1. **Introduction**

SN Mhuire is a co-educational primary Gaeltacht primary school with eight teachers and 135 pupils on rolls. It is a Catholic school under the patronage of the Bishop of Raphoe. The school participates in the School Support Programme under the Scheme for Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS), in the Scheme for Modern Languages for Primary Schools and in the Scheme for Language Assistants, which is funded by the Department of Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs. The evaluation focused on the quality of teaching and learning in Irish, English, Mathematics and Physical Education. 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:

- This is a co-educational, Gaeltacht primary school, which is functioning very effectively. Education of a high standard is provided for the pupils through the medium of Irish.

- This school has a strong Irish language tradition wherein interest in and regard for Gaelic culture and the language are being stimulated effectively by the principal, the teachers and the school community.

- The board of management functions capably in association with the school staff, in order to provide a wide and balanced curriculum for the pupils.

- The principal fulfils his leadership responsibilities in relation to the curriculum and administration skilfully and professionally and the deputy principal assists him very ably.

- A culture of co-operation, mutual support and hard work is discernible among the entire school staff.

- Excellent work practices have been established in the pupils and many awards have been won by the school over the years in drama, cultural and sporting events.

- A very favourable bond exists between the board, the school staff, the parents’ association and the parent community.

- The parents’ association, which fully supports the board and the staff, is very active in the school.

- School planning is of a very high standard.

- An assessment system is being administered capably by the learning support and resource staff.

- Very fruitful work has been implemented by the teachers to achieve the targets of the DEIS action plan over the last three years.

The following main recommendations are made:

- The school is functioning very effectively and it is recommended that the good work be continued in the future.
3. **Quality of School Management**

- The board operates effectively according to the rules of the Department and is very active in the management of the school. Good relations are cultivated between the interested parties in the school community. The board strongly supports the advancement of the culture and ethos of the school.

- The principal fulfils his leadership responsibilities in relation to the curriculum and administration skilfully and professionally. He proceeds to seek high standards from the pupils and the staff generally. He ensures that the primary focus in the school is on learning and teaching. The deputy principal operates very capably in his curricular, administrative and pastoral duties that respond to the requirements of the school. He places great emphasis on the harmonious development of the pupils and he monitors their progress on a structured basis accurately.

- The school's human resources and material resources are managed well. A culture of co-operation, mutual support and hard work is discernible among the entire school staff. Three special needs assistants have been appointed in the school. They promote diligently the participation of certain pupils in class and their functioning as independent learners. A part-time secretary gives worth-while support in the administration and daily operation of the school. Regular use is made of the various suitable materials that have been provided for learning, especially information and communication technology.

- There is a very active and progressive parents' association in the school which fully supports the board and the staff. The association organises a forum for the parents and the communication between the school and the community of parents is functioning at a high level.

- A good, co-operative, hard-working and respectful atmosphere is discernible among the pupils and the teachers in the classrooms and in the whole school environment. A school assembly is organised regularly and the work and the talents of the pupils are celebrated enthusiastically. According to the results of parent and pupil questionnaires, a high number of parents felt that the discipline in the school was good and a high proportion of pupils perceived that that they get on well with other pupils in the school.

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

- The quality of school planning is of a very standard. There are comprehensive, reflective policies in the plan, which gives very useful direction on certain matters, including methodology, learning styles and differences in pupil abilities. There are specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-related targets laid down as a foundation for the school plan and the plan is developed, as required, in the DEIS three year action plan.

- The quality of each teacher’s planning is very good. It is evident from the teaching targets that the teachers are constantly focusing on the attainment of pupils and using the results of standardised assessments in a structured manner.
Child protection policy and procedures

- 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

- A very high standard pertains to the teaching and learning of Irish in this school. The majority of pupils in every class have a fluency in Irish. The majority of them reach a high standard in understanding and in pronunciation and, for this purpose, a rich language input in the form of poetry, story and conversation is provided, especially in the junior classes. There are ample reading materials available and the pupils in the middle and senior classes read with meaning, with fluency and with very good accuracy. The integration, which is achieved in the lessons in every classroom between listening, conversation, reading and writing through the use of technology resources in innovative ways, is praiseworthy. The pupils practise formal writing regularly and there is a beneficial transfer to creative writing. The majority of pupils are achieving a high standard in writing. The pupils participate in the Scriobh Leabhar (Write a Book) competition and the books that have been compiled in some classes for this competition are commendable. Links have been cultivated between the school and a school in Wales, in order to share writing and reading materials.

