1. Introduction

Scoil Náisúnta Naomh Pádraig is a Roman Catholic primary school catering for boys from first to sixth class. It is located in the town of Mallow in Co Cork and participates in the Department of Education and Skill’s School Completion Programme. At the time of the evaluation there were 210 pupils on roll. The school has an administrative principal, eight mainstream class teachers, four full-time teachers for pupils with special educational needs (SEN) and three SEN teachers shared with other schools in the area. There has been a number of changes to school personnel in recent years and at the time of the evaluation three permanent members of the teaching staff were on statutory leave. 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 key findings:

- The school has a committed and supportive board of management.
- The parents’ association contributes in a meaningful way to school life.
- The principal has an in-depth knowledge of the school community and adopts a collaborative approach to school management.
- The pupils are courteous, enthusiastic and very well behaved.
- The overall quality of teaching and learning observed during the evaluation was good, with the quality of lessons observed ranging from fair to very good.

The following main recommendations are made:

- Teachers should engage in a collaborative process of aligning whole-school plans more closely with classroom planning to ensure structured progression and development in curriculum implementation throughout the school.
- The effective approaches to differentiated teaching noted in some classrooms should be extended to all classroom settings.
- A review of provision for special educational needs (SEN) should include the development of an agreed approach to individual education planning, the development of a standardised approach to the organisation and maintenance of pupil progress records and the implementation of a continuous professional development programme.
- Formal mechanisms for incorporating parental perspectives into whole-school planning should be developed.

3. Quality of School Management

- The school has a supportive and committed board of management which has a keen awareness of its role and function. Comprehensive minutes of all meetings are maintained and roles are assigned to individual board members. While close attention is devoted to financial management, it is recommended that the school accounts be audited or certified in accordance with requirements under Section 18 of the Education Act.
• The principal adopts a cooperative management style and promotes positive relationships amongst the staff. He enjoys positive levels of support amongst parents and he has an in-depth knowledge and understanding of the school community. He is assisted by the deputy principal and special-duties teacher who attend to a wide range of duties in a diligent manner. It is recommended that the board makes provision for the formal review of duties attached to posts of responsibilities at regular intervals, to ensure tasks can be prioritised in accordance with the emerging needs of the school. It is also recommended that post holders be given an opportunity to update the board on their work on an annual basis.

• The extensive school building and grounds are very well maintained. A strategic plan for the building should be developed to ensure that the pupils derive maximum benefit from the available space. A range of resources including information and communication technology (ICT) and concrete manipulatives are available in the school. The introduction of a managed inventory system to extend the accessibility and use of these resources is recommended. It is also recommended that greater use be made of available ICT resources to enhance teaching and learning. The secretarial assistance, caretaker and cleaning staff all make a significant contribution to the smooth operation of the school.

• The school enjoys a positive relationship with parents. Regular newsletters, text alerts and the school website facilitate good levels of communication with the parent body. Responses to questionnaires issued as part of the evaluation reflect high levels of satisfaction with the school. The parents provide a variety of organisational supports to the school. Opportunities for greater parental input into policy formation and participation in classroom activities should be explored.

• The management of pupils is very good. In the lessons observed, they were courteous, enthusiastic and very well behaved. The formation of a student council consisting of representatives from all classes is highly commended. Extending the role of this council to enhance student voice in aspects of decision-making and policy formation is advised. Responses to questionnaires issued to pupils during the evaluation were very positive.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

• A broad range of administrative policies provide guidance on a variety of organisational issues in the school and whole-school curricular plans outline the general approaches to be adopted in teaching all subject areas. Teachers provide long and short-term plans of work and complete monthly progress reports which outline the content addressed in all subject areas. In order to enhance the impact of school planning on teaching and learning, it is recommended that teachers engage in a collaborative process of aligning whole-school plans more closely with classroom planning and practice. This should ensure structured progression and development in curriculum implementation throughout the school.

• The school has engaged in a positive manner in the school self-evaluation (SSE) process and specific areas of teaching and learning in English, Mathematics and Gaeilge have been targeted for improvement. The additional emphasis placed on these subject areas is clearly in evidence in classroom practice. The school should work on the development and publication of the school self-evaluation reports and school improvement plans.

