

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

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

**Scoil Mhuire Gan Smál,**  
**Kilkerley, Dundalk, Co. Louth**  
**Uimhir rolla: 16749B**

**Date of inspection: 11 November 2011**



## 1. Introduction

Scoil Mhuire Gan Smál is a rural co-educational school situated in the parish of Kilkerry, near Dundalk, Co. Louth. It is under the patronage of the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Armagh, Cardinal Seán Brady. The school has experienced a significant growth in population over the past number of years and 194 pupils are now enrolled. The attendance levels of the pupils are excellent. The board of management 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.

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

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

- The commitment and awareness of responsibility of the board of management in managing the school are highly commendable.
- The quality of distributed leadership, as demonstrated by the principal, is excellent.
- The quality of overall pupil learning and achievement in English reading is excellent.
- The quality of overall pupil learning and achievement in Mathematics is excellent.
- The quality of education provided for pupils with additional learning needs is highly commendable.
- Parents are very supportive of the school and report high levels of satisfaction with the quality of education provided.
- The behaviour of the pupils and their interest in learning are highly commendable.

The following **main recommendations** are made:

- Some current whole-school curriculum plans require immediate review and expansion.
- Moltar luach chlár na léitheoireachta Gaeilge a uasmhéadú trín' é a bhunú ar úsáid fhíorleabhar agus acmhainní comhthreomhara.
- *It is recommended that the value of the reading programme in Irish be increased through basing it on the use of authentic books and parallel resources.*

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

- The quality of the work of the board of management is very good. Members have a very good understanding of the board's responsibilities and the board collaborates effectively with the principal, staff and parents' association. The income and expenditure accounts are audited annually. Board of management records show that the quality of teaching and learning are priority areas which are discussed at the board's regular meetings.
- The quality of the work of the in-school management team is very good and all members work closely together to ensure that the day-to-day running of the school is effective. The principal demonstrates great dedication and skill in leading the school. Her very effective leadership style facilitates an appropriate distribution of leadership and a culture of professional respect and collaborative decision-making is very strongly evident. Empowered as school leaders, the members of the in-school management team make a valuable contribution to the ongoing development of the school.
- The school building is maintained to a high standard and in it the staff and board of management have created an efficient and very stimulating learning environment. All classrooms are well equipped with a range of very good quality learning and teaching resources. In partnership with parents, high quality external teaching, learning and recreation areas have been developed.
- There are very positive relationships in the school community. Strong parental involvement in supporting the ongoing development of resources, the school infrastructure and facilitating aspects of curriculum delivery was evident during the evaluation. The school has a highly committed and active parents' association which organises and supports a variety of valuable events and programmes. The representatives of the parents' association expressed great support for the school and the teaching staff. They reported that parents were very satisfied with the quality of the education provided and with the standards of pupils' learning and achievement.
- The management of the pupils is excellent. A very caring atmosphere is evident in the school. This is nurtured carefully in partnership with parents. The development of self-confidence and self-esteem is prioritised, not least through high-quality activities such as the school choir. Pupil questionnaire responses show that almost all pupils in the classes surveyed consider their school to be a safe place and they feel they can talk to a teacher if they are upset about something at school.

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

- The school planning process supports the development of the work of the school positively. Organisational policies are clear, structured and support the efficient operation of the school. A number of the whole-school curriculum plans which guide curriculum delivery within the school have been in place for some time and require review. Plans for some subject areas, History, Geography and Music for example, should include more specific guidance on the content to be taught at various class levels. The school engages effectively in self-evaluation and the quality of its current processes is very good. Valuable analysis of data from standardised and diagnostic testing takes place.
- Commitment to continuous development and improvement was in evidence during the evaluation. At classroom level very good quality long and short-term written plans are prepared. These are closely aligned to the structure and content of the primary school curriculum. Teachers are cognisant of the need to adapt the curriculum to meet the needs of individual pupils' abilities and this was reflected in the quality of preparation.

Collation and analysis of standardised test results and assessment data are embedded school practices that contribute significantly to self-evaluation.

