

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

**Whole School Evaluation
REPORT**

**Scoil Mhuire's Iosaf Girls' National School,
St Mary's Place, Dorset Street,
Dublin 7**

Uimhir rolla: 19895E

Date of inspection: 11 November 2010



**AN ROINN | DEPARTMENT OF
OIDEACHAIS | EDUCATION
AGUS SCILEANNA | AND SKILLS**

1. Introduction

Scoil Mhuire's Iosaf National School is an all-girls' school located in a four-storey building, which also accommodates a separate boys' school, in St. Mary's Place, Dorset Street, Dublin 7. The school caters for girls from junior infants to sixth class. It is under the patronage of the Catholic Archbishop of Dublin. Currently, there are 101 pupils enrolled in the school. The school is included 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. 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:

- There is a caring, nurturing atmosphere in the school where diversity is cherished and all pupils are welcomed and supported. Teachers are committed to providing a rich educational experience for pupils and a positive, stimulating learning environment is evident.
- The quality of leadership and in-school management is very good. All school routines and procedures take place in an orderly, positive manner and pupils engage eagerly in the learning activities.
- The quality of teaching and learning was seen to be uniformly good and very good in some cases.
- The school is well resourced and managed.
- Excellent assessment practices are in place. Pupils' strengths and learning needs are identified appropriately and cohesive learning programmes are provided. Individual pupil's development is tracked systematically.
- The quality of school planning and record keeping is good.

The following **main recommendations** are made:

- It is recommended that the roles and responsibilities of staff and the timelines for the achievement of targets be more fully described in the DEIS three-year plan.
- The teaching duties and responsibilities of support teachers, particularly in relation to their in-class involvement, should be described in the school plan to ensure that there is clarity about the roles of the class teachers and support teachers in such circumstances.
- It is recommended that greater attention be given to differentiating the learning programme to ensure that the more able pupils are challenged sufficiently in addition to providing extra support to less able pupils.
- It is recommended that the programme at infant level should have a stronger play-based approach to fostering pupils' oral language and cognitive development.

3. Quality of School Management

- The board of management works effectively to manage all aspects of the organisation and operation of the school. The board is properly constituted and specific roles have been assigned to individual members who report regularly on developments in their areas of responsibility. The board facilitates school policy development and satisfactorily

oversees the planning process. Detailed minutes of board meetings are maintained and school accounts are monitored appropriately.

- The management of pupils is of a very high standard. All classroom interactions occur in a pleasant, affirming manner and pupils engage positively with staff and with each other. Pupils' questionnaire responses indicate that they are treated fairly, that they have a good opinion of the school and that they enjoy their time there. Pupils' attendance rates are generally good. The school has devised a number of creative initiatives to promote regular attendance. A student council is elected annually to allow pupils to contribute in a structured and meaningful way to the operation of appropriate school activities.
- The school has built up a very good stock of teaching and learning resources that are organised and managed effectively to enrich the learning experiences of pupils.
- The members of the in-school management team, under the leadership of an accomplished, committed principal, meet regularly to review the work of the school. Duties attached to posts of responsibility are reviewed annually. Post-holders report to the board of management and regularly provide input at staff meetings.
- The quality of communication between home and school is very good. Formal parent-teacher meetings are held annually and written reports are also sent to parents once a year. Parents are informed of developments at school level through newsletters, homework journals, and, in urgent cases, through a parent texting service. Questionnaire returns indicate that parents are very satisfied with the work of the school and the great majority of them have a good opinion of the school. Specific curriculum initiatives are organised to facilitate the involvement of parents such as, Maths for Fun, Paired Reading and a Science Day.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- As required under the DEIS programme, the school has compiled a three-year action plan. The plan prioritises the following areas: improving each pupil's standard in literacy and numeracy, improving pupil attendance and fostering further parental involvement in the school. While the action plan identifies specific targets and outlines teaching and learning strategies, it is recommended that the roles and responsibilities of staff, and the timelines for the achievement of targets be more fully described.
- The quality of whole-school planning is satisfactory. A plan is in place that addresses all curriculum areas and provides direction to the organisation and operation of the school. The plan was devised co-operatively and ratified by the board of management. The curriculum dimension of the plan is reviewed systematically to meet the changing needs of the school. It is recommended that the next review of Irish should focus on providing a range of rhymes, poems and songs to be taught at each class level.
- All teachers provide comprehensive long-term and short-term written plans for their work. In addition, they prepare a range of suitable resources to illustrate concepts and scaffold pupils' learning. They also provide a monthly report on work completed in each class. It is recommended that the approach to recording monthly progress be reviewed to provide a more succinct account of the work completed each month.
- 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

