Whole-School Evaluation
REPORT

Gaelscoil Bhríde
Bóthar na Naomh, Thurles, Co Tipperary

Roll Number: 19968F

Date of inspection: 24 March 2011
1. Introduction

Gaelscoil Bhríde is a co-educational, Catholic, vertical primary school under the patronage of the Bishop of Cashel and Emly. Irish is the language of instruction and communication of the school. Creditable efforts are made to use Irish as the language of school management. There are 216 pupils on the rolls of the school and the attendance of the majority of pupils is very good.

The board of management of the school was given an opportunity to comment on the findings and recommendations of the report; the board chose to accept the report without response.

2. Summary of Findings and Recommendations for Further Development

The following are the **main strengths** of the work of the school:

- The members of the board of management and of the parents’ association are committed to the work of the school. Excellent work has been done in respect of the provision of accommodation and teaching aids.
- The principal displays very effective leadership as regards the pupils’ education.
- The school has a capable staff of teachers who teach the curriculum skillfully.
- The various school resources are managed very effectively.
- The management of pupils is excellent.
- The educational provision in Irish and Mathematics is very good.
- The pupils attain high standards in English and Irish writing.
- The quality of provision for pupils with special needs is very good.

The following **main recommendations** are made:

- It is recommended that the content and process of planning in the school be reviewed.
- It is recommended that the self-evaluation and assessment practices be further developed.
- It is recommended that a greater variety of teaching approaches be used in classrooms.
- It is recommended that speaking skills in English and reasoning skills in Mathematics be developed systematically throughout the school.
- It is recommended that a more systematic approach be adopted to cater for ability differences among pupils.
3. Quality of School Management

- The board of management functions effectively. The board members are committed to the work of the school and excellent work has been done in respect of the provision of accommodation and facilities. The board addresses management issues appropriately. It is recommended that the board discusses more regularly the quality of education in the school, including teaching matters and pupil attainment. It is also recommended that the financial accounts of the school be audited annually.

- The principal discharges his duties effectively. He has a very good relationship with all staff members and has a strong vision for the school as leader. He pays commendable attention to the standard of education in the school and to the promotion of Gaelic culture, particularly in relation to sport and music.

- Members of the in-school management team are committed to the work of the school. They fulfil their obligations diligently and thereby support the principal in the running of the school. However, it is recommended that the shared leadership structures be further formalised in the context of the school’s recognised priorities.

- The various resources available to the school are managed very effectively, including staff members, teaching aids and accommodation. Skilful use is made of a range of suitable resources in the different learning settings. The attention paid to the provision of library facilities and information technology is praiseworthy. With a view to enhancing this good work, it is recommended that additional reading books in Irish be made available.

- Relations with the school community are effectively managed. Appropriate procedures are in place for communicating and sharing information with parents. The parents’ association gives commendable support to the work of the school. As a means of enhancing this good practice, it is recommended that information on the work of the board of management and the work of the parents’ association be shared regularly.

- The management of pupils is excellent. A pleasant, productive, personal learning atmosphere is cultivated and excellent discipline is maintained.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- The quality of school planning is satisfactory, although many aspects require further development. An extensive range of administrative and curricular policies has been made available. The policies are developed on a collaborative basis and the administrative policies are reviewed appropriately. In order to ensure the effectiveness of the work, it is recommended that the process of reviewing the policies be established more formally. It is also recommended that the curricular planning reflects the specific school context more clearly and that key decisions taken be appropriately recorded in planning documents.

- The school has started to engage in school self-evaluation practices. The analysis of the results of standardised tests forms an important element of this work. It is recommended that self-assessment practices be further developed, for example by drawing up action plans for the school.

- Each teacher provides written planning for his/her teaching, as well as monthly progress records on learning. However, the effectiveness of the planning and the progress records varies. In the interest of continuity in learning, it is recommended that there is an agreed approach to recording written planning and monthly progress records, and that the learning objectives be recorded clearly in the context of the Primary School Curriculum (1999).

