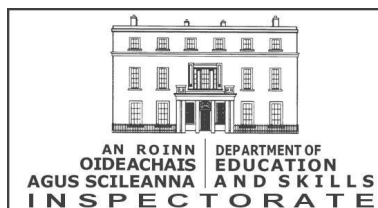


**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna  
Department of Education and Skills**

**Whole School Evaluation  
Management, Leadership and Learning  
REPORT**

**Merlin Woods Primary School  
Doughiska Road, Galway  
Uimhir rolla: 20350P**

**Date of inspection: 6 June 2014**



## Whole-School Evaluation – Management, Leadership and Learning Report

### Introduction

A Whole-School Evaluation – Management, Leadership and Learning (WSE - MLL) was undertaken in Merlin Woods Primary School in June 2014. This report is based on a selection of lessons observed in a range of learning settings in the school, interaction with pupils and review of their work, meetings with the principal and with board and parent representatives, completed parent and pupil questionnaires, and a selection of school documents. 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.

Merlin Woods operates under the patronage of the Catholic Bishop of Galway. It is situated in an area of rapid growth and development and most of the pupils are learning English as an additional language. At the time of the evaluation there were 184 pupils on roll in classes from junior infants to third. It is anticipated that the school will grow incrementally in the coming years to reflect demographic trends in the locality.

The school has **strengths** in the following areas:

- The quality of school leadership is excellent and the manner in which leadership is distributed throughout the school is exemplary.
- The school's engagement with school self-evaluation (SSE) and the school improvement process is very effective.
- Staff members are strongly committed to the provision of high quality educational experiences for all pupils.
- Teachers make very effective use of a suitable range of teaching approaches.
- The development of pupils' reading skills is very good and exemplary standards are achieved in writing.
- The quality of support provided for pupils is very good.

The following **main recommendations** are made:

- Chun forchéimniú a threisiú agus chun cumas na ndaltaí nathanna saibhre cainte a úsáid níos líofa b'fhiú plean uile scoile a chur i bhfeidm le béim láidir ar an gcur chuige cumarsáideach. *To strengthen progression and to enable pupils to use rich idioms of speech more fluently, a whole-school approach should be implemented with specific focus on the communicative approach.*
- Pupils' literacy skills development in English should be reinforced through the direct teaching of key vocabulary and through the use of relevant classroom displays.
- The board of management should put in place a more clearly defined communication structure between the board and the parents' association to further strengthen the partnership between them.

### Findings

#### 1. The learning achievements of pupils

- The overall learning achievements of pupils are very good. There is evidence that pupils, including pupils with special educational needs, are progressing in accordance with their ability.
- Overall there is continuity and progression in pupils' literacy skills development in English. While most pupils demonstrate a good level of oral language development, there is scope to improve the acquisition of key vocabulary in some instances. Pupils in all classes demonstrate appropriate reading skills, are interested in reading and are able to discuss books and stories with confidence. They recite many poems and

rhymes with enthusiasm and expression. The quality of the written work observed in many classrooms was excellent.

- Sa Ghaeilge, foghlaimíonn na daltaí raon foclóra bunaithe ar thopaicí áirithe agus tá ar a gcumas ceisteanna a chur agus a fhreagairt go muiníneach. Baineann siad sult agus tairbhe as na gníomhaíochtaí teanga áirithe. *In Irish, pupils learn a range of vocabulary on various topics and they are able to ask and answer questions with confidence. They derive enjoyment and benefit from the various language activities.*
- The pupils demonstrate a very good understanding of mathematical concepts and complete age-appropriate tasks with confidence and competence. Most pupils can discuss their work using appropriate mathematical language. Consideration should be given to sharing the range of mathematical language for each class level with parents.

## 2. Quality of teaching

- The overall quality of teaching in the school is very good. A range of appropriate teaching approaches is used effectively. Very good practice was observed with regard to the use of socio-dramatic play, team teaching, collaborative learning and the use of assessment information. Resource materials and equipment were used very effectively in the lessons observed.
- Teachers work collaboratively to develop pupils' literacy skills in English and a suitable range of programmes, strategies and interventions is used to very good effect. Phonological and phonemic awareness is developed in a suitably structured way. Very good teaching of English vocabulary was observed in some settings whereby key words and phrases were identified and taught explicitly and the pupils' learning and use of this vocabulary was supported by relevant classroom displays. The school should ensure that this practice is implemented in all settings.
- Baintear úsáid éifeachtach as straitéisí agus áiseanna éagsúla chun clár cuimsitheach a chur i bhfeidhm sa Ghaeilge. Chun forchéimniú a threisiú agus chun cumas na ndaltaí nathanna saibhre cainte a úsáid níos líofa b'fhiú plean uile-scoile a chur i bhfeidhm le béim láidir ar an gcur chuige cumarsáideach. *Effective use is made of various strategies and resources to implement a comprehensive programme in Irish. To strengthen progression and to enable pupils to use rich idioms of speech more fluently, a whole-school approach should be implemented with specific focus on the communicative approach.*
- The quality of teaching provided for pupils with special educational needs is very good. Individual education plans and programmes of work are prepared in consultation with parents and with other relevant professionals, as appropriate. Specific, measurable, realistic targets are identified and progress towards the attainment of these targets is recorded for almost all pupils. Some exemplary teaching of language was observed. The adoption of a common template for planning and recording of pupil progress is recommended.

