An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Scoil Mhuiire
Clarinbridge, Co. Galway
Uimhir rolla: 19965W

Date of inspection: 16 January 2012
1. **Introduction**

Scoil Mhuire is a co-educational, primary school, under the patronage of the Catholic Bishop of Galway. The Religious Sisters of Charity founded the school and remain its trustees. The current enrolment of 271 pupils represents a 70 per cent increase in the school population since the publication of the last report in 2002. Pupils' attendance rates in general are very good.

This whole school evaluation focused on the quality of teaching and learning in English, Irish, Mathematics and Visual Arts.

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**

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<th>The following are the <strong>main strengths</strong> of the work of the school:</th>
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<td>• In providing high quality leadership the principal uses his extensive knowledge of education and his dedication to education to foster a commitment to transformational change at whole school level.</td>
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<td>• A dedicated and skilled team of teachers collaborate effectively to work towards agreed goals.</td>
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<td>• The board of management operates very effectively and is careful and diligent in terms of compliance with relevant legislation, best practice guidelines and Department of Education and Skills circulars.</td>
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<td>• Pupils present as courteous friendly and well behaved.</td>
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<td>• The school has developed a strong culture of self-evaluation and planning for improvement.</td>
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<td>• A varied and stimulating programme of extracurricular and co-curricular activities is provided for pupils.</td>
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<td>• Very good standards are achieved by pupils in aspects of literacy and numeracy.</td>
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<th>The following <strong>main recommendations</strong> are made:</th>
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<td>• The board must now pursue with all vigour the further upgrading of accommodation and facilities. In particular it is recommended that the board reviews as a matter of urgency the accommodation arrangements for the special educational needs (SEN) settings in the school.</td>
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<td>• It is recommended that the use of in-class support and team teaching be further extended and developed.</td>
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3. **Quality of School Management**

- The board of management carries out its functions in a highly professional manner and in the best traditions of the commendable spirit of voluntary service associated with boards generally. Records of meetings provide evidence of thorough consideration of policy formation, finance, health and safety issues, standards, and the broad range of school activities. The board seeks external professional advice when appropriate. Its members have worked diligently to develop and maintain the school’s infrastructure and resources to keep pace with the rapid growth of the school. The recent addition of a Montessori preschool and after school service has been warmly welcomed by parents. The board must now pursue with all vigour the further upgrading of accommodation and facilities. In particular, it is recommended that the board reviews as a matter of urgency the accommodation arrangements for the special educational needs (SEN) settings in the school.

- The in-school management team is led by the principal and includes the deputy principal, an assistant principal and two special duties teachers. The principal demonstrates a deep commitment to the welfare of pupils and to high standards of achievement and uses his extensive theoretical and practical knowledge of education to promote improvement through building and strengthening a strong professional learning community. The members of the in-school management team capably lead curriculum teams whose responsibility it is to identify specific aspects of pedagogy for improvement, to achieve consensus as to possible developments and to action plan accordingly. Post-holders provide an account of their stewardship to the board on an annual basis.

- An active parents’ association meets regularly and has good communication with the principal. Parents support the work of the school through various activities including shared reading, the Green Flag project, school concerts, church celebrations and sporting activities. A consultative committee of parents has been formed to assist in the review of school policies. Analysis of questionnaires indicates very high levels of satisfaction among parents with the overall performance of the school.

- Pupils behave very well and are encouraged to be welcoming of visitors. An extensive programme of co-curricular and extracurricular activities is organised for pupils. The pupils’ council provides a useful vehicle for gathering pupils’ views and these views are used to inform the planning process.

4. **Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation**

- The quality of the school planning and school self-evaluation process is of a very high standard and impacts positively on overall provision. Carefully maintained in-school management and staff meeting records over many years indicate that the school’s practices in self-evaluation are authentic and well embedded. Surveys have been conducted on aspects of curriculum to gather evidence for discussion and the formulation of action plans. Curriculum methodologies, how the language of Mathematics is developed and the genres of writing have recently been evaluated and improved. Analysis of class and whole school results in literacy and numeracy is careful and thorough. The school’s own testing has been validated through participation in the *Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study* (TIMSS) and the *Progress in International Reading Literacy Study* (PIRLS).
The teachers plan conscientiously for their work. Planning for Mathematics and the strands of the English curriculum is particularly clear and concise. Some teachers plan very carefully for curriculum integration and there is good emphasis placed on developing Visual Arts concepts in some instances. While all pupils are included in lessons there is a need for greater differentiation of content for pupils with certain levels of ability. The quality of short-term planning in Gaeilge is in need of development in some classes.

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 quality of overall teaching, learning and pupil achievement is very good. Lessons observed ranged from satisfactory to excellent. Where good, well-structured lessons were observed, the teachers had clear teaching objectives, the lessons were well-paced and commendable efforts were made to engage the pupils through a range of co-operative methodologies. The interactive white board was well used in many classes but there is a need to exercise caution in terms of over reliance on this resource in some instances. Some good team-teaching and co-teaching were observed and the school is encouraged to further develop this aspect of pedagogy. Pupils' learning is good to very good. The pupils are generally confident, have good oral skills in both languages and display positive attitudes to school.

