

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

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

**Scoil Mhuire na nGrás**  
**Greenmount**  
**Cork.**  
**Uimhir rolla: 12473M**

**Date of inspection: 7 October 2011**



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

## 1. Introduction

- Scoil Mhuire na nGrás is situated in Greenmount, in the South side of Cork city. This co-educational school caters for pupils from junior infants to sixth class and includes two special classes for pupils with specific speech and language disorder. Current enrolment stands at 108 girls and 171 boys. The school's mission statement places significant emphasis on the holistic education of children in a safe, happy and inclusive environment. The Presentation Brothers operate as trustees and the school is under the patronage of the Catholic Bishop of Cork and Ross. The school participates in the DEIS initiative, which is the Department of Education and Skills action plan for educational inclusion. 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.
- During the whole-school evaluation, inspectors observed teaching and learning in seven mainstream class settings, five support-teaching settings, one special class and in the Home-School-Community-Liaison setting. In addition, a selection of activities organised by the School Completion Programme were observed.

## 2. Summary of Findings and Recommendations for Further Development

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

- The school is very well managed by a diligent board of management, which has established supportive relationships with the staff.
- The school is led most effectively by a very committed principal who provides positive leadership.
- There is an ethos of mutual respect throughout the school characterised by positive and affirming relationships among pupils and staff.
- Staff members display a strong spirit of commitment to their work and to the welfare of the pupils.
- Overall, high quality teaching and learning were observed in classroom and support settings.
- Parental involvement, in association with the Home-School-Community-Liaison programme, beneficially contributes to the life of the school.
- The school has embraced the concept of co-operative teaching and has implemented a range of effective and well-organised in-class support programmes.

The following **main recommendations** are made:

- Moltar cur chuige cumarsáideach i dteagasc na Gaeilge a fhorbairt a thuilleadh  
*It is recommended that a communicative approach to teaching Irish be developed further.*
- To further enhance the good work of the in-school management team, it is recommended that duties are reviewed more regularly to reflect the school's changing priorities.
- The overall teaching and learning process would gainfully benefit from the further development ICT in classrooms and support settings.
- It is recommended that the structure and policy underpinning the pupil-mentoring/counselling intervention should be further developed.

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

- The board of management fulfils its duties to a very high standard and is committed to the management and development of all aspects of the school. The board places significant attention on the ratification and review of a wide range of organisational and curricular policies. Effective communication with parents is maintained and the board greatly values their contribution to school life.
- The school is led very capably by a committed principal who has created a very positive and collaborative school environment. He provides effective organisational and curricular leadership and has overseen the development of many successful initiatives throughout the school. Central to the principal's vision for the school is his significant commitment to pupils' learning and welfare.
- The deputy principal provides dedicated support to the principal and they display very good collaborative work practices. In addition, the principal is supported by an in-school management team whose members demonstrate a strong spirit of commitment. In-school management members are further supported by teachers who contribute to the development of a variety of educational and organisational initiatives. To further enhance the good work of the in-school management team, it is recommended that duties are reviewed more regularly to reflect the school's changing priorities.
- The school building and its environs are maintained to a high standard and classrooms are well equipped with material resources to support curriculum implementation. Very good use is made of information and communication technology (ICT) to support school administration and interactive whiteboards have been installed in classrooms. Emphasis is placed on teachers' professional development and many have undertaken various courses with the support of the board and principal, resulting in increased capacity to support pupils' learning. The school secretary, caretaker and other ancillary staff also make a valuable contribution to the effective running of this school.
- The school communicates effectively with parents through regular newsletters and through formal and informal parent-teacher meetings. Responses to the parents' questionnaires indicate that the quality of relationships with parents is very good. A committed parents' association works closely with school management and provides support for a range of activities.
- The management of pupils' and their participation in learning are very good. Pupils interact with their teachers and peers in a respectful and courteous manner. Responses to the pupil questionnaires indicate that the vast majority of pupils like coming to school, that they are treated fairly and that they get on well with other children.

