

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

**Whole School Evaluation**  
**REPORT FOR SCHOOL RESPONSE**

**Scoil Mhuire,**  
**Coolcotts, Wexford**  
**Uimhir rolla: 19739N**

**Date of inspection: 01 October 2010**



## 1. Introduction

Scoil Mhuire is a large, urban, forty-six teacher, co-educational, vertical primary school, which includes a unit for pupils with autistic spectrum disorders. The school is under the patronage of the Catholic Bishop of Ferns. There are 558 pupils enrolled. The school participates in the Department's *Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools* (DEIS) programme and it also receives funding from the *School Completion Programme* (SCP). The attendance of almost all pupils is very good. The school is commended for the improvements achieved in attendance levels as a result of the strategies and interventions it has introduced.

During the whole-school evaluation inspectors observed teaching and learning in 16 mainstream class settings and in 7 support-teaching settings. 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:

- A culture of inclusiveness underpins the work of the school and is supported by all the education partners.
- The commitment of the board of management to the work of the school is praised.
- Parental involvement is encouraged successfully through the implementation of a varied range of home-school initiatives. The parents' association makes a valuable contribution to the life of the school.
- The school's promotion of positive discipline is working effectively and the pupils display very good behaviour and positive attitudes to learning.
- The acting principal and teaching staff work in a spirit of cooperation and they demonstrate a high level of care and commitment to the pupils. The use of well-planned team-teaching initiatives contributes significantly to the effectiveness of curriculum implementation.
- Overall, the quality of teaching and learning is very good. In particular, the school is commended for the improvement of pupil achievement in literacy and numeracy.

The following **main recommendations** are made:

- A consistent approach to pupil assessment should be agreed and implemented on a schoolwide basis.
- In order to improve learning outcomes for the pupils in Drama, lessons should focus more clearly on the elements of Drama.

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

- The board of management is properly constituted and actively supports the work of the school. It is committed to providing a high quality educational experience for all the pupils. The board ensures positive and open communication with parents and members of the wider school community. At the current time, the school's enrolment policy provides for the deferral of enrolment of pupils with special educational needs. It is recommended that this policy be reviewed to ensure it is in full compliance with pertinent equality legislation.
- The quality of school leadership is very good. The acting principal is highly commended for her dedication and her capacity to lead and manage the school. Her personal interest in and knowledge of all the pupils in the school is lauded. She is capably assisted by a hardworking in-school management team. The work of the team facilitates the achievement of improvements in the quality of teaching and learning.
- The teaching staff is deployed appropriately and most teachers experience teaching a variety of classes. The school building and grounds are maintained to a very high standard. Classrooms are presented attractively and extensive teaching and learning resources, including information and communication technology (ICT), are used effectively. The school is commended for the more recent development of its school garden. Parent questionnaires indicate that almost all parents are of the view that the facilities in the school are good.
- Parental involvement in the work of the school is encouraged successfully. A range of worthwhile initiatives is implemented through the school's dynamic home/school/community liaison (HSCL) service. This work includes opportunities for parents to work with teachers in the classroom to support the pupils' learning in literacy and numeracy. The school has a highly committed and active parents' association. The association organises and supports a variety of events in the school. In the parent questionnaires, almost all parents report that the school is welcoming of parents.
- The management of pupils is very good and is underpinned by an effective policy and practice of promoting positive discipline. The school communicates high expectations regarding pupil behaviour and engagement and the pupils respond positively to these expectations. Pupil questionnaires confirm that almost all pupils know the school and class rules and consider their school to be a safe place.

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

- Overall, the quality of whole-school planning is very good. A collaborative approach to planning is adopted, involving board of management members, teachers and parents. Creditable progress is being made in the use of school self-evaluation practices. In particular, the school is commended for the quality of its DEIS action plan. The adoption of effective implementation and review procedures has ensured that the plan has had a very positive impact on the pupils' learning.
- All curriculum plans take very good account of the context of the school and its particular needs. In turn, they offer suitable guidance to the teachers to aid curriculum delivery. The school recently engaged in a review of the teachers' short-term planning practices. A revised schoolwide approach to classroom planning is now being implemented.

