

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Scoil Náisiúnta Seanáin Naofa
Clonlara, County Clare
Uimhir rolla: 04548V

Date of inspection: 01 February 2013



1. Introduction

Scoil Seanáin Naofa is a mainstream, co-educational school situated in the village of Clonlara, Co. Clare. It is a Catholic school under the patronage of the Killaloe Diocese. The school has an enrolment of 354 pupils, with a significant increase in the number of junior infants enrolled in September 2012. The school has a staffing of thirteen mainstream class teachers, five learning support/resource teachers one of whom is shared with another school and an administrative principal. The school also has the services of three full-time and two part-time special-needs assistants. The attendance of the majority of pupils is very good.

This whole-school evaluation focused on the quality of teaching and learning in Irish, English, Mathematics and Science. 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.

2. Summary of Findings and Recommendations for Further Development

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

- The school has a strong and supportive board of management.
- The principal and the members of the in-school management team provide strong leadership to the school as an organisation and they are committed to the pursuit of high standards, particularly in Gaeilge, literacy and numeracy.
- In general, the teaching staff is hard-working, dedicated and it is evident that staff members are committed to providing a high quality education for their pupils.
- The quality of teaching ranges from good to very good.
- A very good range of teaching and learning resources is provided at each class level.
- The pupils' learning outcomes in English reading and Mathematics are very good.
- The pupils' behaviour is exemplary and their engagement in the learning activities organised is of a very high standard. Pupils indicate high levels of satisfaction and enjoyment in their education.
- There is very good inclusion of pupils with special educational needs in school life.
- In general, parents are very supportive of the work of the school and are very satisfied with the educational provision.

The following **main recommendations** are made:

- The board is advised to plan strategically for the provision of additional accommodation for the growing needs of the school.
- The principal, together with the members of the in-school management team, should reflect on the priority needs of the school, devise action plans, review and upgrade whole-school plans to reflect the very good practice observed in the school, and incorporate a programme of continuing professional development that will reflect whole-school targets for the staff.
- In Mathematics, further emphasis should be placed on the development of problem-solving skills.
- Reading and comprehension skills should be taught at each class level and differentiated resources provided to support pupils' learning.

3. Quality of School Management

- The board of management provides strong and effective support for the school. The board is properly constituted and board members are assigned various roles. The school accounts are certified on an annual basis. The majority of the board members have received training for their role. Meetings of the board focus on managing the school's finance, ratification of policies, maintenance of buildings, health and safety and the principal's report. The board has been actively involved in evaluating and planning for the improvement of the drop-off facilities outside the school. The board also recognises the need to upgrade and extend the school's accommodation to cater for the growing number of pupils enrolling in the school.
- The principal and the members of the in-school management team work collaboratively and provide good leadership to the school as an organisation. The principal has reviewed the school plans and has initiated the school self-evaluation process through the use of surveys and some staff reviews. The principal liaises effectively with the board of management and the parents' association. The principal takes an active role in the supervision of pupils and interacts with parents on a daily basis.
- The in-school management team is committed to the pursuit of high standards, particularly in Gaeilge, literacy and numeracy. A number of worthwhile initiatives in literacy and numeracy have been introduced in the last year. The in-school management team works with a commendable degree of flexibility and takes on new tasks and roles as the need arises. The team provides good leadership regarding the various initiatives underway in the school. It is recommended that the monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of these initiatives, in terms of the quality of provision, be undertaken regularly. There is scope for the in-school management team to lead the review, monitoring and implementation of the different curriculum areas. It is advised that the team lead the whole-school planning and school self-evaluation process
- The parents' association meets regularly and is actively involved in a range of school-related activities. The representatives who met with the Inspectorate team also reported that there was a very good relationship between the parents' association and the principal. The representatives of the parents' association are very satisfied with the educational provision in the school and this is reflected by the findings of the parent questionnaires distributed during the evaluation process.
- In general, the quality of pupil management is very good. Pupils are friendly and courteous. In most classes, excellent behaviour and pupil management are in evidence. The school promotes a very supportive environment for pupils. The majority of the pupils surveyed during the evaluation indicated that they like school and enjoyed their lessons and learning. The inclusion of pupils with special educational needs in school life is particularly noteworthy. Counselling is provided for pupils who experience emotional difficulties.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- Overall, the quality of school planning is good, with some very good examples of organisational planning in evidence. The school has compiled planning documentation for all areas of the curriculum and for the organisation of the school. The school planning process is led by the principal. Members of the board of management, teachers and the parents are engaged in the review of the school's policies and plans. The school has recently initiated a self-evaluation process and has begun to engage with parents and teachers as part of this process. While general

targets for school improvement are identified in planning documentation, these should be more specific, measurable and attainable. There is a need to devise action plans indicating how these targets will be implemented, monitored and evaluated. When these school plans are being reviewed and revised, they should reflect the good practice observed in the school during the evaluation process.

