

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

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

**Scoil Bhríde,**  
**Knockmay, Portlaoise, Co. Laois**  
**Roll Number: 19747M**

**Date of inspection: 4 October 2012**



## 1. Introduction

Scoil Bhríde is a co-educational primary school under the patronage of the Catholic bishop of Kildare and Leighlin. At the time of the evaluation, 748 pupils were enrolled. During the evaluation inspectors observed teaching and learning in fourteen mainstream classes and five support settings. The school participates in the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) initiative and is designated as a Band One urban school. 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:

- Very effective leadership is provided by the board, principal, deputy principal and in-school management team.
- Strategic, collaborative planning processes are embedded in the school.
- A culture of reflective practice exists, whereby teachers discuss their teaching and reflect critically on the quality of learning outcomes for pupils.
- A range of whole-school approaches to teaching and learning are well established.
- The overall standard of teaching, learning and classroom management in the school is high.

The following **main recommendations** are made:

- Teachers are advised to be more explicit about planning for, teaching and consolidating the subject-specific language of curriculum subjects.
- An increased emphasis should be placed on enriching pupils' vocabulary and developing their competence with syntax and grammar within the oral English programme.
- Ba chóir athbhreithniú a dhéanamh ar mhúineadh na Gaeilge sa scoil agus béim a chur ar chumas cumarsáide na ndaltaí a fheabhsú. *The teaching of Irish in the school should be reviewed and pupils' ability to communicate in Irish should be emphasised.*

## 3. Quality of School Management

- The board of management is very effective. It fulfils its responsibilities, as outlined in *Constitution of Boards and Rules of Procedures* (2011), to a high standard. It is advised to disseminate more information about its work to the school community, through issuing an agreed report on its meetings and an annual report on the operation of the school.
- Leadership in the school is a significant strength. The principal and deputy principal display very effective leadership skills in the administrative, pastoral and curriculum domains. Responsibilities for all leadership functions are clearly outlined and very well distributed amongst all members of the in-school management team. The individual and collective work of this team impacts very positively on all aspects of school life.

- The school is a very welcoming environment for parents. Significant efforts are made to involve parents in all aspects of the school, including classroom work and policy development. Parents are well informed about school life and their children's education. Parent questionnaire returns indicate a very high level of satisfaction with a range of issues including management, teaching and their children's progress.
- The management of pupils is very good. Pastoral care is integral to all aspects of school life. Pupil attendance levels have significantly improved in recent years and are currently very good. Teachers foster a positive relationship with pupils and deploy a range of effective behavioural management strategies. Pupil questionnaire responses indicate that the vast majority of pupils get on well together, agree that teachers are approachable and that the school is a good school.
- The school makes optimum use of its building and grounds. Classes contain a good supply of resources to support teaching and learning. Staff members have successfully created stimulating print- and number-rich environments throughout the school.

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

- Strategic, collaborative planning processes are firmly embedded in the school. Policy development involves reviewing existing practice and gathering relevant data. The process is also informed by appropriate literature and by valid methodologies.
- The DEIS plan contains specific, measurable targets, which build on previous targets. The plan indicates how they are to be implemented, monitored and evaluated. There is firm evidence of the successful attainment of many targets established in the previous DEIS plan.
- Significant work has been completed in establishing robust self-evaluation processes. In line with best practice, these processes critically evaluate the quality of pupils' learning and the quality of teachers' practice.
- Administrative plans provide very clear guidance on school procedures. They reflect the school context and relevant legislation and circulars. A policy on exemptions from Irish should be devised and the policy on teachers' absence should be updated. More detailed information regarding the content and language to be used when dealing with sensitive issues in the Relationship and Sexuality Education (RSE) Programme should be outlined in the RSE policy.
- Very good quality curriculum plans are available. They outline appropriate content for each class and whole-school approaches to various subjects. The Irish plan should contain a greater range of language, developed incrementally from class level to class level.
- The quality of individual teacher planning is good. Long-term plans are linked to the school plan. Short-term plans are mainly objective-based. The involvement of parents, and in some cases pupils, in devising individual educational plans, is commended.
- It is advised that all teachers plan more explicitly for language teaching by clearly stating the language and skills to be taught during language lessons and planning for the subject-specific language required for other subjects. The intended learning outcomes of lessons based on literacy or numeracy initiatives should also be clearly stated in short-term planning.

