

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**  
**Department of Education and Skills**

**Whole School Evaluation**  
**REPORT**

**Gaelscoil Mhachan**  
**Mahon, Blackrock, Cork**  
**Uimhir rolla: 19908K**

**Date of inspection: 12 November 2010**



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

## 1. Introduction

Gaelscoil Mhachan was founded in 1986 and during 2011 will be celebrating 25 years operating in the parish. It is a DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity In Schools) urban band 1 school. There are 166 pupils on the school rolls and the levels of attendance are high.

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 chairperson and members of the board of management work willingly and zealously for the good of the school.
- The principal is in office since the school was founded and she undertakes every aspect of her responsibilities conscientiously and professionally.
- The members of the in-school management team carry out their functions ably and productively.
- The teachers show a high level of enthusiasm and professionalism.
- The parents help the school enthusiastically and beneficially.
- The pupils co-operate eagerly and willingly with the teachers.
- The staff administers a wide range of projects.
- Creditable progress is being made in English and Mathematics as a result of class work and intervention work.
- The pupils have a high level of Irish, thanks to the commitment of the teachers.

The following **main recommendations** are made:

- It is recommended that more training in the use of interactive boards be made available to the teachers.
- It is recommended that lists of poems, rhymes and songs in English and Irish, appropriate to each class, be compiled.
- It is recommended that sessions be organised within the staff-meetings, to share good practice among the whole staff.

### **3. Quality of School Management**

- The board of management of this school is very effective. The chairperson gives very good example to the students as regards speaking Irish. The board discusses policies conscientiously and there are effective systems in operation to keep all concerned informed about school policies. It would now be worthwhile to implement a system of sharing the results of the standardised tests with the board. The board and the parents lately supplemented funds from the Department of Education and Skills to purchase interactive boards for the school. It would be advisable now to organise training in the use of those boards.
- The principal is in office since the school was founded and she functions very effectively in that capacity. It was quite evident during the WSE (Whole School Evaluation) that she focuses all her efforts and her thinking on the welfare of the pupils. She encourages the parents, the board, the staff and pupils to collaborate as one, for the benefit of the school. The members of the in-school management team work ably and productively and are of great assistance to the principal in organising all the projects running in the school. The principal and deputy principal work very productively together. Every member of staff prepares a scheme of work on a term-by-term basis and it is recommended that staff-members submit short reports on the progress of those plans, once a year, to the board.
- Teachers get an opportunity of gaining experience of teaching different classes from year to year. There is a good relationship and admirable co-operation among the teachers and this greatly enhances the way that pupils' learning needs and the implementation of the curriculum are catered for.
- The important role of parents in the pupil's educational life is recognised. Classes in Irish are organised for them and they are kept informed about school matters through the newsletter, notes, meetings and the school website. Parents often provide financial assistance and they give invaluable support during social occasions run for the benefit of the school. They also provide great help for the pupils by playing an active productive part in aspects of the curriculum.
- The teachers in this school look after their pupils very thoroughly. During the WSE, the pupils worked diligently on their tasks and co-operated enthusiastically with the teachers. The school is highly commended for implementing the project *The Incredible Years*. It was noted, in particular, that the pupils were very comfortable speaking Irish to one another and to the teachers.
- The secretary, caretaker and cleaning-staff are very helpful to the school. The building has a comfortable, neat appearance. A stimulating learning atmosphere is created in all the classrooms, through the use of a wealth of print and charts as well as attractive mathematics and nature-study sites.

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

- This school has good administrative and curriculum policies, which indicate commitment and care on the part of the board and the staff. In the areas of Irish and English, it would be well worth compiling lists of songs, rhymes and poems to suit each class. The comprehensive school plans for Mathematics, Geography, special education and DEIS, include all the projects the school operates to deal with pupils' learning needs and with disadvantage.

