

Department of Education and Skills

**Whole School Evaluation
REPORT**

**SN na Maighdine Muire Buachaillí
Ballymun, Dublin 9
Uimhir rolla: 19302U**

Date of inspection: 4 October 2012



A N R O I N N | DEPARTMENT OF
OIDEACHAIS | EDUCATION
AGUS SCILEANNA | AND SKILLS

1. Introduction

SN na Maighdine Muire Buachaillí is situated in Ballymun, Dublin 9, and caters for boys from junior infants to sixth class. The school participates in Band 1 of the School Support Programme of Delivering Equality of Opportunity to Schools (DEIS), the action plan of the Department of Education and Skills for educational inclusion. Targeted interventions have resulted in a measurable and sustained improvement in attendance levels in the school. As part of its provision the school delivers the Early Start Programme to boys and girls. This one-year pre-primary initiative in designated areas of urban disadvantage provides for children who are most at risk of not succeeding in education. There are 138 pupils enrolled in the school.

The board of management was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the report; a response was not received from the board.

2. Summary of Findings and Recommendations for Further Development

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

- The quality of leadership provided by the principal is very good. This insightful leadership ensures that clear and realistic expectations are set for pupils.
- The principal is ably supported by a committed in-school management team whose members display a strong sense of collaboration and sense of shared purpose.
- Teachers and management show a strong commitment to the school self-evaluation process in order to improve the quality of learning provided to pupils.
- The management of pupils is very effective and is conducted in an inclusive setting where the emphasis is on the creation of positive learning environments.
- The teaching of Mathematics is very good, with a commendable emphasis on the development of pupils' problem-solving abilities.
- The school has an effective and well-coordinated programme for the teaching of English which is implemented in a coherent and progressive way and has a positive impact on pupils' learning.
- The range of supports provided for pupils is very good and features well-organised programmes and effective collaboration between mainstream and support teachers.

The following **main recommendations** are made:

- Tá gnéithe le forbairt maidir le múineadh na Gaeilge, go háirithe maidir leis an léitheoireacht agus an scríbhneoireacht. *There are aspects for development in the teaching of Irish, in respect of reading and writing in particular.*
- It is recommended that links between the school plan and teachers' short-term plans for each curricular area are developed to a greater degree in teachers' long-term plans.
- While it is commendable that the school is developing programmes to cater for the needs of more able pupils, it is recommended that greater emphasis be placed on providing differentiated learning activities for these pupils in mainstream class settings.

3. Quality of School Management

- The board of management plays an active role in the life of the school. Board members display a keen interest in school activities. The board is fully involved in the development of school policies. Very good mechanisms are in place for communication between the board and staff in order to ensure that the board is informed of the full range of activities and programmes provided for pupils. Teachers report to the board at each meeting in respect of school activities. School accounts are managed prudently and are audited annually.
- The quality of leadership provided by the principal is very good. This insightful leadership ensures that clear and realistic expectations are set for pupils. The principal's thorough understanding of the school context and his commitment to pupils help to ensure the effective management of the school. The principal is ably supported by a committed in-school management team whose members display a strong sense of collaboration and sense of shared purpose. The team meets regularly and provides curricular and organisational leadership. Team members have clearly-defined roles and they perform their duties effectively and collaboratively.
- The quality of the management of resources is very good. Prudent management of resources, in collaboration with the board of management of the adjoining girls' school, means that the school grounds and facilities are maintained to a high standard. A commendable range of resources is provided for teaching and learning in all classrooms, including support settings.
- The management of pupils is very good. The school is inclusive and welcoming for pupils. The board of management and staff collaborate effectively to create positive learning environments for pupils. Pupils' questionnaire responses indicate that these efforts are highly successful: most pupils feel secure in school, they see their teachers as approachable, they believe they are doing well and they consider their school to be a good school.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- The quality of the school planning and school self-evaluation process is very good. All members of school community have opportunities to contribute to the development of school policy. Data is analysed carefully when policies are being formulated and reviewed. Curriculum planning is specific and focused and self-evaluation processes in the school are sophisticated. The school has a very good awareness of the need to set very specific targets, specifically with regard to DEIS planning.
- The school is working to ensure that there is a correlation between whole-school decisions in long-term planning and individual classroom planning. Clear and constructive guidance is provided for teachers in the school plan for each curricular area. It is recommended that links between the school plan and teachers' short-term plans for each curricular area are developed to a greater degree in teachers' long-term plans.
- Teachers' short-term plans are of commendable quality. Specific learning objectives are identified, along with a variety of appropriate and purposeful learning activities. A very good range of resources is provided for teaching and learning in each classroom. While it is commendable that the school is developing programmes to cater for the needs of more able pupils, it is recommended that greater emphasis be placed on providing differentiated learning activities for these pupils in mainstream class settings. This could be done initially by providing greater detail of differentiation in short-term plans.

