

An Roinn Oideachais agus Eolaíochta
Department of Education and Science

Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Scoil Mhuire
Lacken, Ballinagh, County Cavan
Uimhir rolla:17479D

Date of inspection: 22 February 2008

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WHOLE-SCHOOL EVALUATION

A whole-school evaluation of Scoil Mhuire, Lacken was undertaken in February, 2008. This report presents the findings of the evaluation and makes recommendations for improvement. The evaluation focused on the quality of teaching and learning in English, Irish, Mathematics and Science. 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.

INTRODUCTION – SCHOOL CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

Scoil Mhuire, Lacken is a co-educational school under the patronage of the Bishop of Kimore. It is situated approximately three kilometres from Ballinagh, Co. Cavan. The school participates in the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools initiative (DEIS).

The following table provides an overview of the enrolment and staffing in the school at the time of the evaluation:

	Number
Pupils enrolled in the school	69
Mainstream classes in the school	3
Teachers on the school staff	4
Mainstream class teachers	3
Teachers working in support roles	1
Special needs assistants	0

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT

1.1 Characteristic spirit, mission or vision

The school fosters a strong community spirit and the school campus is a focal point for the community. The school's mission statement states that it takes a holistic approach to education with strong traditions in sport and music.

1.2 Board of management

The board of management provides effective leadership and guidance to the school. It is properly constituted and meetings of the board are convened regularly. It works collaboratively with the staff and the parents' association. It competently fulfils all its statutory obligations and is led by an efficient chairperson who gives invaluable support and deals with matters promptly.

The school was refurbished and extended recently to a very high standard. It celebrated its official opening in June 2006. The project finished promptly due to the hard work and dedication of the various partners. The school now comprises three spacious classrooms, a large secretary's office, two learning support rooms, a staffroom, a principal's office and a general purpose room. All associated with the school are proud of the new building. The board purchased adjoining land at a nominal cost for use as a sports field. This has added enormously to facilities at the school.

1.3 In-school management

The highly competent principal teacher was appointed in May 1987. He displays exceptional leadership skills and he fosters a collaborative culture within the staff. Staff members display commendable zeal for their work and embrace change with enthusiasm. The principal is a trainer with the Primary Curriculum Support Programme (PCSP). He encourages his staff with success to share their expertise. The practices that prevail in Scoil Mhuire are worthy of dissemination to others. The principal was instrumental in setting up a school band in 2004. Accordions were purchased with financial support from the board, parents' association and the Cavan Arts Office. The band has participated in Fleadh competitions, midnight mass and the local St Patrick's Day parade. The principal is ably supported by an efficient secretary.

The deputy principal and the special duties teacher are flexible and co-operative and contribute to the smooth running of the school. Consequently, good organisation and efficiency are apparent in all aspects of the school day.

1.4 Management of relationships and communication with the school community

An energetic, positive climate permeates the school. Trust and respect is built between parents and teachers. The parents' association expresses a high level of satisfaction with the school. Home-school links are promoted with success. The parents supported the various fundraising efforts to secure the local contribution towards the new building. They were instrumental in the school's involvement in the Health Promoting School project and in developing an organic garden. They are also involved with the training of the

football teams with great success. Communication is of a very high quality. The school's website and the frequent newsletters keep the school community updated on activities and events. The general purpose room in the school is located so that local community groups such as Foróige can avail of this facility. Strengths of the school includes the extended family support, the community partnership, the quality of care for the pupils, the quality of teaching and learning, the dedicated board of management, the active parents' association and the committed teaching staff.

1.5 Management of pupils
Pupils present as courteous, friendly and respectful. Pupils are involved in many projects and activities. The pupils learn in a caring, calm, organised and inclusive environment.

2. QUALITY OF SCHOOL PLANNING

2.1 Whole-school and classroom planning
The quality of the school's curricular policy is of a very high standard. All of the organisational procedures and practices are in place and ratified by the board of management. Policies have been discussed and forwarded to the parents' association for their contribution. However, some of the organisational polices are too brief and require augmentation and modification as discussed at the post-evaluation meeting. The School Development Planning website www.ppds.ie will prove beneficial in this regard. A comprehensive plan for special educational needs is also available. The school produces a booklet for parents which outlines the key practices in the school. This is a useful document and the school website is another source of information on the school.

