Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Scoil Mháirtín,
Kilworth, Co. Cork
Uimhir rolla: 20204E

Date of inspection: 21 January 2011
1. Introduction

Scoil Mháirtín is located in a new building, opened in 2008, after an amalgamation of two local schools. It has been in a phase of growth since then with a current enrolment of 220 pupils. It is expected that enrolment will reach 240 pupils in the coming school year.

This whole school evaluation focused on the quality of teaching and learning in Irish, English, Mathematics and History. 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 manages the school effectively.
- The principal provides the school with dedicated service.
- The teachers work supportively with each other.
- Very good direct teaching was observed in Irish and it is evident that a wide range of reading experiences is provided in English.
- The approach to Mathematics is characterised by resource-based teaching and good use of the interactive whiteboard.
- The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in History is good.
- Good teaching and high levels of commitment were observed in relation to learning support and resource teaching.

The following main recommendations are made:

- A structure should be adopted to capture parental views during policy development.
- It is recommended that the board of management formally adopt the Department’s Child Protection Guidelines for Primary Schools and that procedures are brought formally to the attention of parents and all school staff, including external tutors.
- The staff should consider introducing intensive reading activities with parental help.
- The school should analyse pupils’ standardised test results to support self-evaluation in the teaching of literacy and numeracy.
- The school should review the role of the special needs team in teaching full mainstream programmes in English and Mathematics.
3. Quality of School Management

- The board of management of Scoil Mháirtín manages the school effectively. The chairperson has given lengthy and dedicated service to the school. The board is involved in the school planning process through discussion and ratification of policies. It is advised that the board be made aware of how particular areas of the curriculum are taught in the school. Structures have not yet been created to involve parents in aspects of policy development. It is recommended that a structure be adopted to ensure parental views are captured during the development of policy. The board is also advised to review its enrolment policy to ensure full compliance with current equality legislation.

- The principal fulfils her functions effectively and conscientiously. She was to the forefront in leading the amalgamation of the two schools. She is very aware of the need to cater for the expanding enrolment. The principal is seeking to build on the success of the amalgamation by developing policies gradually. The in-school management (ISM) team is very supportive and meets formally every six weeks after school. Progress reports on the work of the ISM team are presented to the board via the principal. The team should now consider a system whereby members present the board with a brief occasional written report.

- The teachers provide dedicated service to pupils and work supportively with each other. Instances of very beneficial teacher cooperation with regard to planning were observed during the whole school evaluation. The school’s material resources are of very high quality. Of particular note are the new building and ICT resources. Unfortunately, the new computer room is doubling as a classroom for part of the school day and access is restricted. The restrictions on its use for its intended purpose were highlighted in the pupils’ questionnaires and in discussion with representatives of the parents’ association.

- A happy atmosphere pervades the school. It is evident that the pupils feel safe and that they get on well with each other. The school is held in high regard by the parents. These findings are borne out by the responses to the questionnaires administered during this evaluation. The parents are involved in a broad range of school activities.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- The school plan serves as a productive guide to classroom activity. The school adopts a practical approach to devising the plan by establishing planning committees. The staff should now devise action plans to oversee implementation within agreed timeframes. All teachers engage in long-term and in short-term planning. The approach to collaborative planning processes adopted by some teachers is of great benefit to classroom practice.

- The teachers engage in school self-evaluation practices as there is a tradition of collaboration and supportive practices within the school. Staff members are encouraged to adopt a more formal and systematic approach to school self-evaluation, and to consider how this may be facilitated by reference to the Department of Education and Science publication, *Looking At Our School* (2003).

- All members of staff have received copies of the school’s child protection policy. However, external tutors have not been given copies of the policy nor has it formally been given to the parents’ association. It is now recommended that in compliance with Primary Circular 0061/2006, the board of management formally adopt the Department’s *Child Protection Guidelines for Primary Schools*. The board should ensure that these child...
protection procedures are brought formally to the attention of parents and all school staff, including external tutors. A designated liaison person (DLP) and a deputy DLP have been appointed in the school in line with the requirements of the guidelines.

