Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Scoil Bhríde National School
Lettermacaward
Co. Donegal

Roll number: 15847T

Date of inspection: 9 December 2011
1. Introduction

Scoil Bhríde National School is a Catholic, co-educational, Gaeltacht primary school under the patronage of the Bishop of Raphoe. Thirty three pupils attend the school and its roll books indicate that their attendance is good. Although this school is situated in the Gaeltacht, the majority of its pupils come to school with no knowledge of the Irish language as a decline has occurred in the number of households in which Irish is spoken. The school is a participant in the Language Assistants Scheme which is funded by the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht. At the time of the evaluation a member of the staff was on maternity leave and a newly qualified teacher had been appointed as a substitute for her. The evaluation focused on the quality of teaching and learning in Irish, English, Mathematics and Drama. The board of management was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the report; a response was not received from the board.

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 is functioning at a level of very high quality.
- The principal teacher fulfils his leadership duties in regard to curriculum and organisation in a most able and innovative manner.
- The standard of teaching, learning and pupil achievement is very high in Irish, English, Mathematics and Drama.
- The provision made for pupils with learning needs is highly effective.
- The staff of the school work co-operatively to provide the pupils with very effective teaching and learning.

The following main recommendations are made:

- The principal teacher is advised to provide the Board of Management with an annual report on the progress of the pupils.
- The members of the teaching staff are advised to use a wider range of assessment strategies.

3. Quality of School Management

- The Board of Management is functioning at a level of very high quality. The chairperson and the members of the board take an active part in the management of the school and they provide the teachers with very valuable support. The members have been assigned particular responsibilities and the school accounts are certified annually. The chairperson visits the school regularly. The board fulfils its role in regard to promoting the Irish language in accordance with Section 9 of the Education Act by supporting the cultural and language activities of the school.
• The principal teacher fulfils his leadership duties in regard to curriculum and organisation in a most effective and innovative manner. He sets about seeking a very high standard from the pupils in their learning. He has written high quality textbooks in Irish that are based on the curriculum and they are used in a very effective way in the classrooms. The other teachers on the staff provide the principal with very good support in responding to the needs of the school.

• The school building is new and contains up-to-date accommodation. In addition to the high quality learning support materials that the teachers themselves provide, the Board of Management and the parents’ committee have made available a wide range of resources, including technological equipment. Very effective use is made of the technology and of the school’s website to publish its newsletter, the *Leitir Update*, and to share information with the school community.

• The parents play an active role in the life of the school and the parents’ committee provides valuable support to its staff and management. In their responses to the questionnaires which were issued to them as part of the whole school evaluation, a high number of the parents expressed satisfaction with the school and indicated that they are welcomed there.

• The pupils are very well managed and a respectful atmosphere is discernible in the school. It takes part regularly in national competitions through the medium of Irish and it has frequently won all-Ireland competitions at the National Festival of School Drama. The pupils win prizes annually in writing competitions at the Patrick McGill Summer School. The school has also established a worthwhile relationship with Glenveagh National Park and it has been decided that two history books written by pupils of the school will be used as part of the Park’s education programme. The pupils have also been victorious on numerous occasions in a competition that is run by the Primary School Association, a branch of the GAA. In their responses to the questionnaire which was issued to them as part of the evaluation, all of the pupils were of the view that everybody in the school is treated fairly and that lesson content is explained clearly.

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

• The quality of school planning is very high. The school’s policies provide very useful guidance on particular aspects of it; including methodology, learning styles and differences in pupil ability. Specific targets have been set down as a basis in the school plan and they have been expanded upon as required in the strategic plan 2010 – 2013 that has been laid out.

• The standard of classroom planning is very good. As should be the case, it is in accord with the learning objectives in the curriculum and is focused on the learning needs of the pupils.

• 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 teaching, learning and pupil achievement in Irish is very good. Although Irish was not the first language of most of the pupils, the teachers succeed in a commendable way in modelling and perpetuating the language in a variety of contexts while teaching it. The pupils are given valuable opportunities to practise the Irish that they have learned and a very good standard of fluency has been attained by most of them. A commendable emphasis is placed on the use of correct grammar, in the spoken language in particular, in the senior classes. A high standard of reading, comprehension and accuracy has been achieved by the majority of the pupils and it is evident from the samples that were seen that a high standard has been reached in writing as well.

- The quality of provision in English is of a very high standard. Innovative methods are used for oral language, reading and writing development. The majority of pupils read in a highly competent manner. A very good school library has been established in the school, which includes a wide range of books including books written and produced by the pupils themselves. The pupils’ books range from world to local history and there is also a variety of short fact and fictional books. The pupils’ functional and creative writing skills are of an exceptionally high standard. Very worthwhile emphasis is placed on vocabulary use, grammar, spelling and handwriting during lessons. Pupils’ comprehension skills are developed very skilfully and their ability to scan text and analyse content is very good.

- The standard of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in Mathematics is very good. Structured teaching takes place in both divisions of the school with a broad programme being taught. Very clear planning has been carried out by each teacher with targets set out to strengthen the participation and active involvement of the pupils in the learning. It is clear from the results of standardised tests and from the learning tasks assigned to the pupils during the evaluation process that a high number of them are functioning at a very high level of learning in Mathematics.

- The teaching of Drama is undertaken in an excellent way. It forms a central feature of the school curriculum, being both an instrument for curriculum integration and a functioning strategy in enriching the pupils’ language. Irish language scripts, which are prepared by the teachers in the school, are used as a springboard for drama competitions in which the pupils take part. Role play is used in a commendable way to nurture their self-confidence.

- Overall, the quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement is of a very high standard. The teachers make use of creative teaching methods that focus on the ability and learning needs of the pupils in order to respond to them in a systematic way. Total partnership for the pupils in the teaching and learning process is cultivated. Very creditable use is made of communications and information technology in the school. The pupils set to work enthusiastically and it is evident that they are interested in learning. In responding to the questionnaires, all of the parents were in agreement that teaching and learning in the school was good and that the pupils were learning successfully.

- The quality of assessment is very good. The results of assessment tests show that the majority of the pupils are making very good progress in English and Mathematics. The results of school-based tests indicate that very good progress is being made in Irish also. Screening tests are administered to the junior pupils in order to identify their strengths and needs and to plan learning targets in English. The results of assessment tests are given to the parents at the end of the school year. At the time of this report, the teachers were about to organise standardised testing of the pupils in Irish for the first time. In order to further enhance the assessment system in the school, it is recommended that more extensive use be made of self-assessment strategies.
6. **Quality of Supports for Pupils**

- The effectiveness of the provision for pupils with learning needs is excellent. The learning support service, which is based in the school, is shared with two other schools. The provision of learning support for pupils in this school amounts to seven hours per week. Fruitful teaching and learning was observed in the course of providing this report. Effective use is made of illustrative stimuli to boost the pupils’ interest and understanding and to develop their language and reading skills.

- A book rental scheme is operated throughout the school.

*Published May 2012*