All teachers provide exemplary long-term and short-term planning. The quality of the monthly reports is superb. Consequently, the quality of teaching and learning is very good.

2.2 Child protection policy and procedures
Confirmation was provided that, in compliance with Department of Education and Science Primary Circular 0061/2006, the board of management has formally adopted the *Child Protection Guidelines for Primary Schools* (Department of Education and Science, September 2001). Confirmation was also provided 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.

3. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

3.1 Language

Gaeilge
Tá dáiríreacht na n-oidí faoi chur chun cinn na Gaeilge le moladh. Tá moladh tuillte ag an bhfoireann as ardchaighdeán na hoibre san ábhar. Úsáidtear scéalaíocht go héifeachtach sa scoil. Clúdaítear obair i gciorcal, cluichí, rannta, drámaíocht, gníomhaíochtaí agus tascanna lena linn. Múintear na feidhmeanna teanga, seanfhocail, an ghramadach agus na nathanna úsáideacha go héifeachtach sa scoil.Baintear úsáid as '*Drochlá Ruairí'* ar bhealach chomhtháite. Is inmholta an obair atá ar siúl leis an úrscéal ag baint úsáide as teicneolaíocht an eolais lena linn. Cuirtear na ceachtanna i láthair na ndaltaí go bríomhar, taitneamhach. Léann formhór na ndaltaí le líofacht agus léiríonn siad tusicint bhreá ar ábhar na gceachtanna. Baintear úsáid as raon straitéisí chun deiseanna cainte a chruthú. D'fhéadfaí obair bheirte a úsáid níos rialta sa scoil. Tá focail scríofa le feiceáil go flúirseach i dtimpealleacht na scoile. Déantar cúram bhréa den obair scríofa agus tá dul chun cinn creidiúnach le feiceáil sna seomraí. Chonacthas obair den scoth ar siúl i dteagasc na Gaeilge.

Irish
The dedication of the teachers in promoting Irish is commendable. The staff is worthy of praise for the standard achieved by the pupils in the subject. Storytelling is used effectively in the school. Circle work, games, rhymes, drama, activities and tasks are covered during these sessions. The language functions, proverbs, grammar and useful phrases are taught effectively in the school. 'Drochlá Ruairi' is used in an integrated manner. There is praiseworthy work being done with the novel using ICT. Lessons in Irish are implemented in a lively and enjoyable manner. The majority of the pupils read with fluency and they demonstrate positive understanding of their reading material. A range

of strategies is employed to develop pupils' oral capacities. Pair work could be used more frequently in the school. There is a print-rich environment in evidence in the school. Good attention is given to written work and there is evidence of creditable progress in writing in some classes. Exemplary practice was witnessed here in the teaching of Irish.

English
The teaching of English is carried out in a proficient manner in all classes. The staff is implementing the literacy action plan under DEIS very successfully. The principal invited parents into the school to promote reading. They are encouraged to visit the school library each Tuesday evening and read with their child. This initiative has aroused an interest in reading for the pupils and is proving successful.

The quality of the teaching of the Big Book and novel requires particular mention. The emphasis on skills development is commendable. Teachers differentiate the activities that arise from the reading sessions and this practice is noteworthy. Role-play, circle time, nursery rhymes, puppets, phonic work, drawing and work on magnetic letters are some of the many successful strategies used to support learning at the junior end of the school. An extensive emphasis on reading this year has led to a shared reading programme, the collaborative teaching of the novel and the further development of creative writing in the school.

There is a commendable integrated approach in the development of pupils' oral language and writing skills. The array of games, materials and resources to support oral language in the school is praiseworthy. The pupils' output in creative writing is laudable. The modelling of the staff of the process writing has instilled a confidence in the pupils. The collaboration of the special education teaching during creative writing sessions is highly effective. The lesson on the story sack and the use of the author's chair was of a very high quality. It is recommended that the school involves itself in the Write a Book project. The school has participated with success in the Windows poetry competition. The staff provides the pupils with challenging vocabulary and grammar lessons. A commendable project on Co. Cavan was presented articulately and enthusiastically by the senior pupils.

