Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Scoil Náisiúnta Naomh Fhinnian,
Dromin, Co. Louth
Uimhir rolla:06576N

Date of inspection: 19 October 2011
1. Introduction

SN Naomh Fhinnian is a co-educational school under the patronage of the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Armagh. It serves the village of Dromin and the surrounding townlands. There are 89 pupils currently enrolled. With growing pupil numbers, the number of classroom teachers has increased from two classroom teachers in 2008 to four in the current school year. A major extension to the school building was also undertaken in this four year period to respond to the increase in pupil numbers. Pupil attendance levels are very good. 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:

- There is a strong spirit of collaboration and a sense of shared purpose among all members of the school community.

- An encouraging and safe learning environment has been created in the school with all teachers demonstrating a positive rapport with pupils and all teachers inculcating an enthusiasm for learning in the pupils.

- There is good quality collaboration between the mainstream teachers and the support teachers and effective practices have been put in place to make good use of the range of teaching personnel available within the school.

- Teaching throughout the school is of a very good standard characterised by effective preparation, well-structured lessons and good-quality questioning of pupils.

- Very effective practices are in place for recording the results from standardised testing in English Reading and Mathematics. These practices allow both whole-school attainment levels and individual attainment levels to be readily observable.

The following main recommendations are made:

- There is scope to develop the teaching of English reading and writing in the middle and senior classes through more systematic skill development.

- In some aspects of Mathematics, there is scope for lesson content to be further differentiated to take closer account of varying pupil ability levels.
3. **Quality of School Management**

- The board is correctly constituted; it meets very regularly and performs its functions effectively. A strong spirit of collaboration and a sense of shared purpose characterise the work of this board. Very effective practices are in place for recording the results from standardised testing in English reading and Mathematics. These practices allow both whole-school attainment levels and individual attainment levels to be readily observable. It is suggested that these results should be discussed at board of management level. This practice would add to the role of the board in contributing to the development of good quality teaching and learning in the school.

- The quality of the work of the in-school management team comprising the principal and the deputy principal is very good. Tasks have been clearly specified for each and are implemented conscientiously. The willingness of other members of staff to contribute to the development of education within the school through their voluntary leadership of aspects of curriculum planning is to be commended.

- The quality of the management of resources is very good with a broad range of resources available and appropriately used by teachers.

- The quality of the management of relationships with the parent community is good. In a meeting with the inspector, representatives from the parents’ association reported their satisfaction with regard to the efficient running of the school and the satisfaction of the general parent body with the quality of education provided by the school. Having been involved in the development of some organisational policies within the school, parents are interested in also contributing to curriculum development within the school. The school is reminded of its obligation to communicate to parents in written form the results obtained by their children in the annual standardised tests in English reading and Mathematics.

- The quality of the management of pupils’ behaviour is very good with effective routines in place to ensure the ordered running of the school and the creation of a positive and encouraging learning environment for pupils.

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

- The quality of the school planning and school self-evaluation process is good. Key organisational policies required by legislation such as an enrolment and admissions policy and a code of behaviour are in place. Organisational policies are clear and impacting positively on school life. Curriculum plans, however, are too general to impact significantly on teaching and learning. Future reviews of these plans should focus on documenting practices specific to the school thereby ensuring a stronger impact on teaching and learning.

- It is good practice that school planning is being informed by a process of collaborative reflection and discussion among teachers. This collaboration is leading to effective action planning for the development of teaching and learning in the school.

- The quality of teachers’ planning is good. A common planning template is used by teachers and this is effective in emphasising the significance of lesson content to good quality planning. Where teachers’ planning requires development, more careful attention
needs to be paid to skill development within English and to making provision for the range of pupil ability levels in Mathematics.

- 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 caighdeán an teagaisc agus na foghlama sa Ghaeilge go han-mhaith. Tá cuspóirí agus struchtúr cinnte ag gabháil le teagaisc agus béim chuí curtha go breá ar fhobairt na teanga i measc na ndaltaí. Chun an cleachtas seo a shaibhriú, moltar go mbeadh seans ag na daltaí éisteacht le níos mó Gaeilge labhartha le linn ná gceachtanna. Cuirtear béim oiriúnach ar fhoclóir na ndaltaí a fhobairt tríd an scoil agus éirionn go breá leis seo. Tá bun-struchtúr na teanga agus stór leathan de nathanna cainte ar eolas go maith ag na daltaí. Is breá an cumas atá ag na daltaí úsáid cheart a bhaint as raon leathan briathra i súíomhanna cumarsáide éagsúla. Baintear úsáid mhaith as modhanna chuí idir lípéidí, luaschartaí agus abairtí simplí a léamh chun scileanna na réamhléitheoireachta a fhorbairt.