- 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

- Tá múineadh na Gaeilge go maith ar an iomlán tríd an scoil ach tá gnéithe le forbairt ann maidir leis an léitheoireacht agus an scríbhneoireacht. Tá roinnt modhanna dearfacha in úsáid sa scoil agus tá raon acmhainní cuí ar fáil. Cuirtear béim inmholta ar fhíorchumarsáid agus sonraítear dea-úsáid á bhaint as gníomhaíochtaí cuí chun scileanna éisteachta agus labhartha na ndaltaí a fhorbairt. Is mór is fiú an bhéim a leagtar ar úsáid nathanna na seachtaine agus is léir go bhfuil dea-thionchar dá bharr ar fhoghlaim na ndaltaí. Sna ranganna, múintear raon oiriúnach foclóra agus baintear feidhm thorthúil as obair bheirte chun deiseanna rannpháirtíochta a sholáthar do na daltaí le linn ceachtanna. I ranganna áirithe sonraítear úsáid inmholta á bhaint as gníomhrainn, filíocht agus amhráin chun eispéireas teanga na ndaltaí a shaibhriú. B'fhiú an cleachtas seo a leathnú tríd an scoil. Sa léitheoireacht, d'fhéadfaí úsáid sa bhreis a bhaint as sleachta de dheardh na n-oidí, bunaithe ar thimpeallacht na ndaltaí, chun an ábhar léitheoireachta a leathnú. B'fhiú freisin clár córasach scríbhneoireachta a chruthú chun tuilleadh éagsúlachta a sholáthar agus níos mó dúshláin a thabhairt do na daltaí.
- *While aspects of the teaching of Irish are good throughout the school, others such as reading and writing require attention. Commendable emphasis is placed on real communication and good use is observed being made of appropriate activities to develop pupils' listening and speaking skills. The emphasis that is laid on the use of phrases of the week is worthwhile and it is clear that this emphasis has a positive influence on pupils' learning. In the classrooms, an appropriate range of vocabulary is taught and productive use is made of pair work to provide pupils with opportunities to participate during lessons. In some classes the commendable use of action rhymes, poetry and songs to enrich pupils' language experience is noted. It would be worth extending this practice through the school. Regarding reading, more use could be made of passages designed by the teachers based on the pupils' environment to broaden the range of reading material. It would also be worthwhile developing a systematic writing programme to provide greater variety and more challenge for pupils.*
- The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in English is commendable. The English programme is underpinned by good quality short-term planning which focuses on specific objectives and learning outcomes. The *First Steps* approach is well coordinated and is used very well throughout the school. Commendable differentiation is a noteworthy feature of contexts where team teaching is used. Such practices ensure that all pupils are afforded opportunities to participate actively and purposefully during lessons and that all pupils are given realistic opportunities to experience success in their learning. There is scope for greater use of differentiation in lessons when one teacher has responsibility for the whole class group. DEIS programmes are used very well and the literacy initiatives that are implemented on a whole-school basis are having a positive impact on pupil attainment levels. Good and careful monitoring of pupils' work is evident throughout the school. Appropriate emphasis is placed on good presentation and penmanship. Copybooks are well presented and are corrected regularly.
- The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in Mathematics is very good. Planning for skill development is evident at each class level. Suitable emphasis is placed on mental mathematics in all classes. Pair work and group work are used effectively in developing computational skills. Effective problem-solving strategies are taught systematically and good use is made of higher order questions during mathematics