- Tá teagasc agus foghlaim sa Ghaeilge ar chaighdéan maith. Sroichtear inniúlacht creidhmhach sa teanga labhartha agus tá foclóir leathan ag cuid mhaith daltaí. Cuireann obair bheirte agus aithris dhhrámata na ndánta leis an inniúlacht seo agus d'fhéadfaí an dea-chleachtas seo a leathnú. Tugtar faoi deara liofacht agus foghraíocht mhaith i léamh na ndaltaí agus moltar anois tuilleadh fíorleabhair a chur ar chúl na léitheoireachta. Sa scribhneoireacht d'fhéadfaí a bhí agus feictear samplaí fiúntacha den obair chruthaitheach sna hard-ranganna.

The teaching and learning of Irish is of a good standard. A creditable competence is achieved in spoken Irish and the pupils have a broad vocabulary. Pair work and the dramatic recitation of poems enhance this competence and this good practice merits wider application. Good fluency and pronunciation is noted in pupils’ reading and it is recommended that extra real books would be added to the reading programme. There is a significant amount of teacher directed exercises completed in writing with worthwhile samples of creative work in evidence in the senior classes.

- The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in English is very good. In-class support in developing phonological awareness has been very beneficial. Good practice in the teaching of reading includes the use of a wide range of reading materials, pre-teaching of language, and the use of focus questions and comprehension development strategies. Poetry is creatively explored and presented. Very good attention is given to teaching writing genres and pupils’ work is duly celebrated through displays in classrooms and corridors. There is some scope for the adoption of a more consistent approach to developing handwriting skills throughout the school.

- The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in Mathematics is of a high standard. Concepts are presented, explained and developed very carefully. A review of the school’s plan for Mathematics has resulted in the teachers employing a consistent approach to the development of mathematical language, number operations and to problem solving strategies. Rhymes are used effectively to consolidate various
operations, and number games are a positive feature of work in mental mathematics. The more able pupils are well challenged during lessons using information and communications technology (ICT), mathematical games, higher-order questions, and a range of problem solving tasks. There is some scope for more concrete materials to be made available, especially for SEN pupils in the mainstream class.

- The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in Visual Arts is very good. A range of well-organised lessons was observed and there is very good coverage of the strands at each class level. Of particular merit were lessons exploring the work of famous artists and projects in design and construction. Appropriate emphasis is placed on developing concepts in art and on providing pupils with the appropriate language to discuss their work and the work of others. The inclusion of the strand unit Looking and Responding in oral language activities is a worthwhile development which merits wider application.

6. Quality of Support for Pupils

- Five teachers provide resource teaching and learning support to pupils. The overall quality of this support is good. Individual pupils and groups of pupils are withdrawn from the mainstream classroom for support. Some of the accommodation provided for this support is very restricted and of a poor standard. This limits the range and type of activities which can be undertaken with pupils. Notwithstanding this, a number of the teachers make very good efforts to generate supportive learning environments. In each of the settings, affirming pupil-teacher relationships are in evidence.

- Appropriate plans of work are in place for many of the pupils who receive resource support. These plans feature clear, measurable targets and incorporate the advice and input of professionals, pupils’ parents and mainstream class teachers. It is recommended that this approach to target-setting be adopted in each of the settings. Assessment data are used to good effect in identifying pupils’ learning-support needs in English and Mathematics. Valuable resources and programmes, including Reading Recovery, are successfully employed by the teachers.

- A very good start has been made by the teachers in developing and implementing station teaching and in-class support. As the attainment of some of the pupils who are withdrawn from the mainstream classes is within the average range, it is recommended that in-class support be favoured, particularly for pupils in the middle and senior classes. Very good quality early intervention is in evidence and the work carried out in developing pupils' phonological awareness is excellent.

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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 whole school community of Scoil Mhuire Clarinbridge - the Board of Management, the staff, the pupils and the Parents’ Association - wish to place on record their appreciation of the professional, constructive and courteous manner in which both Cigirí carried out their evaluation during the week of the 16th January 2012. We welcome the affirming report and are delighted that it acknowledges and reflects the school’s strengths and the positive, respectful and caring atmosphere present throughout the school. It also affirms the commitment towards the culture of self-evaluation and planning for improvement by the dedicated and skilled team of teachers. The members of the Board of Management valued the opportunity of meeting with the Cigirí before and after their visit; in addition to the general comments of the Cigirí, they found the practical suggestions offered during the iarchomh Dháil to be particularly helpful.

The Board was happy to see that the Report acknowledges that very good standards are achieved by pupils in respect of literacy and numeracy and that pupils were found to be courteous, very well behaved and welcoming of visitors.

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 is particularly encouraged by and welcomes the recommendation re the further upgrading of accommodation. The Board has tirelessly sought additional permanent accommodation since 2001 and was listed by the Department of Education for a new school in May 2007. Unfortunately, despite having to add temporary accommodation as the school has rapidly expanded, (70% increase since the last evaluation), we continue to pursue with all vigour the much needed new building and the Board and Parents’ Association are committed to striving to achieve this outcome.

The Board will certainly support the staff as they continue to develop and extend the process of in-class learning support.