- The 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

- On the whole, the quality of teaching, learning and pupil attainment is good throughout the school. Many aspects of the educational provision are very good. Parents and pupils indicate a very high level of satisfaction with the teaching and learning. The teachers make skilful use of a wide range of teaching strategies in a whole-class context. The pupils attain creditable standards in accordance with their varying abilities. Good examples of differentiation, integration and of group work or paired work are to be seen. With a view to varying further the approach to teaching, it is recommended that these good practices be extended throughout the school.

- The educational provision in Irish is very good. Effective use is made of a wide range of methodologies and aids, including authentic materials, in order to develop the various language skills. The pupils achieve high levels of understanding and of speaking. They read fluently and discuss the reading matter confidently. The exploration of the class novels is particularly praiseworthy. A high standard of writing is to be observed in the great majority of classes. The composition of stories by pupils is excellent. In the interest of enhancing the work, it is recommended that a more extensive range of spoken language forms be taught, that the development of reading comprehension be systematically addressed and that pupils be given opportunities to write in a range of genres.

- The quality of provision in English is generally good with very high standards achieved in particular aspects of the language. Worthwhile efforts are made to develop pupils’ speaking and listening skills and it is advised that pupils’ confidence in these aspects be developed further through greater emphasis on the principal contexts for oral language as recommended in the Primary School Curriculum (1999). A range of strategies is employed to ensure that pupils are making very good progress in reading at all levels. Co-ordinated approaches to the teaching of phonics and spellings, a programme of shared reading and the provision of attractive stocks of reading materials are among the contributing factors. The quality of work in penmanship and writing in various genres is particularly praiseworthy.

- The educational provision in Mathematics is very good in general. The concepts and language of Mathematics are taught systematically in the great majority of classes, in accordance with the basic teaching principles of the Primary School Curriculum (1999), and the pupils reveal a very good knowledge of these aspects. Good examples are to be seen of discussion, discovery work, mental work and the development of estimation skills and problem-solving. A commendable effort is made in some classrooms to teach mathematical strategies. It is recommended that these good practices be implemented on a whole-school basis, so as to bring about continuing development of the specific skills of reasoning, problem-solving and estimation. It is further recommended that differences in ability among the pupils be systematically addressed.

- Visual Arts are capably taught. Valuable opportunities are afforded to the pupils to interpret the world visually through the use of a range of media of expression. Impressive examples of the pupils’ work are to be seen displayed in the classrooms. Lessons are carefully prepared, while the interactive white board and other effective resources are creatively used, in order to present new techniques and concepts in an integrated fashion. The white board is also used in looking at art and in responding to it. With a view to achieving excellence in responding to art, it would be worthwhile approaching it in an agreed manner throughout the school.

- On the whole, the quality of assessment in mainstream classrooms is good, although some aspects are yet to be developed. The assessment focuses on particular aspects of the pupils’ learning. A range of assessment methods is used. Commendable records of the pupils’ progress are kept. Summative assessment is mainly practised, although a
worthwhile example of formative assessment is to be seen occasionally. In the interest of developing the work, it is recommended that an assessment policy be drawn up in accordance with the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment publication, *Assessment in the Primary Curriculum: Guidelines for Primary Schools* (2007). It is recommended that more regular assessment be carried out of all important aspects of learning, including speaking skills and problem-solving, and that the results of the assessment be systematically used in order to cater for the varying abilities of pupils.

6. **Quality of Supports for Pupils**

   - The quality of provision for pupils with special needs is very good. The provision functions in accordance with the appropriate guidelines and recognised good practice. The staff members discharge their duties capably. Appropriate planning, which emerges from an appropriate process of consultation, is provided for each pupil and the plans are regularly reviewed. The learning settings are stimulating and attractively organised, and pupils are making commendable progress in their learning. In the interest of enhancing the work, it is recommended that the learning objectives be clearly recorded in all planning, and that systematic assessment of the progress of pupils be carried out accordingly. It is also recommended that the in-class support be further developed.