- All teachers devise long-term and short-term plans and monthly progress reports. Overall, the quality of these plans is good. A classroom plan has been devised for use at all class levels. It is now timely to review the use of this planning tool as, in many cases, classroom teachers plan independently of the centrally devised plan, in an effort to differentiate the curriculum for different cohorts of pupils. In some contexts, there is a need to ensure that all strands of the curriculum are taught and that the role of planning based on textbooks is reviewed.
- 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 quality of teaching observed during the evaluation ranged from satisfactory to very good. Overall, good to very good teaching was observed in the majority of settings. Classrooms were very well organised with supportive displays of illustrative materials and pupils' work. The lessons were well-paced and concepts and skills were clearly developed. All teachers are hard-working and most teachers implement a wide range of methodologies. Many teachers have embraced change. They integrate information and communications technology (ICT) very effectively into the teaching and learning process, and engage enthusiastically with literacy initiatives such as *Literacy Lift Off*, station teaching, team teaching and *Maths Blast*. It is evident that the needs of pupils are foremost and provision for pupils with learning needs is very well integrated throughout the school. Overall, assessment practices are good and self-assessment is being introduced in some classes. This very good development is praiseworthy. The pastoral care of pupils is prioritised and there is a warm atmosphere in almost all classes. It is advised that the implementation of relevant elements of *Aistear*, the early childhood curriculum framework, be considered by the school.
- Sonraítear atmaisféar fabhrach don Ghaeilge ar fud na scoile agus caitear go han-dícheallach le teagasc na Gaeilge Tá an-suim ag na daltaí san ábhar agus tá modheolaíochta spreagúla in úsáid i dtromlach na ranganna. Tá béim faoi leith ar an tréimhse chumarsáide i ranganna áirithe. Tugann na tuismitheoirí an-tacaíocht don scoil agus tá traidisiún an-láidir sa scoil seo maidir le teagasc agus foghlaim na Gaeilge. Tá an-mholadh ag dul do na hoidí as a gcuid iarrachtaí chun an comhrá, an léitheoireacht agus scríobh na teanga a chur chun cinn. Labhraíonn formhór na ndaltaí le líofacht shuntasach ar ábhair ina gcuireann siad féin suim. Aithrisíonn na páistí rainn oiriúnacha go soiléir, taitneamhach. Tá cumas léitheoireachta na ndaltaí go mór le moladh. Léann formhór na ndaltaí le brí agus le tuiscint. Déantar cúram den scríbhneoireacht Ghaeilge agus is léir ón obair scríofa go bhfuil caighdeán chreidiúnach á shroichint ag formhór na bpáistí. Moltar anois don scoil an Triail Ghaeilge Dhroim Conrach a úsáid go rialta.

A favourable atmosphere is evident towards the Irish language in the school and the teaching of Irish is carried out very diligently. The children show a particular interest in the Irish language and motivating methodologies are in use in the majority of classes. A particular emphasis is placed on the communicative phase in some classes. Parents provide high levels of support for the teaching of Irish and there is a very strong tradition in the school in respect of the teaching of Irish. The teachers are to be praised for their efforts to promote the teaching of conversation, reading and writing.

Many of the children speak with commendable fluency about subjects in which they show a personal interest. The children recite appropriate rhymes clearly and with enthusiasm. The children's reading ability is very praiseworthy. The majority of children read with meaning and have a good understanding of the texts being read. Appropriate attention is paid to the teaching of Irish writing and it is evident that a good standard is achieved by the majority of the children. The regular use of the Drumcondra Assessment Test in Irish is recommended.