- 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

- Tá ardmholadh tuillte as an gcaoi ina gcuireann an fhoireann foghlaim sa Ghaeilge chun cinn. Le linn na gceachtanna sa Ghaeilge labhartha, bhí cleachtais an-mhaithe ar bun. B'inmholta mar ar chuir oidí béim ar mhúnlú na teanga. Cheistigh siad na daltaí le scil. Bhí ar chumas na ndaltaí abairtí a struchtúru le muinín bhreá agus le cumas oiriúnach dá rangleibhéil. Tá dornán saibhir dánta, amhráin agus rainn ar eolas acu. Sa léitheoireacht léiríodh go dtugtar go críochnúil faoi foclóir agus fogharluach cruinn a fhorbairt. Le linn tascanna léitheoireachta a tugadh, léigh daltaí le brí, le cruinneas agus le tuiscint. Is ar shleachta loma i dtéacsleabhair a bhunaítear léitheoireacht na Gaeilge, áfach. Chun éifeacht chlár na léitheoireachta a uasmhéadú, moltar é a bhunú anois ar léamh fhíorleabhar agus acmhainní comhthreomhara ag na grádleibhéil chuí. Tugann na daltaí le cumas faoin scríbhneoireacht i raon *genres* ar bhonn rialta. Léiríodh an-chaighdeán sa scríbhneoireacht fheidhmiúil agus sa scríbhneoireacht chruthaitheach i gcoitinne.
- *High praise is due for the way in which the staff advances learning in Irish. During lessons in spoken Irish very good practices are established. It is commendable how teachers emphasise modelling of language. They questioned pupils skilfully. Pupils demonstrated ability to structure sentences with fine confidence and ability appropriate to their class level. They know a rich collection of poems, songs and rhymes. In reading, vocabulary development and exact phonemic understanding are addressed thoroughly. During reading tasks pupils read with clarity, accuracy and understanding. Irish reading is based on basic extracts in textbooks, however. To increase the effectiveness of the Irish reading programme, it is recommended that it now be based on reading authentic books and parallel resources at the appropriate grade levels. Pupils capably undertake writing in a range of genres regularly. A very good standard was evident in functional and creative writing generally.*
- The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in English is excellent. Pupils' expressive language ability is of a high standard. The school has been very successful in developing pupils' reading ability. Effective teaching of phonological and phonemic awareness and comprehension strategies is evident. During tasks pupils consistently indicated familiarity with phoneme-level word attack and very good fluency and comprehension. The pupils' writing skills are developed purposefully and very good quality writing was evident in a range of genres. Poetry is taught as a significant part of the English programme and pupils recite poems with fluency and expression.
- The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in Mathematics is excellent. Clear explanation, that was supported by effective use of a range of resources, and the regular consolidation of understanding of concepts characterised the mathematics teaching evaluated. The focus on oral and mental mathematical work, early years' mathematics work, manipulation of concrete resources by pupils during lessons and collaborative learning activities are commendable practices. Very good standards are achieved. To build further on this effective teaching, it would be worthwhile to consider incorporating more daily problem-solving within lessons.

- A range of strategies is used effectively in the implementation of the drama curriculum. The quality of lessons observed during the evaluation was very good. They were well thought out and prepared carefully. Teachers are successful in creating safe atmospheres in which ideas and feelings and experiences can be explored. The pupils participated enthusiastically in a range of activities during the evaluation.
- The quality of overall teaching and learning in the school is highly commendable. During the evaluation a broad range of effective methodologies were evident that maximised engagement and promoted quality in learning outcomes. Successful station teaching is established. Teachers made very good use of information and communication technology resources during demonstration and explanation. Almost all pupils report that their teachers explain concepts clearly during lessons. Responses in questionnaires also indicate that that an increase in amounts of small group teaching at some grade levels could be warranted.
- Comprehensive assessment practice takes place to monitor and record pupils' progression in learning. Detailed monthly progress records (*cuntais mhíosúla*) are maintained. A range of formative and summative assessment practices were in evidence. Where best practice in assessment for learning was observed teachers included specific observations and judgements that facilitated effective shared communication about pupils' learning.

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

- The quality of education provided for pupils with special educational needs is very good. An appropriate combination of withdrawal and in-class support is being operated successfully. Support teaching environments are organised in stimulating ways and very good approaches, resources and programmes are used. Some clarification is required in the school's learning support policy to show how the support teaching resource is prioritised towards pupils with greatest learning need. Explicit criteria should be included.
- Very good quality teaching approaches were observed during support teaching evaluated. Lessons were well paced and designed towards the achievement of specific objectives and outcomes. Progression in pupils' learning is very evident and is well monitored. Reading Recovery is operated faithfully. Very good quality individualised plans are prepared for all pupils with additional learning needs.
- The quality of home-school partnership is very good. Effective systems of communication have been established and almost all parents strongly agreed or agreed that they were happy with the school and that the school is welcoming towards parents.

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# **Appendix**

**SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT**

**Submitted by the Board of Management**

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

Our Inspector's professionalism, courtesy and ability to relate to children of all ages ensured that our WSE was a very positive experience for all involved. He offered very solid, insightful advice throughout the week. As a Board we are very pleased with the outcomes and his acknowledgement of the excellence we strive for in all we do in our school

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

We have taken into account his recommendations and our staff have divided into working groups to tackle the review and expansion of some of our current whole school curriculum plans.

We are also researching the quality and suitability of authentic Irish books and parallel resources to build upon the way in which the staff advances learning in Irish, which received high praise from the Inspector. From this report we will set new objectives for the future.