- It is obvious that the teachers undertake effective written planning for their work. They keep a continuous account of the progress of the work and of the assessment of the pupils. This assessment information is shared, on an ongoing basis, among the appropriate teachers, to the benefit of all involved – both pupils and teachers.
- 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 also 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

- Irish is very well taught in the school. In the junior classes, the poems are recited and the songs sung in a lively, confident manner. Good examples of challenging work were observed in the middle classes. Effective systems are used to promote reading and writing. In the senior classes, good examples of direct teaching and of well-organised pair work were observed. The pupils read with great confidence. The interactive whiteboards were not used in some classes and it would be very worthwhile if the board of management now invested in training for the use of this resource. It would also be worthwhile using excerpts from *TG4*, *Wikipedia* in Irish and *Raidió na Gaeltachta* during lessons.
- During the WSE, good examples of English conversation lessons were observed. Good reading lessons based on the *First Steps* literacy resource and with supportive parental involvement were demonstrated. The *One Book One Community* project is a major help in advancing reading in the school. An effective plan is implemented whereby writing lessons throughout the school revolve around a particular genre for a defined period. Emphasis is also placed in some classes on free writing and this aspect of teaching writing could be given more time in all classes.
- During lessons in Mathematics, the teachers make good use of in-class support, of group-work and pair-work to serve the various ability-levels of the pupils. Concrete materials are effectively used and the pupils are given creditable practice in solving problems. Overall, the pupils record written work in their school copybooks in an orderly fashion. However, the teachers use a variety of approaches: it is now recommended, as a counsel of perfection, that a whole-school policy on recording be agreed. The results of the standardised tests indicate that the students are doing well in Mathematics.
- In the junior classes, work on Geography is focused mainly on nature. The nature tables are attractively presented and effective use is made of them to help the students to acquire information. In middle and senior classes, pupils are enabled to acquire a basic understanding of the physical world, of the relationship between people and their surroundings and of the conservation of the environment. The school community is particularly commended for achieving two green flags. The pupils gain experience of project methods regularly and it is recommended that this approach be more widely used to support their learning.

## 6. Quality of Support for Pupils

- Great credit is due to the learning support team for the help they give to pupils who require support. A comprehensive programme has been organised for each child. During the planning process, systematic contact is maintained with the class teachers, the classroom assistants and the parents. Realistic, attainable targets have been set, clearly based on the learning needs of the pupils. To improve the pupils' skills, worthwhile learning programmes, including reading and mathematics recovery, early intervention, fine and gross motor exercises conducted in the hall and group-work during class-support periods.
- Great credit is due to the two home-school liaison co-ordinators who maintain a fruitful link between the home and the school. A really worthwhile project, known as 'One Book One Community' was implemented this year to enhance the literacy of the school community, a wide-ranging programme of classes has been organised for the parents, to improve their competence in Irish, in information and communication technology and in cookery, among other areas. A report on the progress of the work is written at the end of each school-year.
- Four people are employed as members of the School Completion Programme (SCP). A beneficial programme has been implemented for those who are in danger of becoming early school-leavers. Those pupils are invited to participate in homework clubs and in summer schemes to improve their social skills. The transition year programme is organised for those who are moving on to the post-primary education system. Home visits are organised to offer extra support to some parents.
- The classroom assistants work flexibly in the school. They help individual pupils in the classes and assist in intervention activities and in practising motor exercises. All of the assistants can speak Irish and are agreeable to work through the medium of Irish.

# **Appendix**

**SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT**

**Submitted by the Board of Management**

### **Area 1 Observations on the content of the inspection report**

We express our gratitude to the inspectors who were kind to the pupils; who created a positive atmosphere and who boosted the morale of the staff and the whole school community.

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

1. Ongoing training on the use of the interactive whiteboards is being provided.
2. Lists of poems and rhymes in English and Irish have been put together for each class.
3. Good practice strategies are now being shared regularly at after-school staff meetings.
4. The results of standardised tests are shared with the board of management.
5. Progress reports from members of the in-school management team are now submitted to the board.
6. A whole school policy on recording work in school copies for Mathematics has been agreed.

*(This is a translation of the School Response submitted by the board of management.)*