Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Scoil Mhuiire
Ramelton, County Donegal
Uimhir rolla: 19491D

Date of inspection: 10 February 2011
1. Introduction

Scoil Mhuire is a mainstream primary school under the patronage of the Catholic Bishop of Raphoe. There are 180 pupils on roll and numbers have been increasing over the past number of years. School attendance is good. The teaching staff includes an administrative principal, eight school-based teachers—seven mainstream and one support—and two visiting support teachers. Two teachers were on leave at the time of this evaluation; two substitute teachers were employed in their place. The school participates in the Modern Languages in Primary Schools Initiative and in Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS, Rural Band 2), the action plan of the Department of Education and Skills for educational inclusion. Provision for English, Irish, Mathematics and Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) was inspected during this whole-school evaluation. 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

<table>
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<tr>
<th>The following are the <strong>main strengths</strong> of the work of the school:</th>
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<td>• The school is very well managed by a supportive board of management.</td>
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<td>• The principal provides excellent leadership to the school community.</td>
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<td>• The work of the deputy principal is highly praiseworthy</td>
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<td>• The school has a strong sense of community, a commendable child-centered ethos and a very welcoming atmosphere.</td>
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<td>• The overall quality of teaching and learning is very good.</td>
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<td>• The pupils are making very good progress in their learning and engage very well in their learning activities.</td>
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<td>• The support teachers are very committed to their pupils and work in a very diligent, skilful and earnest manner.</td>
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<td>• The active parents’ association is very supportive of the work of the school.</td>
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The following **main recommendations** are made:

- Moltar a thuilleadh béime a chur ar an gcumarsáid sa Ghaeilge tríd an scoil agus an córas measúnaíthe don Éisteacht agus don Labhairt atá i bhfeidhm sa scoil a leathnú. Further emphasis should be placed on communication in Irish throughout the school and existing assessment practices for listening and speaking should be developed.

3. Quality of School Management

- The work of the board of management is very positive and productive. The board discusses and ratifies school policies and oversees their review on an ongoing basis. The chairperson fulfils his role in a very committed manner and provides valuable support
through school visits and regular communication with the principal and staff. To ensure parents are kept up to date with the work of the board, it is recommended that the parents’ representatives on the board provide an agreed report about board decisions and actions to meetings of the parents’ association.

- The quality of in-school leadership is very high. The principal adopts a collaborative approach to her work and empowers staff members to create an effective, enjoyable learning environment. The deputy principal is actively involved in curricular and organisational development. Roll books are very well maintained by the post-holder. It is recommended, however, that the duties attached to the post of responsibility are reviewed to ensure they reflect the pastoral, curricular and administrative needs of the school.

- Teachers work very hard and skilfully and they are very committed to their pupils. There is very effective teamwork amongst staff and team-teaching approaches are used regularly to support learning. A class-allocation policy is recommended to create better opportunities for teachers to experience a range of teaching contexts. The school benefits very significantly from the diligent efforts of its secretary, cleaner and caretaker.

- At the time of this evaluation, the board was building a school extension so as to provide extra classroom space and the work was progressing well. The existing classrooms provide very stimulating learning environments; they are well resourced and include appropriate resources for information and communications technologies (ICT). The standard of display, including photographic displays of the pupils’ extracurricular activities along the corridors and in the common areas, is highly praiseworthy.

- The hard-working parents’ association communicates very well with the parent body and the newsletters produced are highly praiseworthy. At a pre-evaluation meeting, officers of the association reported that their children enjoy school and they are very happy with the education provided. Responses to questionnaires, administered as part of the evaluation process, indicate that parents consider the school to be very well run with a very good reputation in the community.

- The management of pupils is very effective. The talents of individual pupils are recognised and nurtured through a very wide range of co-curricular and extracurricular activities. In questionnaires administered during the evaluation, pupils indicate that they get on well with other children in the school and that they feel safe in the classroom and in the playground.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- The quality of whole-school administrative planning is very good. The principal ensures that school development planning is a collaborative process which involves the staff, the board and the parents’ association. The school policy booklets prepared for parents are commendable. The use of a school web site would be beneficial in further facilitating the sharing of information with the parent community.

- The overall quality of curriculum planning is very good. The delineation of content and teaching strategies in the plans for English, Mathematics and SPHE is useful for teachers. A review of the Irish plan is recommended, in particular the planning for **listening** and **speaking**. The Department’s publication *Irish in the Primary School* (2007) will be a useful resource in this regard.
• The teachers are committed to school self-evaluation and to improving pupils’ literacy and numeracy attainments. Collaborative planning practices for team-teaching and innovative station teaching are praiseworthy. It is recommended that school management continues to monitor the outcomes of literacy and numeracy initiatives measuring in particular their impact on the pupils’ learning.

• The quality of classroom long-term and short-term planning is very good. As appropriate, records of monthly progress are maintained by the principal.

