

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

**Whole School Evaluation
REPORT**

**Scoil Mhuire, Caisleán Úi Dhonnabháin,
Drimoleague, Co Cork
Uimhir rolla: 18468D**

Date of inspection: 16 September 2013



1. Introduction

Scoil Mhuire, Caisleán Úi Dhonnabháin (Castledonovan NS) is a rural, co-educational primary school in the parish of Drimoleague in West Cork. Currently, 48 pupils attend the school and enrolment trends are stable. The school patron is the Catholic Bishop of Cork and Ross. 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 discharges its duties in an effective manner.
- The school enjoys high levels of community support.
- The newly-appointed principal and staff are hard-working and committed professional educators.
- Pupils display positive dispositions to learning and have well developed work practices.
- General standards of pupil achievement are satisfactory.
- There is a focus on the maintenance of standards and on school improvement across a broad range of parameters.

The following **main recommendations** are made:

- Planning processes should be developed further to include, on a more structured basis, the voice of parents and other relevant educational partners.
- The educational experiences of pupils should be further expanded through more engagement with the immediate school environment, web-based learning and cross-curricular projects, as well as more involvement in a broader range of co-curricular and extra-curricular activity.
- A communicative approach to the teaching of Irish should be developed further.

3. Quality of School Management

- The board of management is properly constituted and plays an active role in the life of the school. Members are to be commended for providing well resourced and well maintained premises and for overseeing the administrative and financial affairs of the school in an efficient manner. The board has, traditionally, played a secondary role in the development of school policies and in curricular planning and, whilst this is an area in which a more collaborative approach has been adopted, further scope for development exists. Communication lines, though informal, are effective and the quality of relationships within the school community is, on the evidence

available, very good. For example, parental questionnaire responses indicate that the board and the teaching staff enjoy very high levels of support and are trusted by the school community.

- The principal, newly appointed in December 2011, articulates a clear vision for the school. She is a committed professional with a clear focus on the maintenance of high standards with respect to pupil achievement across the curriculum. She displays significant strengths in the area of strategic planning and in administration. She is also aware of the fundamental need to further encourage parental inputs and to build on the strengths of the past through effective communication, regular dialogue and meaningful partnership.
- She is capably assisted in her work by her mainstream colleague who, though not, as yet, in a formal post of responsibility, shows a willingness to play an important role in curriculum leadership and in the pastoral care of the pupils.
- Secretarial, caretaking and SNA support greatly assist in the day-to-day operation of the school.
- The school benefits from an active parents' association which provides financial support and practical assistance for a number of co-curricular and extra-curricular activities.
- Pupils are well-behaved, cooperative and courteous with well developed work practices and positive dispositions to learning. Pupil responses to a 23 item questionnaire indicate that they are happy in school and have positive self images.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- Though the work is, as yet, incomplete, the principal has made a significant contribution to policy development since her appointment in December 2011. A wide range of administrative and curricular plans were available for review during the whole-school evaluation and these were both relevant and useful. Advice was given with respect to broadening the collaborative base for planning further and on the need to involve, where relevant, parents in that ongoing process.
- The quality of teacher preparedness is a significant strength in the school. A very effective model of maintaining monthly progress reports has been developed by the staff and this allows for easy analysis of progress on a strand by strand basis at the end of the school year.
- The school has taken positive initial steps in the school self-evaluation process. Problem solving in Mathematics has been identified as a relevant whole school focus for the year ahead. To date this process has been effectively implemented in line with Departmental guidelines
- 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

- The overall quality of teaching in the lessons observed during the whole-school evaluation was very good. Pupils were active participants in the learning process and displayed positive learning dispositions. Levels of pupil attainment were satisfactory and standardised testing in literacy and numeracy demonstrated very good results, in many instances. Quantitative data (parental questionnaire responses) clearly indicate that the teachers enjoy the respect of the community.

- Moltar dáiríreacht na n-oidí i bhforbairt mhúineadh na Gaeilge agus i bhforbairt atmaisféir fábhach don teanga a chothú sa scoil. Cuirtear béim ar théamaí a bhaineann le timpeallacht agus le taithí na ndaltaí agus ar fhorbairt fhoclóra. Cleachtar gníomhaíochtaí cainte éifeachtacha chun an teanga múinte a chur i bhfeidhm agus cuirtear béim ar na snáitheanna uile (éisteacht, labhairt, léitheoireacht & scríbhneoireacht). Chun cur leis an obair a thuilleadh moltar béim sa bhreis a chur ar an teanga chumarsáideach agus straitéisí nua a aithint chun deiseanna cainte a chruthú go rialta trasna an scoil-lae. Moltar, chomh maith, timpeallacht phrionta-shaibhir i nGaeilge a chruthú níos mó agus obair scríofa na ndaltaí a chur ar taispeáint.