- In the four curriculum areas evaluated, the quality of teaching and learning was seen to be uniformly good and very good in some cases. All teachers prepare thoroughly for their work. A range of appropriate resources is used creatively and all classrooms have interactive white boards that are used to present lessons in an imaginative, stimulating manner. Appropriate teaching methods were observed and children were provided with opportunities to work in pairs and small groups to discuss their learning. In all classrooms, pupils were seen to be motivated and fully engaged during lessons. Support teachers and class teachers co-operate willingly to ensure that a cohesive learning programme is provided to pupils. In order to enhance the quality of this work, it is recommended that greater attention be given to differentiating the learning programme to ensure that the more able pupils are challenged sufficiently in addition to providing extra support to less able pupils.
- Leagtar béim inmholta sa phlean don Ghaeilge ar shuim agus ar mheas na ndaltaí a chothú agus rianaítear straitéisí faoi leith chun an Ghaeilge a chur chun cinn tríd an scoil. Múintear an Ghaeilge go féilteúil, dílis sna ranganna uile agus úsáidtear an teanga mar mheán theagaisc agus bhainistíochta sna ceachtanna. Baineann na hoidí leas torthúil as raon maith áiseanna oiriúnacha, an bord bán idirghníomhach san áireamh, chun foclóir nua a léiriú agus suim na ndaltaí a mhúscailt. Glacann na daltaí páirt fhuinniúil 'sna ceachtanna uile agus baineann siad taitneamh agus tairbhe as na cluichí beaga teanga agus na gníomhaíochtaí foghlama a sholáthraíonn na hoidí dóibh. Déanann na hoidí iarracht mhaith cur chuige cumarsáideach a chur i bhfeidhm agus comhrá na ndaltaí a scafláil. Ar an iomlán, éiríonn go hinmholta leo san obair seo. 'Sna bunranganna, cuirtear béim ar leathnú foclóra agus ar fhorbairt tuiscint na ndaltaí. Sna meán ranganna agus sna hard ranganna, forbraítear an Ghaeilge labhartha, an léitheoireacht agus an scríbhneoireacht go córasach. Léann roinnt mhaith de na daltaí le muinín agus léiríonn siad tuiscint chuí ar an ábhar léitheoireachta. De ghnáth bunaítear an scríbhneoireacht ar shleachta ó leabhair shaothair agus tá samplaí de scríbhneoireacht phearsanta na ndaltaí ar taispeáint i bhformhór de na seomraí ranga. Chun cur leis an dea-obair seo, moltar raon níos leithne de rainn bheaga agus píosaí filíochta a mhúineadh, go háirithe 'sna bunranganna. B'fhiú na rainn agus an fhilíocht a chuimsiú go hiomlán sa phlean scoile don Ghaeilge.
- *In the Irish plan, commendable emphasis is put on fostering the interest and regard of pupils for Irish and specific strategies to promote Irish have been set out. Irish is taught regularly in all classes and it is used as the language of instruction and management during lessons. Teachers use a wide range of resources, including the interactive white board, to illustrate new vocabulary and to engage pupils. Pupils participate enthusiastically in all the lessons and they both benefit from and enjoy the language games and activities that teachers organise. Teachers make a good effort to promote the communicative approach and to scaffold pupils' conversations. In general, they succeed well in this work. In the junior classes, an emphasis is placed on developing pupils' vocabulary and understanding of Irish. In middle and senior classes, oral Irish, reading and writing are developed systematically. Many pupils read confidently and display a good understanding of the reading material. Usually, writing exercises are based on activities from workbooks and samples of the pupils' writing are displayed in most classrooms. To build on this good work, it is recommended that a wider range of rhymes*

and poems be taught, especially in the junior classes. It would be worthwhile to include such poems and rhymes in the school plan for Irish.