3.2 Mathematics
The pupils experience a broad and balanced programme. Lessons are well designed, paced appropriately and differentiated to meet the needs of the pupils. Lessons are engaging and encourage experiential learning. Adequate resources are available to support teaching and learning. There is evidence of problem solving and linkage across the strands. It is recommended, however, that there should be an even greater emphasis placed on both linkage and problem solving in the school. Overall the pupils experience success in their learning. Pupils are provided with opportunities to use ICT and to learn co-operatively. The further use of paired work should be explored. There is very good emphasis on the development of mathematical language as was noted during the teaching of Data, Shape and Algebra. However, it is also recommended that the school develops maths trails.

3.3 Science
The quality of teaching and learning in Science is very good. A range of resources is used effectively. Lessons are structured and teachers adapt their approaches to meet the individual pupils' needs. The teachers employ a variety of methodologies such as talk and discussion, investigative work and group work. There is due emphasis on skills development and pupils are challenged by the lessons. Teachers are adept in planning integrated lessons based on strands of the science curriculum. Notable examples were the exploration of the work of Van Gogh in Visual Arts and the story of the Three Little Pigs in English through integration with the strand on Materials. Pupils' concepts and knowledge are developed through activity, experimentation and investigation. Records of pupils' work are maintained and samples of their work are displayed in the school.

3.4 Assessment
A range of assessment strategies is used throughout the school, most notably teacher observation, work samples, photographic evidence, profiles, teacher designed tests and weekly tests. The Belfield Infant Assessment Programme (BIAP) is used to test pupils' progress in infant classes. Early intervention is successful. Standardised tests have been administered in both Mathematics and English to all classes from first to sixth class. Results are analysed and relevant supports and strategies are employed to enable the achievement of pupils. Collaborative teaching in Scoil Mhuire has resulted in closer assessment of pupils.

4. QUALITY OF SUPPORT FOR PUPILS

4.1 Pupils with special educational needs
The quality of support for pupils with educational needs is very good. A collaborative approach to the provision of support for pupils is proving highly effective. The experienced special education teacher implements programmes such as a project work, creative writing and shared reading very effectively. They are all linked directly to the content

objectives of the curriculum and the pupils' needs. The quality of the teaching and learning is laudable. A deep sense of care and sensitivity prevails in all her interactions with staff and pupils. The focus is on how effectively the pupils cope in their own classrooms and to this end the majority of the support occurs in classrooms through co-teaching and working with small groups. The pupils in receipt of additional support are confident and have good self-esteem. Strengths of the quality of support for pupils includes the experience of the teacher, the quality planning, the collaboration with class teachers and the interest of the entire staff in supporting pupils with learning needs.

4.2 Other support for pupils: disadvantaged, minority and other groups.
A rural co-ordinator was appointed last year as part of the DEIS action plan. The principal convened a meeting with the parents of the school and outlined the benefits of the school's involvement in DEIS. The pupils avail of a free lunch scheme that promotes healthy eating. The school receives funding which was used to erect an outdoor shelter. The school also received additional funding towards the purchase of books. It is recommended that a home-school policy be formulated that will incorporate all of the initiatives undertaken by the school. The co-ordinator has plans in place to visit the homes of new entrants in 2008. She will modify the current starter pack given to parents and will provide ideas on how parents can prepare their children for school. She is eager and enthusiastic about her work. She has introduced aspects of *Ready Steady Go Maths* and *Maths for Fun* in the school. She withdraws small groups of children and focuses on the use of concrete materials. She has focused on developing a listening programme with the junior pupils. She works collaboratively in the senior room facilitating the teaching of the novel. The quality of her work is noteworthy.

5. CONCLUSION

The school has strengths in the following areas:

- The school enjoys the support of a committed board of management and dedicated parents' association.
- A very strong spirit of collaboration and enthusiasm exists among the school staff.
- The quality of leadership in the school is empowering.
- The quality of provision in all of the subjects evaluated is high.
- A quality school building and stimulating school environment exists which serves to create a nurturing and supportive learning environment for staff and pupils.
- The quality of support for pupils is noteworthy.

The following key recommendations are made in order to further improve the quality of education provided by the school:

- To build on effective practice in the teaching of Mathematics it is recommended that further attention be given to pair work, problem solving, linkage and the development of mathematical trails.
- It is recommended that some of the school's organisational policies be modified and augmented as discussed at the post-evaluation meeting.

Post-evaluation meetings were held with the staff and the board of management where the draft findings and recommendations of the evaluation were presented and discussed.

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