- Overall, the quality of teaching in English is good, with some very good lessons observed in some settings. Oral language is delivered mainly through integration with other areas of the curriculum. Poetry is well taught and some pupils can recite poems from memory. Oral language has been identified by the school staff as an area for development. Overall, very good outcomes are achieved by pupils in reading. In some classes, very specific reading skills are taught. A literacy intervention has been introduced in the senior infant and first class settings and this is a very commendable development. The school provided evidence that many pupils had made significant gains in reading since the introduction of this literacy programme. In junior, middle and senior standards pupils read from class texts, class novels and engage in independent reading, through the use of an accelerated reading programme. The introduction of a differentiated approach to reading is recommended in all classes. It is advised that the school explore this approach, which would necessitate the re-organisation and redeployment of personnel, through further team teaching in all classes. A writing initiative has also been introduced throughout the school, which is in the early stages of development. While the introduction of *The First Steps Writing Programme* is commendable, the full implementation of the programme will require additional professional development for the teachers. Handwriting is taught well and the quality of the cursive script in pupils' copies is of a very high standard. Copies are corrected very consistently and in general, good feedback is provided to pupils. It is recommended that, in future, more samples of pupils' writing be displayed in the classrooms and in the public areas of the school.
- The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in Mathematics is of a good to very good standard. Most pupils have a very good knowledge of concepts associated with the different strand units. In most classes, direct teaching of concepts was generally well structured. Most lessons observed were clearly focused on the objectives of the curriculum. Mathematics-rich environments are in evidence in all classrooms. All teachers are aware of the need to develop the pupils' mathematical language. The quality of teaching in the infant classes is very good. The school is advised to explore the use of *Ready, Steady Go Maths* early intervention initiative in the infant classes as a development of the very good practice already in evidence. There was commendable focus, in some classes, on a balance of active learning methodologies and on consolidating and reviewing pupils' learning. A very good range of concrete materials was used to support teaching and learning in Mathematics in almost all of the lessons observed. While team teaching has been introduced in some settings, a review of the organisation of this initiative is recommended. It is recommended that increased focus be placed on embedding pupils' learning in authentic problem-solving contexts, particularly through the use of oral problem-solving strategies.
- The lessons observed in Science were of a good to very good standard. Where very good practice was observed, pupils were provided with hands-on activities and opportunities to engage in free exploration of materials. In some settings, the pupils also had opportunities to design their own experiments and to work collaboratively with each other. Commendable emphasis is placed on the strand *Living Things*. This needs to be balanced with equal delivery of the strands, *Materials* and *Energy and Forces*. A good range of ICT resources was accessed during the lessons observed. A school garden has also been developed. A resource folder with very good experiments and exemplars to guide practice was used effectively at some class levels. There is a need for the Science policy to be reviewed and upgraded. More examples of pupils' work in this area should be displayed throughout the school.

6. Quality of Supports for Pupils

- In general, the quality of teaching in this area is of a good to very good standard. The post-holder for special educational needs provides very good leadership and direction to the support team. A comprehensive special educational needs policy has been devised. A commendable development this year has been the discontinuation of seventeen pupils from the learning support teacher's caseload due to the literacy and numeracy interventions implemented in the early years. Individual education plans (IEPs) and individual pupil learning profiles (IPLPs) are of a good to very good quality. Short term plans include specific targets and strategies. This is commendable. The support team engage in regular consultation with the relevant professionals and parents are consulted regarding the support plans for their children. The *Belfield Infant Assessment Programme* (BIAP) and the *Middle Infant Screening Test* (MIST) are used to target pupils in need of support in the early years. The learning support and resource teachers withdraw groups of pupils from second to sixth class, while pupils who require individual support are also withdrawn from the mainstream setting. When a review of provision in the area of special educational needs is being carried out, it would be appropriate to consider the number of teachers providing support to pupils in the same class settings.

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 Seanáin Naofa welcome the report of the inspectorate and wish to acknowledge the courteous and professional manner in which they carried out the Whole School evaluation during their five days with us. We are pleased that the wonderful work and atmosphere in our school was both recognised and affirmed. We are proud of our children and our staff. We especially acknowledge the importance of recent initiatives in our school. These have borne fruit.

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 welcome the observations of the inspection team and have already started to work on their recommendations. We remain committed to ensuring our school is a happy, safe and welcoming one for our pupils, their families, our staff and the wider community. We will continue our efforts to ensure that the high standards in our school continue into the future.