An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Scoil Náisiúnta Mhuire, Coolronan,
Ballivor, County Meath
Uimhir rolla: 18429Q

Date of inspection: 19 January 2011
1. Introduction

Scoil Náisiúnta Mhuire, Coolronan is a two-teacher school under the patronage of the Catholic Bishop of Meath. A shared support teacher is based at this school. The school participates in the Department of Education and Skills Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS), the action plan for educational inclusion. Enrolment trends indicate a gradual increase in pupil numbers and attendance rates are very good for many pupils. A review of the current attendance strategy should be undertaken to further support school attendance. The board of management of the school was given an opportunity to comment on the findings and recommendations of the report; the board chose to accept the report without response.

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 is committed to the development of the school.
- The principal is commended for her role in developing school facilities.
- The teachers and ancillary staff create a warm, affirming and supportive learning environment for the pupils.
- Pupils are very courteous and enthusiastic learners and many demonstrate very good levels of independence in their learning.
- Early and emergent reading skills are competently developed.
- Pupils demonstrate imagination, confidence and enthusiasm during their participation in drama activities.

The following main recommendations are made:

- A more active approach to school self-review should be developed and a strategic plan be devised to guide whole-school planning.
- A greater focus on skills development should underpin some aspects of curriculum provision.
- The board should review the current structure of the school day to ensure that the timing of recreation periods optimises the educational provision for the pupils.
- Provision for differentiation should be further improved to ensure that there is a greater level of support for pupils of varying abilities in aspects of literacy and numeracy.
- It is recommended that provision for pupils with special educational needs be reviewed.

3. Quality of School Management

- The board of management is very supportive of the work of the school and members are committed to the improvement of its facilities and resources. It is advised, however, to
have accounts audited or certified on an annual basis. The board should support the re-establishment of the Parents’ Association.

- The principal who was appointed two years ago has worked diligently to improve the school facilities. Effective links have been forged with the school community. The principal is now focusing on her role as instructional leader within the school and has been instrumental in initiating whole-school planning and review. Very collegial working relationships exist within the school and the deputy principal undertakes a range of appropriate duties.

- Adequate and suitable resources are available to support the delivery of all aspects of the curriculum.

- Pupil management is very good and teachers are commended for the positive learning atmosphere and the sense of community that exists in the school. Pupils are courteous and respectful in their relationships with peers and teachers. The board should review the current structure of the school day to ensure that the timing of recreation periods optimises educational provision for pupils. The analysis of pupils’ questionnaires indicates that pupils feel secure and confident in their learning environment. The school is commended for the range of co-curricular and extracurricular activities provided for pupils.

- Parents are directly involved in many of the school’s activities and willingly offer their support at various times of the year. To build further on this support, the board should continue to support the re-establishment of the parents’ association. The analysis of parents’ questionnaires indicate their satisfaction with opportunities to meet with teachers and discuss their children’s progress. It is recommended that the results of standardised assessments should be communicated in writing to parents. The role of parents in the planning process should be developed.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- There is scope for further development in the overall quality of whole-school planning. A number of organisational policies require review to ensure full compliance with current legislative requirements. Some whole-school curricular plans have been completed. A greater emphasis on curriculum content to be taught and a closer alignment to the school context is advised.

- Teachers’ preparation and planning is good in general.

- Whole-school planning and school self-review should now be developed. The identified targets need to more closely reflect the school’s context. An action plan will guide this process.

- School authorities provided evidence that, in compliance with Primary Circular 0061/2006, the board of management has formally adopted the Department’s Child Protection Guidelines for Primary Schools. Evidence was provided to show 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.
5. Quality of Teaching, Learning and Pupil Achievement

- Tugtar faoi mhúineadh na Gaeilge go dícheallach. Leirionn na daltaí dearadh dearfach i leith na teanga. Baintear úsáid éifeachtach as puipéid, as pictiúir agus as dramaíocht chun cumas cumarsáide na ndaltaí a spreagadh. Tá sé ar chumas daltaí áirithe simplí a chumadh agus roinnt briathra a lámhas a chumadh go bhuail forbairt chéimníúil á dhéanamh ar scileanna labhartha na ndaltaí. Moltar an Ghaeilge a úsáid go rialta lasmuigh den cheacht Gaeilge. Cleachtar an léitheoireacht agus a n scríbhneoireacht go rialta. Moltar don scoil clár léitheoireachta struchtúrtha a chur i bhfeidhm. Moltar freisin clár scríbhneoireachta níos dusshlánach a tharla.

The Irish language is taught diligently. Pupils have a positive attitude to the language. Effective use is made of puppets, pictures and drama to stimulate pupils’ communication skills. Some pupils are able to compose simple sentences and use a number of verbs with some degree of competence. New language taught should be incremental in nature to ensure that there is systematic progression in pupils’ language skills. It is recommended that Irish be used regularly outside the Irish lesson. The school is advised to put a structured reading scheme in place. A more challenging programme of writing is also recommended.

- The quality of teaching and learning in some aspects of English is very good. Oral language is competently developed on a cross-curricular and discrete basis. Pupils respond positively to poetry. A broader response to a wider and more challenging selection of poetry is recommended. Early and emergent literacy skills are skilfully developed. A praiseworthy variety of graded reading material underpins the school’s programme for literacy. The more frequent use of novels is recommended in the middle and senior classes to challenge and further extend pupils’ competencies. Many pupils are confident writers and manifest an appropriate ability to write independently and with creativity. Further review at whole-school level is recommended to systematically improve pupils’ presentation skills.

- The quality of teaching and learning in particular aspects of Mathematics is very good. Oral mathematical activities are a feature of classroom work and teachers facilitate pupils to apply concepts in real life situations. Attainment for a number of pupils is good but further challenge for more able pupils is recommended. Pupils in particular classes should be enabled to do more of their mathematical work in copybooks and develop their independent recording skills. The development of mathematical trails in the school grounds merits consideration as an appropriate means of integrating pupils’ skills and concepts.

- There is evidence of some good practice with regard to teaching and learning in Drama. Discussion and consolidation enhances their understanding of the patterns of human behaviour and particular events. When prompted, the pupils can display a range of emotions and expression which is of a good standard in some classes. The selection of more complex scenarios and settings should be explored further to communicate and share the drama in an improvised and spontaneous manner.

- The overall quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement is good. Vibrant and purposeful displays are a feature of each classroom and the celebration of pupils’ creative endeavours enhances the circulation area. A wide variety of methodologies are competently used by all teachers. However opportunities for structured play should be facilitated for infant pupils in a more systematic manner. Many pupils can confidently
discuss aspects of their learning and undertake activities with enthusiasm and independence commendable for their age. However, to optimise the learning opportunities for some pupils, further provision for differentiation is recommended to ensure appropriate challenge or support.

- Some very effective and appropriate assessment strategies were noted during the evaluation. There is potential to develop a more informative tracking system to record individual pupils' performance. Consideration should be given to analysing assessment results in order to set appropriate learning targets for individual pupils.

6. Quality of Support for Pupils

- On the whole, there is good quality support for pupils with special educational needs (SEN). A positive learning environment is created where pupils' strengths are affirmed. Lessons are appropriately resourced and suitably structured. Individual education plans are in place and are devised collaboratively. There is potential to further clarify the role of the class teacher within these plans and to document pupils' progress more consistently. The current approach to provision is mainly on a withdrawal basis for individual pupils. This practice should be reviewed and a more varied approach be adopted based on the needs of individual pupils. Some pupils would also benefit from activities focusing on social skills development.

Published October 2011