## 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

- Overall, the quality of teaching and learning is very good. Positive levels of pupil achievement, commensurate with their varying ability levels, are in evidence. The teachers are successful in creating a very positive learning environment for the pupils. Well-planned team-teaching initiatives, involving class teachers and support teachers, are a significant feature of school provision and are implemented in a highly effective manner. For some aspects of learning, the pupils are grouped suitably according to their ability levels and good differentiated learning opportunities are provided. The pupils participate actively in their learning and engage meaningfully in high quality collaborative group work. A variety of assessment approaches, including skilful teacher questioning and close observation of the pupils as they learn, is being implemented. There are also praiseworthy evolving practices in evidence that facilitate the pupils to engage in self-assessment. It is advised that a consistent approach to pupil assessment be agreed and implemented on a schoolwide basis and that a wider range of assessment approaches be considered. The school is commended for the systematic analysis of standardised assessment results in English and Mathematics and for using the outcomes of this assessment to inform planning and teaching.
- Tá múineadh agus foghlaim na Gaeilge ar chaighdeán oiriúnach. Tá árd-mholadh tuillte ag an bhfoireann don sár-obair atá á déanamh aici chun dearcadh dearfach i leith na Gaeilge a chothú i measc na ndaltaí. Labhraíonn formhór na ndaltaí le líofacht feiliúnach. Chun cumas labhartha agus saibhreas teanga gach dalta a fhorbairt a thuilleadh, b'fhiú dul siar go han rialta ar na téamaí agus an t-ábhar teanga a bhfuil déanta cheana féin. Ar an iomlán, léann na daltaí le líofacht agus le cruinneas oiriúnach. Faigheann siad deiseanna chun scríbhneoireacht fheidhmiúil agus scríbhneoireacht phearsanta a chleachtadh.

*The quality of teaching and learning in Irish is of an appropriate standard. The teachers are highly commended for their work in promoting a positive attitude to the Irish language among the pupils. Most pupils speak with suitable fluency. In order to further improve all pupils' speaking competence and richness of language, it is recommended that lesson themes and language content be revised regularly. On the whole, the pupils read with appropriate fluency and accuracy. They are provided with opportunities to engage in both functional and personal writing.*

- Overall, the quality of teaching and learning in English is very good. While progress in promoting the pupils' expressive language confidence and competence is acknowledged, the school should ensure that the practice of addressing discrete oral language objectives is extended on a schoolwide basis. The school has made substantial progress in promoting the pupils' interest and ability in reading. The use of reading groups, graded reading materials and well-chosen novels ensures that the pupils are reading at an appropriate instructional level. The school's success in promoting the pupils' reading competence is supported by the pupil questionnaire responses in which most pupils agreed that they were doing well at reading. The school employs a highly structured

approach to writing and the pupils are provided with regular opportunities to write in a variety of genres and for a range of purposes. The teachers skilfully encourage the pupils to write and their writing is celebrated and displayed attractively in all classrooms.

- The quality of teaching and learning in Mathematics is very good. Collaborative learning activities using concrete materials and practical problem-solving approaches are regular features of practice. Very good emphasis is placed on fostering mathematical language, promoting number competence and developing the pupils' conceptual understanding of Mathematics. It is advised that current good practice in the promotion of number skills be extended to include regular linkage across the mathematics strands. Overall, the pupils show good understanding of work previously addressed and in completing the pupil questionnaires, most pupils reported that they are achieving well at Mathematics.
- The teachers employ a range of strategies effectively in the implementation of the drama curriculum. They are praised for the creation of a safe classroom environment in which the pupils' ideas, feelings and experiences can be expressed freely. The pupils are facilitated to work in pairs and groups to make Drama and they participate enthusiastically in the range of activities. Drama is integrated successfully with other areas of the curriculum, particularly English and Irish. The school is committed to extending the pupils' experiences of drama by facilitating them to attend performances in the local theatre and by inviting theatre companies to the school. It is recommended that, in order to further improve learning outcomes in Drama, lessons focus more clearly on the elements of drama and be less teacher-directed.

## **6. Quality of Supports for Pupils**

- Provision for pupils with special educational needs, pupils for whom English is an additional language and children from the Travelling community with additional learning needs is very good. The pupils experience being taught in an inclusive and supportive learning environment. Purposeful individualised and group learning programmes are prepared and implemented skilfully. The contribution of the pupils to the development and review of their learning targets is lauded. The implementation of new measures to monitor individual pupil progress in group learning contexts is noted. Support for pupils is provided primarily on an in-class basis through well-devised and implemented team-teaching initiatives. Commendable levels of pupil progress are in evidence. The quality of individualised withdrawal programmes, including *Reading Recovery* and *Maths Recovery*, is praised highly. The special needs assistants (SNAs) support the learning of their assigned pupils in a very competent manner. The unit for pupils with autistic spectrum disorders provides significant support through the sharing of expertise, facilities and resources and this contributes positively to the overall delivery of support for the pupils of the school.

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