5. Quality of Teaching, Learning and Pupil Achievement

- In the teaching of Irish, the teachers make beneficial use of the interactive whiteboard and of physical and pictorial resources to teach directly in an interesting manner. This work is enhanced by drama, and pair work. Irish is used to issue instructions. A wide range of rhyme, poems and songs is taught in the school. There is a very good system for teaching the Irish phrase of the week. An attractive writing environment for Irish has been created and the school gives due attention to progress in Irish writing.

- In English, the foundations for reading development are laid carefully by the imaginative use of the interactive whiteboard to teach phonics. This resource is supplemented by well organised group reading games. Use has also been made of the interactive whiteboard to develop skills using the class reader and a wide range of reading experiences is included in class programmes. Very interesting work on class novels was observed in some classes. Despite the sound teaching practices observed, the results of standardised English reading tests reveal a mix of high performance and some below average performance. To address this, the staff should consider introducing intensive reading activities with parental help. Handwriting is practised regularly. Opportunities for free writing are created and further opportunities should be provided. A wide range of rhymes and poems have been taught.

- The approach to Mathematics is characterised by emphases on mental arithmetic activity, resource-based teaching and good use of the interactive whiteboard. There is a high standard of recording in pupils’ copies in many classes and copybooks are monitored consistently by teachers. Teachers also use group work in a collaborative manner in order to work out problems and learning is consolidated with sound whole class work. In many classes, teachers seek to relate Mathematics to real life emphasising problem solving in groups. Overall, high standards of teaching were observed in Mathematics.

- The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in History is good. Teachers make use of story for History and also combine use of storybook and interactive whiteboard as resources. Very good project work encompassing use of artefacts, photographic evidence and ICT was observed during the evaluation. Visitors are invited to the school to complement the history programme. There is productive use of group and pair-work as well as whole-class talk and discussion in lessons.

- A variety of assessment modes is used in a summative manner. The school is now advised to monitor learning in a more systematic manner by analysing the standardised tests to aid self-evaluation in literacy and numeracy teaching.
6. Quality of Support for Pupils

• The work in literacy in learning support is of a very high quality. One approach employed seeks to extend reading by using books mentioned in the class reader. A wide range of resources is also drawn upon to extend vocabulary and word attack skills. Considerable effort has gone into preparing material for lessons.

• One learning support teacher concentrates on numeracy development. Activities are concentrated on practical work, pencil-and-paper tasks and computer sessions to reinforce understanding of mathematical concepts.

• The quality of resource teaching is good. Teachers are very committed to addressing the learning needs of their respective pupils. Good use of strategies and of teaching and learning resources was observed. Individual education plans (IEPs) are prepared in an inclusive manner encompassing parents, special needs assistants and relevant agencies. These are reviewed at the end of each year. It is now recommended that an interim review be factored into the process. Staff might also consider reviewing the *cuntas míosúil* process to include regular recording of pupils’ progress.

• In further developing special education needs provision, staff might usefully consider the appointment of a special needs coordinator and meeting as a team to explore avenues for ongoing development. Greater use of early intervention strategies should also be explored.

• Members of the special needs team are deployed in the mainstream setting to teach English and Mathematics to certain classes. The board of management should review this practice and, in so doing, pay due regard to the *Learning Support Guidelines* issued by the Department in 2000.

• Language support is given to five pupils in an effective manner. Lessons are practical and pupils are assessed for vocabulary comprehension regularly. Plans and results are shared with the class teacher. The emphasis on vocabulary should be supplemented by the use of story and rhyme in order to develop fluency.
Appendix

SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

Submitted by the Board of Management
Area 1  Observations on the content of the inspection report

The B.O.M. and staff would like to acknowledge the courteous and professional approach by the inspectors throughout the W.S.E. process. We are pleased the W.S.E. affirms the positive work being done in our school.

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 B.O.M. working alongside the principal will facilitate the recommendations outlined in the report and will endeavour to implement them as effectively as possible.