lessons. Very good examples were observed of teachers modelling mathematical thinking processes for pupils and helping them to explore possible solutions to problems. There is scope to provide a greater challenge for more able pupils in some class settings. Very effective use is made of resources to enhance pupil engagement and develop pupil understanding. Pupils are very focused and purposeful during discussions in lessons. Monitoring of pupils' work is systematic and effective and there is very good communication between support teachers and mainstream class teachers. On the whole, pupils are making commendable progress in Mathematics.

- The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in Science is very good. The school plan for Science is informative and outlines topics and how they are to be developed at each class level. Accordingly, the Science programme in the school is cohesive and is broad and balanced, ensuring that pupils experience all curriculum strands regularly. Hands-on learning activities are used well to enhance pupils' engagement levels in science lessons and there is good emphasis on language development. Team teaching is used well to ensure that pupils with additional learning needs are included purposefully during lessons. Pupils work well collaboratively to investigate and explore and they evidently enjoy science lessons. Their very good understanding of concepts taught is evidenced in their oral responses to questions and in their written and practical work.
- The quality of overall teaching, learning and pupil achievement is commendable. Lessons are focused and well prepared and teachers use questioning effectively. Good use is made of resources and the pacing of lessons is good, with appropriate momentum maintained throughout lessons. Assessment practices are good, with all teachers monitoring pupils' work carefully across the range of the curriculum. Assessment data is used very well to inform the school's approach to literacy and numeracy. There is scope to extend the range of assessment instruments in use in other areas of the curriculum. The guidelines produced by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA), *Assessment in the Primary School Curriculum (2007)* should be useful in developing a school-wide approach to assessment.

6. Quality of Support for Pupils

- The quality of support provided for pupils with special educational needs (SEN) is very good. Policy in this area is very clear and specific and there is very good collaboration both within the SEN team and between support and mainstream class teachers. Thorough and careful identification of pupils' educational needs is a feature of the provision, and pupils are placed on the relevant stages of the continuum of support. Individualised plans for pupils are very specific and informative. Careful thought is given to the selection of approach for pupils. Programmes such as Reading Recovery and Maths Recovery are used effectively and the provision is very well organised throughout the school. Withdrawal and in-class support are used very effectively as part of the school's cohesive approach. A broad range of resources is used effectively. Facilities are good throughout the school and spacious rooms are provided for support teaching.
- Lessons observed in the special class for pupils with mild general learning disability were conducted well with clear questioning by the teacher and suitable use of available resources. Pair work and group work facilitated social interaction. More use of modelling strategies and the interactive whiteboard will help to meet the range of pupils' needs. Individualised profiles are prepared with priority learning needs well identified and specific learning targets included. It is noted that the number of pupils in the class is less than the pupil teacher ratio for these classes of 11:1 and also that a small number of pupils will leave at the end of this school year. In this context, the future viability of the class is not assured.

- The quality of home-school partnership is very good. Under the Home, School and Community Liaison (HSCCL) initiative, a range of appropriate programmes is provided for families. There is a commendable focus on target groups and a strong emphasis is placed on developing parents' capacities to support their children's learning. School Completion Programme initiatives are used effectively to support children and families. Effective ongoing assessment of the effectiveness of interventions helps to ensure that activities are focused and targeted on the areas of greatest need.
- Communication with parents and with the wider community is very good. Parents are kept informed of school events and there are clear and well-used mechanisms for them to communicate with teachers. Parents' responses to questionnaires administered during the evaluation were also very positive. They expressed high levels of satisfaction with their children's progress, with procedures for communicating with the school and with the way their children are treated in school.