- The overall quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in English is very good. Teachers have used assessment data effectively to inform whole-school literacy targets. Cross-curricular approaches to the development of the pupils’ oral language are particularly effective. In some classrooms, the teaching of poetry is highly commendable. The teachers are commended for their work in raising standards of reading aided by their use of a structured phonological programme, paired reading, DEAR time and effectively implemented comprehension programmes. Library use is organised very well throughout the school. Results of standardised assessments indicate that there is very good progression in the pupils’ reading skills. Pupils at each class level have good opportunities to write; from pre-writing experiences at infant level to writing in different genres in the middle and senior classes.

- The standard of teaching in Mathematics is very good and a great effort has been made for the last three years, on a whole-school basis, to strengthen the learning standards of the pupils. Very good use is made of the whole-school assessment to clarify learning targets throughout the school. It is evident that structured teaching is in place in every class with a wide Mathematics programme being taught. Each teacher has very clear plans with targets laid out to consolidate the active participation of the pupils in the learning. It is clear from the standardised results and from the tasks assigned to the pupils during the evaluation that many pupils are functioning at a high level of learning in Mathematics.

- A very high standard pertains to the teaching of Physical Education across the school. Very effective use is made of group work during the teaching at every class level so as to provide the opportunity for pupils to develop a range of suitable specific skills. Attention is given to particular safety issues during the lessons and conversation and discussion
are features of the lessons. The boys and the girls participate fully in all activities and they benefit from a wide, balanced curriculum. Favorable links are fostered with other sporting organisations in the district also.

- In general, the quality of teaching and learning and the attainment of the pupils are of a very high standard. Suitable integration is covered in the planning and use is made of seasonal themes. Very fruitful work has been implemented by the teachers for the last three years in order to achieve the targets in the action plan. The teachers employ creative teaching methods that are directed at the ability and requirements of the pupils to address their needs progressively. The full participation of the pupils in teaching and learning is cultivated.

- An excellent assessment system is in use whereby an accurate study of the pupils’ progress is conducted and this has a beneficial influence on the teaching and the learning. Significant efforts are made to keep parents informed about the progress of the pupils. In the questionnaires, which were distributed to the parents and the pupils, the majority of parents considered that the teaching and the learning were good in the school and many pupils were of the opinion that they were progressing satisfactorily in reading and Mathematics.

6. **Quality of Supports for Pupils**

- A very high standard pertains to the provision made for pupils with learning needs. There is a full-time support teacher in the school and also a resource teacher who is shared with another school for 2.5 hours in the week. In particular the learning support and the resource provision in the school are managed commendably. Successful teaching and learning were observed during the evaluation and the pupils’ reading and arithmetic skills were being developed in a structured approach.

- There are successful strategies in place for early intervention and for post intervention, whereby certain periods of support are given to pupils for literacy and numeracy. Class teaching is differentiated for pupils with varying abilities and a satisfactory link is cultivated with the support teacher and resource teacher. The in-class teaching is structured, as need arises. There is a very good range of software in use to strengthen the pupils’ understanding of concepts by means of information technology.

- The school serves pupils, with a variety of needs, from disadvantaged backgrounds to good effect. A comprehensive plan for DEIS and for the home/school liaison service with clear targets for the years 2007-2010 has been compiled and implemented effectively. There is ample progress to be seen with respect to the targets for reading, numeracy, attendance and partnership with parents and other schools. The rural co-ordinator gives very good support to the pupils in reading, Mathematics, technology and sport in groups and co-teaching situations in the classrooms. Groups of **reading buddies** are organised ably and a successful link is established with transition year students from Pobalscoil Ghaoth Dobhar to progress reading and to facilitate the transfer to second level for the senior pupils. After-school events are organised for parents in association with the Vocational Educational Committee and the Health Service Executive. The teachers intend that **Irish and Science for Fun** will form a central part of the targets in the DEIS action plan for the years 2010-2013.

- The school participates in a wide range of extra-curricular activities, for example music activities, drama, quizzes, science, football and dance. Numerous projects have been completed, as co-curricular activities, and are on display as part of the green flag scheme.
A lunch is provided for pupils under the grants’ scheme from the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs. The school organises a book rental scheme for pupils also.
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 of Scoil Mhuire would like to thank the inspection team for the report on our school and for the professional manner in which they did their work. The board welcomes the fact that the school is functioning very effectively and that there is a high standard of education provided for the pupils through the medium of Irish. The board congratulates the staff, parents and pupils for their co-operation.

Area 2: Follow-up actions planned or undertaken since the completion of the inspection activity to implement the findings and recommendations of the inspection