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

- The quality of whole-school planning is very good. Curricular plans are collaboratively developed and comprehensive administrative policies effectively guide organisational matters in the school.
- The principal and staff engage in productive school self-evaluation practices, which have led to the successful implementation of many curricular and organisational projects.

Clearly defined targets in the DEIS plan are systematically reviewed to ensure that the range of initiatives being implemented is having a positive impact on learning.

- In general, the quality of teachers' planning is good. The process of collaborative planning is highly commended and could be beneficially extended throughout the school. Reviewing the format of the monthly progress reports to facilitate enhanced monitoring of curriculum implementation throughout the school is advised.
- 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 and school staff; 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. Management is advised to present the child protection policy formally to parents.

## 5. Quality of Teaching, Learning and Pupil Achievement

- In the vast majority of settings, very good standards of teaching, learning and pupil achievement were observed during the evaluation. In these cases, teachers display a strong commitment to the various collaborative, whole-school approaches and a strong emphasis is placed on interactive teaching with effective use of group teaching and differentiated learning. The overall teaching and learning process would further benefit from the increased use of ICT in classrooms and support settings.
- Déanann na hoidí an-iarracht dearcadh dearfach i leith na Gaeilge a chothú. Is tairbheach an leas a bhaineann said as straitéisí fiúntacha agus as acmhainní corportha chun suim na ndaltaí a mhuscailt agus chun a gcumas a leathnú. Is dúshlán anois é d'fhoireann na scoile an Ghaeilge labhartha a chur chun cinn a thuilleadh ar bhonn scoile uile. Ina leith sin, rachadh sé chun tairbhe d'fhoghlaim na ndaltaí dá dtabharfaí breis deiseanna dóibh an Ghaeilge a labhairt le linn an scoil lae. Ag rangleibhéil éagsúla, déantar forbairt bhreá ar scileanna léitheoireachta agus scríbhneoireachta na ndaltaí agus eiríonn leo caighdeán maith dá n'aoisghrúpa a bhaint amach. Moltar don bhfoireann an dea-chleachtas seo a fhorbairt a thuilleadh ar bhonn na scoile ina hiomláine.

*Teachers make very good efforts to promote Irish. Effective strategies and appropriate concrete materials are beneficially utilised to enhance pupils' interest and to extend their abilities. The challenge for the school is to further promote spoken Irish throughout the school. In this regard, the provision of further opportunities for pupils to use Irish during the school day would enrich their learning. At certain levels, pupils' reading and writing abilities are well developed and they have successfully achieved age-appropriate standards. It is recommended that this good practice be extended further on a whole-school level.*

- History is well taught, with good attention paid to the acquisition of knowledge and the development of pupils' skills. Commendable emphasis is placed on aspects of local history and community historians provide a rich resource for the pupils. Pupils engage in written exercises, including some project work, to a good standard.
- The quality of teaching and learning in English is very good. A broad range of DEIS initiatives are implemented in a highly effective manner and this is impacting positively on pupil attainment. Due emphasis is placed on the development of pupils' oral language skills during discrete provision and in cross curricular contexts. Focussed station-teaching

using an extensive range of graded reading material ensures all pupils have opportunities to read at an instructional level. Well-chosen novels are features of provision in a number of classes and comprehension skills are developed in a structured and highly effective manner. Writing in a variety of genres and for a range of audiences is systematically addressed with the pupils.

- The quality of teaching and learning in Mathematics is very good. Teachers employ a very effective range of methodologies and a number of targeted approaches successfully address the variation in pupils' learning abilities. Very good emphasis is placed on fostering mathematical language, promoting number competence and developing the pupils' conceptual understanding across the strands of the curriculum. This effective teaching combined with the positive views that children have of their mathematical competence ensures that productive learning taking place.
- Pupils' progress is assessed regularly using a comprehensive range of screening and diagnostic tests in classrooms and special education settings. Many teachers employ effective in-class assessment practices to track pupil's progress. The whole-school approach to the formative analysis of assessment data to inform effective targeting of resources is highly commendable.