The commitment of the staff in teaching Irish and in creating a positive atmosphere for the promotion of the language is to be commended. There is an emphasis on vocabulary development around themes which are relevant to the experiences of the pupils. Effective learning activities are organised to teach the language and all strands (listening, speaking, reading and writing) are promoted. To further develop practice it is recommended that more emphasis be placed on the communicative use of Irish by developing new strategies to promote regular conversation during the school day. It is also recommended that a more print rich environment is developed and that the written work of pupils in Irish is displayed.

- High standards of teaching in English result in very satisfactory levels of pupil achievement. The school environment is suitably print rich and a wide range of appropriate reading material is available in each classroom. Suitable strategies are employed to allow pupils develop the skills to identify and comprehend words and an effective phonics programme is systematically implemented in the junior classes. Class readers are supplemented by a broad range of additional reading material in the form of class libraries and class novels are used to good effect in the senior room. A book club has recently been formed in the senior classes and reading logs are now being maintained. Standardised test results indicate above average standards of reading in all of the curricular bands. It is recommended that the school continue to prioritise books as key resources and look at further prioritising reading through, for example, involving parents in shared reading initiatives or engaging in other projects which motivate pupils to read for pleasure. It would also be worthwhile to look at suitable programmes to explicitly teach comprehension strategies for older pupils or to explore web-based learning opportunities which promote reading.
- The quality of the teaching and pupil achievement in Mathematics is good and standardised test scores indicate satisfactory levels of general pupil attainment. Effective use is made of a wide range of concrete manipulative materials to ensure pupils' understanding of mathematical concepts and skills is effectively promoted. Active learning methodologies are frequently employed. Mathematics was observed to be effectively integrated in Physical Education during the evaluation and there was a consistent reinforcement of mathematical language across the curriculum where opportunities occurred. The mathematical understanding of pupils would be further enhanced by more engagement with Mathematics in the environment through games or maths trails and there would be value in exploring further opportunities to incorporate web-based learning as a teaching methodology in Mathematics.
- In Physical Education (PE), despite a restrictive indoor environment, a wide variety of learning activities are provided for in line with the principles of the prescribed curriculum. PE lessons are well managed and high levels of pupil participation are actively promoted. There is, however, scope for further development in the context of promoting PE as a cross-curricular activity through nature walks, orienteering, school garden projects or maths trails that explore the educational potential of the immediate locality. The school should also consider participation in sporting competitions or in events such as the 'Active Flag' or 'Healthy Eating' programmes all of which would generate interest and enthusiasm amongst pupils and parents. The school is to be commended for their recent registration for the 'Green Schools' initiative as an initial first step in expanding the educational experiences of pupils further through a broader range of extra-curricular and co-curricular activities.

- Very good assessment practices have been developed in the school and available data is carefully analysed and very effective records are maintained. Pupils' written work is regularly monitored and positive evaluative comments are provided by the teachers. The recently developed tracking system for individual pupil progress will further improve assessment practices.

6. Quality of Support for Pupils

- A well constructed and relevant special educational needs (SEN) policy is in place in the school. Individual teacher preparation is also of a good standard and there is an appropriate emphasis on partnership and on information sharing. Teaching in SEN settings is conducted in a professional manner and pupil teacher relationships were observed to be positive and affirming. Support is, normally, provided through withdrawal and there is scope to broaden the range of support methodologies to include more in-class support or whole-class teaching, where appropriate. The school also benefits from the services of a support teacher funded by the Department of Education & Skills under the terms of a local parish agreement dating back to the early eighties. The teacher, currently working in this position, makes a valuable contribution to teaching and learning in support of her colleagues and withdraws specific classes for focused instruction in specific subject areas in line with the agreed needs of the school. At the time of the evaluation the resource allocation hours (8.5hrs) were in the process of being filled and this aspect of the work of the school was not observed.

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 welcome the very positive findings of the report and wish to thank the inspector for the courtesy and professionalism he afforded the school during the course of the evaluation.

Area 2 Follow-up actions planned or undertaken since the completion of the inspection activity to implement the findings and recommendations of the inspection

Since the evaluation, implementation of the recommendations has commenced and will continue into the future.