## 3. Support for pupils' well-being

- This is an inclusive school where all children are enabled to participate in the full range of learning opportunities provided. The effective links established with appropriate professionals and support agencies are used to very good effect to provide appropriate support for pupils' well-being.
- Teachers take on a collective responsibility for the management of pupils and the strategies in use foster positive behaviour and mutual respect.
- 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*.

## 4. Leadership and Management

- The board of management provides effective governance to the school. The chairperson works closely with the principal and there is a shared vision for the role of the school within the local community. A more clearly defined communication structure between the board and the parents' association would further strengthen the partnership between them. The board has recently overseen the successful move of

the school to its new site and the quality of the school facility provided is of a very high standard.

- The principal provides exemplary leadership to the school. She ensures that a well structured CPD programme is provided for all staff and that innovative approaches are used throughout the school. She maintains very effective working relationships with colleagues, with the board and with pupils and parents. Regular and effective use is made of school newsletters, social media and the school website to keep parents informed about school matters.
- The in-school management team provides very strong and effective support to the principal and the range of duties undertaken is appropriate to the developing needs of the school.
- Leadership responsibilities are distributed effectively among staff members and the commitment of all staff to the on-going development and effective day-to-day running of the school is highly commendable.

#### **5. School Self-evaluation**

- The quality of school self evaluation is very good. The staff has engaged effectively with the SSE process in a way that supports school improvement. In particular, the school has made a clear link between the SSE process and improving learner outcomes.
- A school improvement plan has been developed and shared with relevant stakeholders.

#### **Conclusion**

The school's capacity to engage in school improvement is very good.

# **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 and Staff of Merlin Woods Primary School are delighted that the high standards of leadership, teaching and learning in the school have been recognised and acknowledged in our recent Whole School Evaluation – Management, Leadership and Learning. We particularly note the frequency of positive language used by inspectors, and we are very pleased that the dedication and commitment of the staff and management has been reflected in the report.

Since opening in temporary accommodation with just 16 pupils in 2010, and growing to 184 at the time of this evaluation, the management and staff of Merlin Woods Primary School have worked tirelessly to implement best practice and the highest of standards of leadership, teaching and learning in the school. Our school vision centres on Commitment, Collaboration and Community, and we feel that the evaluation, and subsequent report, reflects the emphasis we place on these areas to promote quality education in our school. As observed in the evaluation, we are committed to using effective teaching approaches and engaging in continuous professional development in order to provide high quality educational experiences. Staff collaborate closely with each other and, together with parents, support the holistic needs of each child, enabling them to reach his/her potential. The Board of Management and Staff believe passionately in the role that Merlin Woods Primary School has in the development of this vibrant and diverse locality and building links between families and various communities.

## **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 examined the main recommendations of the Inspectorate in the report and are pleased that they reflect the areas that we, as a school, have also identified as areas for focus as part of our Whole School Development Plan and our School Self Evaluation process.

Maidir le múineadh na Gailege, tá an fhoireann tar éis athbreathnú a dhéanamh ar an bPlean Scoile, ag cur béim láidir ar an saibhreas cainte agus an cur chuige chumarsáideach. Tá an scoil tar éis comhairle a fháil ó Chuiditheoir Ghaeilge PDST maidir le h-acmhainní Gaeilge, agus tá an Bord Bainistíochta tar éis infheistíocht a dhéanamh ar na h-acmhainní seo.

*With regard to the teaching of Irish, the staff has reviewed the school plan putting strong emphasis on richness of language and the communicative approach. The school has received advice from the PDST regarding Irish resources, and the board of management has invested in these resource.*

*(This is a translation of the text provided by the board of management).*

Our School Improvement Plan sets out our plan to focus even further on Oral Language and our actions include allocating further time and resources to the teaching and learning of our Oral Language Programme during school every day.

In order to facilitate a more clearly defined communication structure between the Board and the Parents' Association, the teacher nominee on the board will also act as the Parent Association link teacher, to further strengthen the good relationship which has been established already.

Overall, the Board and Staff are extremely pleased with the outcome of this inspection in our new and developing school, and we look forward to continued growth and good practice over the coming years.