports, including the results of standardised tests, along with annual parent-teacher meetings, inform parents of their child’s progress. Parent questionnaires indicate that all parents feel their child is doing well in school and all parents agree that the school welcomes parents.

- The management of pupils, incorporating a targeted focus on their pastoral needs, is a significant strength of the school. Pupils are courteous and pleasant at all times. They are self-confident learners and show due regard for their school and its environs. Teachers’ classroom management skills are very good. A culture of mutual respect enhances the positive learning environment.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- The overall quality of school planning is good. Teachers plan collaboratively and key organisational and curriculum areas are addressed. Organisational plans clearly influence the day-to-day activities of the school. Curriculum plans reflect the principles of the Primary School Curriculum (1999). It is recommended that the school embark on a formal school self-evaluation process. This process should include a focussed plan of action to ensure the cyclical review of school policies and procedures.

- Teachers prepare long-term and short-term plans and maintain monthly progress records. The quality of this planning varies. Long-term planning is generally good. Further focus on the use of curriculum objectives along with some clarification on the specific methodologies to be used is required in short-term planning. It is recommended that the results of standardised tests, along with the regular assessment of all curriculum areas by class teachers, be used to inform planning for teaching and learning. It is necessary to include in this process, strategies for measuring school-based attainments against
national norms in order to gather information regarding strengths and areas needing development in pupils’ learning. It is recommended that information gathered be used to further inform differentiated approaches at each class level.

• 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

• Overall, teaching and learning are of a high quality. Effective classroom management skills are evident at all class levels. Teachers engage in whole-class teaching and provide pertinent opportunities for pair work and group tasks. Effective integration and linkage enhance lesson pace in many instances. In some instances differentiation is used well. The extension of this good practice to all classes is advised. Bright, print-rich classrooms provide supportive learning environments throughout. Teachers display an ability to support their lessons using a variety of resources including the interactive whiteboard, and the judicious use of textbooks was observed for the most part.

• The quality of teaching and learning in Irish is good. A wide variety of resources, including the interactive whiteboard, purposefully illustrate lessons. Irish is integrated meaningfully throughout the day in all classes. Poetry and songs are used effectively to reinforce learning. Pupils complete appropriate workbook-based exercises carefully. It is recommended, however, that creative and independent writing be further cultivated. Most pupils read with understanding and the extension of their reading experience is recommended. In order to build on the good work observed, it is recommended that the curriculum forms the basis for classroom planning and that structured programmes of work be laid out for the four strands.

• There is a good standard relating to teaching, learning and pupil achievement in English. Pupils’ oral skills are prioritised mainly through teacher modelling. To ensure continuity and progression in pupils’ oral language development, a curriculum-based oral language programme is recommended for the majority of classes. The grouping of pupils for reading according to ability is commendable. The print-rich environment, along with the provision of reading materials in a variety of genres, supports pupils in becoming competent readers. Through the pupil questionnaires, most pupils report that they are doing well at reading. Pupils can recite, write and appreciate a wide variety of genres of poetry. Pupils’ functional and creative writing skills are suitably fostered. To assist the development of the writing process, a more consistent approach to penmanship is advised.

• The overall quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in Mathematics is commendable. Mathematical language is consistently extended, and written work is
diligently corrected. Oral work is used constructively to advance pupils’ mathematical thinking. Resources are carefully selected, methodologies vary to meet individual pupil’s learning needs and pupils’ competence in problem solving is suitably addressed. Pupils generally have a good understanding of the mathematical concepts being taught and the majority are achieving well in Mathematics. In their questionnaire responses, most pupils believed that they are doing well at Mathematics.

- The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in Drama is very good. Discrete, well-structured lessons enable pupils to work collaboratively, to develop their improvisation and visualisation skills, and to reflect on the process. The use of imaginative stimulus, the emphasis on appropriate language and the inventive use of characterisation are among the positive features of the lessons observed. This results in pupils responding enthusiastically to the creative environment established. Pupils consistently demonstrate their enjoyment of the drama process.

6. Quality of Support for Pupils

- Good practice was observed in some special education settings. This includes the organisation of teaching approaches to meet pupils’ varying needs, combined with the use of praiseworthy learning opportunities. Where pupils are withdrawn, it is recommended that group sizes as outlined in the school’s comprehensive special education plan be adhered to. The majority of support is organised on a withdrawal basis. In light of changes to personnel, a review of the organisation and delivery of support is recommended.

- The quality of planning in the special education setting varies. Good practice observed includes the setting out of specific targets in each pupil’s individual education plan based on their identified needs. These targets are then addressed consistently through the creation of clear curriculum-based objectives in short-term plans. The adoption of this good practice in all special education settings is recommended. The special education team and class teachers liaise informally as required. Additional focus on the identified needs of individual pupils is advised to ensure a more focussed link between classroom and special education planning for these pupils. The recording of pupil attendance in the special education setting is advised for all learning support and resource teachers.

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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 Board of Management and staff of Scoil Muire Banrion are grateful to the Department of Education and Skills Inspectors for their recent Whole School Evaluation and for their comprehensive report on our school.

The many encouraging findings of the report will be a constructive support in the ongoing efforts of the staff, BOM and school community to even further enhance the learning opportunities the school provides as well as in the implementation of the recommendations contained in the report.

The Board welcomes the many positive findings in the report. It reaffirms the strength of teaching throughout the school from a dedicated staff. The Board is particularly pleased with the report’s affirmation of the pastoral care and needs of all pupils. It also, recognises the very significant advances the school has made in the effective embracing of modern technology in all areas of the school to the benefit of all 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 school has already implemented the recommendations on specific targets in individual learning plans by all support teachers.

The implementation of further recommendations will be introduced on a planned basis within a specific short term timeframe. This will include the approach to the cyclical rotation of teachers which, while agreeing with the board principal of rotation, will also include levels of teacher strengths and expertise in particular areas to the greater benefit of students as criteria for teacher deployment.