- 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 overall standard of teaching and learning is high, with some very effective practice observed during the evaluation. A range of whole-school approaches to teaching, learning and classroom management is well established. Pupils' attainments in standardised tests are continually improving and are currently very good. A culture of reflective practice exists amongst teachers, whereby teachers discuss their teaching and reflect critically on the quality of learning outcomes for pupils.
- Teachers are advised to be more explicit about the subject-specific language of curriculum subjects in their planning and teaching. Further attention to differentiation in mainstream classes is also advised.
- Baineann deacrachtaí le múineadh na Gaeilge. Caitear an iomarca ama ar mhúineadh ainmfhocal agus ar chleachtaí tuisceana. Moltar go mbunófaí na ceachtanna ar mhúineadh teanga, briathra agus struchtúir chainte san áireamh. Ba chóir freisin an iliomad deiseanna d'uilechineál a sholáthar do na daltaí chun an teanga nuafhoghlamtha a chleachtadh i suímh éagsúla. Is den tábhacht é go ndéantar forchéimniú ar an teanga a mhúintear sa scoil ionas go dtógtar foghlaim i rang amháin ar fhoghlaim na mblianta roimhe sin. Moltar don scoil ról na dtéacsleabhar atá in úsáid do mhúineadh na Gaeilge a mheas.
- *There are difficulties with the teaching of Irish. Too much attention is devoted to teaching nouns and to comprehension exercises. It is advised that lessons be based on the teaching of language, including verbs and language structures. Pupils should also be enabled to practice the newly acquired language in a variety of different settings. It is important that the language taught in the school is systematically developed, so that learning in one class builds on previous learning. The school is advised to evaluate the role of the textbook currently in use for Irish teaching.*
- The quality of teaching and learning in English is very good. A very positive attitude to literacy is fostered. Reading skills are taught systematically throughout the school and a broad range of approaches to reading is successfully implemented. In writing, a commendable emphasis is placed on writing processes, writing genres and celebrating pupils' work. Very good work is done on assessing pupils' writing. The school is introducing a whole-school approach to oral language, which focuses on developing oral skills. In implementing this, an increased emphasis should be placed on enriching pupils' vocabulary and developing their competence with syntax and grammar. All aspects of the English programme should be more closely integrated.
- Teaching and learning in Mathematics are effective. Learning objectives are clear and lessons are well structured. A commendable emphasis is placed on oral, mental mathematics and on skill development. Opportunities for collaborative pair work and group work are provided and some very good examples of consolidating learning were observed. Pupils are enabled to estimate and to problem solve; exposure to a wider range of strategies for these skills is now advised. More explicit teaching and consolidating of the subject-specific language of Mathematics is also recommended.

- High quality provision for Drama was observed. A safe environment for Drama is created and pupil enjoyment and participation levels are high. Teachers use a broad range of drama strategies and conventions and pupils are aware of the elements of Drama. During lessons, pupils are enabled to co-operate and communicate with others in shaping the drama and good explorations of feelings and knowledge are facilitated. Some lessons are integrated with other curricular areas; however they still maintain the integrity of the Drama. Further opportunities for pupils to reflect on and discuss their learning would enhance provision in this area.
- Very good assessment strategies are employed. A range of assessment of learning and assessment for learning strategies is used at all levels. Pupil progress is tracked throughout the school. In the support settings very effective use is made of diagnostic testing to identify particular needs of pupils.

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

- Very effective supports are provided for pupils with special educational needs. Teachers are very affirming of pupils and their teaching is very well planned, structured and resourced. Very good practice was observed in some settings regarding the teachers sharing learning objectives with pupils and consolidating new learning.
- Throughout the school, initiatives in literacy and numeracy, such as *Reading Recovery*, *Maths for Fun* and *First Steps* are successfully implemented. Pupils are supported through focused in-class work and targeted withdrawal. Effective approaches to planning and record keeping are in place. Embedding a whole-school approach to the classroom support stage of the continuum of support is recommended.
- The work of the Home School Community Liaison (HSCL) co-ordinator is very effective. He co-ordinates a range of initiatives to enable parents to support their children's learning and to be meaningfully involved in the school. These initiatives are valued by parents and are impacting very positively on school life and on pupils' learning.
- Pupils with additional language needs are catered for on a withdrawal basis. A greater emphasis on developing specific oral competencies in this setting is advised.

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