The standard of teaching and learning in Irish is very good. Lessons are characterised by a clear structure and clear objectives. To enhance this good practice, it is recommended that pupils have an opportunity to listen to more spoken Irish during lessons. An appropriate emphasis is placed on the development of pupils’ vocabulary throughout the school and this is successfully achieved. Pupils have a good knowledge of basic language structures and have a good knowledge of a wide range of phrases. The pupils display a commendable capacity to use a broad range of verbs correctly in various communicative settings. Good use is made of appropriate approaches such as the reading of captions, flash-cards and simple sentences in the development of pre-reading skills. Pupils in the middle and senior classes read class texts with understanding. To enhance fluency with reading, it is recommended that provision be made to provide opportunities for reading a wider variety of texts. This practice has begun in the middle classes and it would be worth extending it to the senior classes. Pupils have a good standard of functional writing. This is evident in the sufficiently broad vocabulary and variety of verbs to be observed in pupils’ work. An effective emphasis is placed by the school on developing the pupils’ ability to structure sentences correctly.

- The quality of teaching and learning in English is good. Pupils have good oral language skills. To enhance provision for oral language, specific skill development should underpin lessons and these skills should be developed in a systematic manner over the course of the school year. The attainment of pupils in reading is good. The approach to the teaching of reading in the infant and junior classes, which is based primarily on a core reading programme, results in pupils reading at an appropriate level with good fluency and understanding. In the middle and senior classes, pupils’ reading development will be enhanced by a greater emphasis on more focused skill development. The quality of pupils’ independent writing skills is good with skills such as punctuation, penmanship and
spelling being developed to a good standard as pupils proceed through the school. To enhance pupils’ progress in the senior classes, clearly focused skill development needs to be central to pupils’ independent writing. It is also recommended that before beginning a new piece of writing, pupils should be encouraged to review their previous writing and their teacher’s comments in order to identify for themselves an aspect of their writing which they wish to improve.

- The quality of teaching in Mathematics is very good with pupil attainment at a good level. The mathematics curriculum is being taught in a broad and balanced manner. Teachers are successful in situating concepts in the context of pupils’ own experiences. In all classes, pupils demonstrated a good ability to answer questions posed orally and in written form during the inspection. There is scope for lesson content in some aspects of Mathematics to be differentiated further to optimise learning for more able pupils.

- The quality of teaching and learning in the Visual Arts is good. Lessons are structured effectively and appropriate stimuli are provided for pupils to optimise pupil engagement and learning. Discussion is effective in focusing pupils’ attention on specific art elements and ensuring specific skill development during lessons. While looking and responding to their own art and the art of their peers is well established as part of the school’s provision for the Visual Arts, looking and responding to the work of celebrated visual artists and craftspeople is not so well established and merits further attention.

- In a questionnaire completed by pupils from third to sixth class as part of this inspection, almost all pupils report that they feel SN Naomh Fhinnian is a good school, that their lessons are interesting and that teachers explain things clearly. A similar majority of pupils also respond they get on well with the other pupils in the school, that they feel safe in their class and in the playground and that they feel they can talk to a teacher if they have concerns relating to their welfare.

- The quality of overall teaching, learning and pupil achievement is good. Lessons are appropriately focused, structured correctly and taught in an affirming manner that is successful in encouraging pupils to enjoy learning and see its relevance to the world around them. Pupils’ attainment levels were good in all subject areas inspected during the evaluation.

6. **Quality of Support for Pupils**

- The quality of support for pupils with special educational needs is good. Lesson activities correlate with pupil needs and are pitched at an appropriate level. In some few instances, the pacing and ordering of activities could usefully be reviewed to better suit the needs of particular pupils. The newly-instituted collaboration between mainstream and support teachers is to be commended. The direction of this collaboration, in respect of senior pupils, towards the focused development of comprehension skills in small group settings is worthwhile. Much interesting conversation was observed between pupils and between the pupils and their teachers during these sessions.

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