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

- A dedicated team of learning-support/resource teachers (LS/RTs) and an English as an addition language (EAL) teacher provides qualifying pupils with supplementary support. Pupils are taught through a well-balance programme of withdrawal and in-class support. A noteworthy feature of provision is the effective in-class, team-teaching sessions that focus predominately on supporting pupils' literacy and numeracy skills. A programme of activities is in place to further support pupils' needs in fine and gross motor skills. The special needs assistants work conscientiously and are proactive in supporting pupils as needs arise in their respective classroom.
- Seven pupils attend each of the two special classes for pupils who present with specific speech and language disorder. Pupils attending the special classes benefit greatly from the services of speech and language therapists, employed by the Health Service Executive (HSE). Special-class teachers and speech therapists work in close collaboration, providing comprehensive support for the pupils in a very positive, affirming and stimulating environment. Comprehensive individual education plans (IEPs) are collaboratively prepared by the teachers. A broad and balanced curriculum is taught and emphasis is placed on the development of pupils' language abilities. Pupils benefit from inclusion in age-appropriate mainstream activities in a number of subject areas.
- The contribution and involvement of parents in the life of the school is significantly enhanced by the work of the home-school-community liaison (HSCL) teacher. A broad range of supports are provided and it is evident that this work is having a beneficial impact on parents and pupils. Additional support is also provided to selected pupils by the school-completion programme (SCP). The coordinator works closely with the principal, the HSCL teacher and class teachers. In addition to its focus on attendance, other praiseworthy aspects of the SCP include the breakfast club, homework club, after-school activities and the transition programme for sixth-class pupils. It is recommended that the policy underpinning the pupil-mentoring/counselling intervention provided by SCP is further developed by the school.

*Published, May 2012*

# **Appendix**

**SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT**

**Submitted by the Board of Management**

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

The Board of Management of Scoil Mhuire na nGrás would like to thank the Inspectorate for the professional manner in which they carried out the WSE. We welcome the report's recognition of the high quality of school management and leadership. We acknowledge and appreciate the contribution made by the Parents' Association, parents, pupils, teaching staff, Special Needs Assistants and ancillary staff. The recognition of the staff's commitment to the welfare of the children and to a high quality of teaching and learning is extremely affirming. It is also affirming to see the ethos of mutual respect amongst the school community highlighted.

The Board particularly welcomes the acknowledgement of the successful implementation of DEIS initiatives in the area of numeracy and literacy, which have impacted positively on pupil attainment. We are committed to the implementation of Reading Recovery and in-class literacy support through the provision of station teaching (Literacy Lift-off), as well as, the implementation of Ready Set Go Maths and Maths Recovery. The Board supports the implementation of Maths Recovery by encouraging the facilitation of team teaching and station teaching by way of Maths Blast and Maths Factor.

The Board welcomes the recognition of the systematic approach to genre writing, which has been developed through the First Steps Programme. It also welcomes the recognition of the structured approach to Comprehension Instruction, which has been developed through the Building Bridges of Understanding Programme. The Board has facilitated the training of 5 Maths Recovery teachers and 2 Reading Recovery teachers and wish to further expand this CPD into the future. The BOM would like to take this opportunity to recognise staff members' willingness to deliver "cutting edge" initiatives for the benefit of the children's education.

The recognition of the valuable contribution made by the HSCL and SCP is strongly welcomed. Moreover, we are pleased to see the acknowledgment of the dedication of staff to special education and the effective educational support provided by the SNAs, LS/RTs, the EAL teacher, as well as two Special Class teachers in close collaboration with HSE therapists.

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

The Board welcomes the report's recommendations and the school community are already using such to forge a blueprint for school improvement.

- A review of the in-school management team duties is underway.
- A committee is developing a School E-Learning Plan to further develop ICT in classrooms and support settings.
- Croke Park hours are being utilised to extend the existing practice of collaborative planning.
- The school and the School Completion Programme (SCP) are meeting currently in order to enhance the existing good work being carried out by the SCP.
- A review of the monthly progress report format is scheduled for 2012/13 to enhance the monitoring of curriculum implementation.
- The Board looks forward to encouraging initiatives to promote spoken Irish throughout the school.
- The Board are committed to accessing further CPD for staff, especially in DEIS initiatives.