• 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

• Tá caighdeán maith le sonrú i múineadh agus foghlaim na Gaeilge. Baineann na hoidí leas an-tairbheach as an nGaeilge go neamhfhoirmiúil agus as modhanna cruthaitheacha i múineadh na teanga. Déantar go leor oibre chun raon teanga nandlait a forbarachtach, fós, tá scóip chun forbartha i bhforbaracht na firchumarsáide. Léann na ndalait go caighdeán maith agus tuigeann siad abhar na léitheoireachta. Déantar comhtháthú breá sna rangsheomraí idir an comhrá, an léitheoireacht agus an scribhneoireacht. Déantar measúnú ar dhul chun cinn na ndalait go rialta ach moltar an dea-chleachtas atá sa chóras measúnaithe i ranganna áirithe a leathnú go gach rang

• The standard of teaching and learning in Irish is good. The teachers use Irish informally to very good effect and use creative approaches in teaching the language. A lot of work is undertaken in order to develop the pupils’ repertoires of language; however there is still scope for the development of communicative skills. The pupils’ standard of reading is good and they understand the content of their reading. Language, reading and writing activities are integrated to good effect in all classrooms. The pupils’ progress is assessed regularly; however the effective assessment practices that are in use in some classrooms should be extended to all classrooms.

• The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in English is very good. Oral language development is emphasised and the pupils enjoy regular discussion and vocabulary enrichment activities. Reading and writing are taught very well. In all classrooms the teaching of poetry is highly commendable. Language, reading and writing are promoted to very good effect across the curriculum. Overall, the pupils are confident speakers; they read with very good fluency and write to a very good standard.

• The quality of teaching and learning and pupil achievement in Mathematics is very good. Lessons engage pupils very well and active participation is encouraged through the creative use of concrete resources, games, hands-on activities, ICT and discussion. Lesson content is linked very well to the environment and to the life experiences of the pupils. Oral mathematics is very well attended. Problem-solving skills are developed effectively through strategic questioning, discussion and targeted activities.

• The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in SPHE, including Relationships and Sexual Education, is very good. Both the positive school ethos and the celebration
of the pupils’ work in SPHE are praiseworthy. Story, group work and circle time are used creatively to prompt the pupils to analyse particular themes and topics and to stimulate discussion. The integration of SPHE with other subjects is very effective. The *Roots of Empathy Programme*, supported by the Health Service Executive and delivered as part of the SPHE programme, is very supportive of the pupils’ learning.

- The quality of assessment is very good overall. Standardised tests are administered in English reading and numeracy while screening tests are used to identify any infant pupils with particular learning needs. In some classrooms, there is beneficial use of formative assessment which includes insightful written feedback to pupils on how to improve their work. This practice should be extended to all classrooms. Annual parent-teacher meetings are held and written reports are issued to parents summarising pupils’ progress and attainment at the end of the year. It is recommended that annual reports be issued to parents earlier in the year. The inclusion in these reports of the pupils’ attendance figures and their results in standardised tests is recommended.

- The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement is very good. Differentiated teaching approaches are used effectively throughout the school. From their questionnaire responses, pupils indicate that their teachers explain things clearly in lessons and that they often get to use computers in school. Parents, in their responses to questionnaires, indicate strong satisfaction with the quality of teaching in the school.

6. Quality of Support for Pupils

- The school is inclusive in its practices and the teachers are aware of and seek diligently to address pupils’ individual needs. There is very high quality provision for pupils with special and additional educational needs. Planning for individual education plans (IEPs) is commendable. Teaching approaches are effective and there is purposeful use of in-class support, sensory support and ICT. The pupils are progressing very well. Early identification and intervention procedures are working satisfactorily. More systematic procedures for communicating with parents, including seeking written consent to withdraw pupils from the classroom for learning support, are recommended. Two special needs assistants work capably and very positively in support of pupils with specific care needs.

- Provision for pupils from disadvantaged, minority and other groups is very good. The work of the visiting rural co-coordinator for DEIS, based appropriately on the targets identified in the DEIS plan, is highly effective. A laudable range of after-school courses and in-school activities are organised for parents to help them support their children’s learning and development. They are encouraged to participate in school events and a wide range of extracurricular activities.

- As part of the Modern Languages for Primary Schools Initiative, a visiting French-language teacher provides very good tuition to senior pupils on a weekly basis. At intervals, the school invites external tutors in to support instrumental music, ICT skills and various sporting activities.

*Published June 2011*
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 school community of Scoil Mhuire, Ramelton were hugely impressed by the courteous and caring manner in which the whole school evaluation was carried out.

An environment of mutual trust was created at the initial meeting with the inspectors and this was reinforced over the entire course of the inspection. Much preparation, work, and energy have gone into the creation of a child centred environment, a positive learning atmosphere, and suitable systems which together have made the school the tried and proven success it has become. This has been affirmed by the thorough and detailed report which we wholeheartedly welcome.

We are delighted with the affirmation of the Board of Management, the Parents Association, the Principal, teachers, special needs assistants, secretary, caretaker, and cleaner for their commitment, dedication and hard work.

We welcome the acknowledgement of the very good practice and high standards of teaching and learning. We note that the strong emphasis on teamwork, co-operation, inclusion, and communication in the school, with parents and the wider community was recognised.

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 recommendation made was discussed by the staff and this will inform and guide school planning for Irish for the next school year.

The staff as a team look forward to continuing the challenge of making the Irish language a greater part of the children’s daily life and will endeavour to create a sense of pride and ownership over their own culture and heritage.