• 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 quality of teaching and learning observed during the evaluation was good, with the quality of lessons observed ranging from fair to very good. Attractive learning environments and positive atmospheres were features of provision in all classrooms. All teachers demonstrated effective classroom management skills and some good examples of collaborative and cooperative activities were observed. While effective provision for differentiation was noted in some classroom settings, it is recommended that differentiated teaching in classrooms be prioritised for further development on a school-wide basis. Scope for development in the structure of lessons, the use of concrete manipulatives and the presentation and correction of pupils’ work was noted in some settings.


- The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in Irish is good. A positive attitude to the language is cultivated throughout the school and significant effort is made to promote the language. Lessons are generally taught confidently through Irish and an emphasis on extending pupils’ vocabulary was a key feature of practice in all classrooms. To further enhance pupils’ communication skills, it is recommended that a broader range of teaching resources be used in all classrooms and additional emphasis be placed on lesson structure in some classrooms. While the standard of Irish reading is good throughout the school, extending the range of Irish reading materials available in all classrooms is recommended. Good samples of creative and functional writing were noted in some classrooms. This work should be developed on a whole-school basis.

- High quality teaching and learning were observed in literacy. Frequent opportunities for the development of oral language skills are provided through talk and discussion and discrete oral language programmes are used in some classrooms. A broad range of reading material is available in the school library and novels and graded readers are used to good effect in classrooms. The station teaching programme provides differentiated, targeted, support in reading and individual pupil progress is closely monitored in this setting. The main features of key writing genres are taught throughout the school and well-presented samples of pupils’ work were observed. It is advised that an increased emphasis be placed on penmanship and presentation of written work in some settings.

- The overall quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in Mathematics is good. A focus on the development of mathematical language was observed in all classes. Effective use of hands-on manipulatives was observed in some setting and extending this practice to all classrooms is recommended. Pupils display commendable enthusiasm for, and interest in problem solving activities. An increased emphasis on oral and mental maths, with pupils verbalising the process through which they arrive at mathematical solutions would further enhance the quality of provision in this area.
The overall quality of teaching and learning in History is good. The school environment promotes an appreciation of History and pupils expressed enthusiasm for this area of learning. Visual time-lines are well used in classrooms to develop pupils’ sense of continuity and change. Teachers use a range of evidence to help develop historical investigation skills. Local studies are a feature of pupils’ learning throughout the school and a number pupils in the senior classrooms displayed some awareness of local people and areas of historical significance. To further develop provision in History, it is recommended that the school develop a whole-school approach to planning and provision with an emphasis on systematic progression and development in pupils’ learning. It is also recommended that teachers record skills development in addition to content coverage in monthly progress reports.

A range of approaches to assessment are employed throughout the school. Teacher observation, teacher-designed tasks and tests and the administration of standardised tests in literacy and numeracy are features of practice in all classrooms. In almost all classes, pupils’ work is regularly monitored and the provision of formative feedback on written tasks was a noteworthy feature of practice in some classrooms. The practice of pupils in senior classes engaging in structured self-assessment through use of checklists and learning logs is highly commended. To further develop practice in this area, it is recommended that assessment for all subject areas be embedded in a review of the whole-school and classroom planning process.

6. Quality of Support for Pupils

The quality of provision for pupils with special educational needs was generally good, with some high quality practice observed. Caring, constructive and supportive relationships are established with all pupils. Support is provided through withdrawal for individual and group tuition, station teaching and the provision of in-class support. While all teachers plan individual programmes of work for the pupils receiving support, some variation in the quality of these plans was observed. A wide-ranging review of provision for pupils with SEN is recommended. This should include a focus on further analysing pupils’ needs to inform both caseload allocation and the development of a continuous professional development programme for teachers. It should also include an agreed approach to individual education planning process and the development of a standardised approach to the organisation and maintenance of pupil progress records.

The quality of teaching approaches and interventions for pupils receiving support for English as an additional language is good. Pupils’ progress is systematically monitored and assessment results are used to inform improvement targets.

The positive contribution of the special education needs assistants to meeting the needs of pupils and in particular, their awareness of the importance of promoting pupils’ independence was noted during the evaluation.