- The school plan for English places considerable emphasis on developing children's oral language. It is recommended that the programme at infant level should have a stronger play-based approach to fostering pupils' oral language and cognitive development. Similarly, considerable effort is put into developing children's reading competences and a very wide stock of suitable reading materials has been acquired. The *Reading Recovery* programme is used successfully and a number of focused initiatives to teach reading using the principles of *Reading Recovery* are also in place. The *First Steps* programme is used to good effect in developing children's writing. Good use is made of the novel in middle and senior classes to teach reading and commendable standards have been achieved.
- The school is commended for the focused approach it takes to promoting and progressing mathematics achievement. Team-teaching, parental involvement and the use of curricular initiatives such as *Ready Set Go Maths* and *Maths for Fun* are features of the programme. Mathematics lessons are delivered in a lively, constructive manner, making effective use of concrete resources and information and communications technology (ICT). Pupils display good interest in mathematics lessons and engage in them enthusiastically. The appropriate connection of content to the life experiences of pupils underpins lessons in a practical, realistic manner. Teachers make suitable use of discussion and cooperative learning during mathematics lessons, with good provision for the development of mental arithmetic and problem-solving skills. The school carefully monitors pupils' progress, paying close attention to attainment levels across all classes and in all strands of the curriculum. In building on this good foundation, it is recommended that the school examine wider opportunities for linkage within the mathematics programme.
- The school has devised a good whole-school plan for science. A wide range of equipment has been sourced and the school links successfully with third-level institutions in the area to promote an interest in science. Parents are invited to become involved and they show considerable interest in their children's progress in this curriculum area. All strands of the curriculum are addressed and pupils are encouraged to observe, explore and to apply scientific ideas and concepts. A number of interesting projects have been undertaken and pupils are enabled to have hands-on experience of conducting simple science experiments.

6. Quality of Supports for Pupils

- The school plan for special education is well constructed. Resources are used effectively, particularly ICT resources. Widespread use is made of in-class support, with focused and lively interventions being noted during the inspection. In providing for pupils with special educational needs, the school pays close attention to the cultivation of an affirming learning environment.
- Excellent assessment practices were observed in this school and individual pupil's development is tracked systematically. Assessment data are tabulated and analysed thoroughly and teachers co-operate to share information about pupils' progress and to ensure that the programme of learning is delivered in a cohesive, joined-up fashion.
- A majority of pupils in the school have English as an additional language. Two teachers provide appropriate support to these children in both withdrawal and in-class settings. It is recommended that the school plan should provide specific guidance to support teachers

who work in class to ensure that there is clarity about the role of the class teacher and the support teacher in such circumstances.

- There is a policy of early intervention practised in the school. Pupils' progress is monitored from junior infants onwards and appropriate additional support is provided as soon as possible. Parents are kept fully informed about pupils' achievements and opportunities are provided to parents to become involved in their children's school work. Formal parent-teacher meetings are held annually and written reports are provided to parents each year. The home-school-community liaison co-ordinator also ensures that parents are kept fully informed of all school-related developments and are facilitated to avail of educational opportunities themselves and to become involved to the greatest extent possible in their children's education.

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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 Mhuire's Iosaf wish to commend the inspectors of the Department of Education and Skills for the professional courtesy extended to us during the Whole School Evaluation.

The Board of Management welcomes the very positive findings of the report while also acknowledging the constructive recommendations.

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 Board of Management and staff are committed to implementing all of the recommendations of the report.

The key recommendations have been discussed at recent staff meetings. Relevant policy documents are being reviewed and action plans devised.