Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

SN Aibhithín Naofa
Ros Cathail, Co.na Gaillimhe
Uimhir rolla:14590D

Date of inspection: 04 February 2010
WHOLE-SCHOOL EVALUATION

A whole-school evaluation of SN Aibhithín Naofa was undertaken in February, 2010. This report presents the findings of the evaluation and makes recommendations for improvement. The evaluation focused on the quality of teaching and learning in English, Irish, Mathematics and Drama. The board of management was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the report; a response was not received from the board.

INTRODUCTION – SCHOOL CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

This fourteen-teacher school is situated on the main road between Galway and Oughterard, some twenty six kilometres west of Galway city. The school population has more than doubled since the last school report. It continues to grow and the area is now regarded as a dormitory town of Galway city. The school building has increased in size with the expanding school population since its original construction as a three-teacher school in 1968. A further two classrooms and a general-purposes room were added in 1985 with an additional three classrooms, principal’s office, resource room and ancillary accommodation being completed by last year. Builders are currently on site building additional rooms. The school site has been extended and agreement has been reached with Galway County Council to ensure better traffic management to link a school drop off and pick-up area at the rear of the school to the main road. The board of management has also secured agreement with the council for speed limits and footpaths to be added to school environs. Because of the succession of building projects, the school yard has been sectioned into different play areas for the pupils. The wire fencing used for this purpose must be regularly examined by school personnel to ensure adequate health and safety standards for the pupils during recreation periods. The school also has access to the community hall and playing pitches, although road transport is required to move pupils to this location. A shrubbery and flower garden has been recently completed by parents and pupils to the front of the school and it is hoped to expand this feature in the near future. Flower pots have just been planted and are hanging under school windows to the front of the school and a large woodland area to the rear of the school is being developed as a pupil’s nature area.

The following table provides an overview of the enrolment and staffing in the school at the time of the evaluation:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pupils enrolled in the school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainstream classes in the school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers on the school staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainstream class teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers working in support roles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special needs assistants</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT

1.1 Characteristic spirit, mission or vision

The schools mission statement outlines the staffs' commitment to the spiritual, moral, social and intellectual development of the pupils under their care. It emphasises their endeavour to enable all pupils to reach their full potential whilst recognising the individuality and difference that exists
naturally in their numbers. They also emphasise the need to develop a happy and caring environment where children are at ease, where they can develop as good citizens and make a positive contribution to the community. To achieve these aims, a secure and stimulating atmosphere is created in the school, pupils are held in esteem and respect, good behaviour between all parties is encouraged and a structured developmental education programme is provided.

1.2 Board of management
The board of management has been selected in accordance with the regulations of the Department of Education and Skills and officers are designated specific duties. Meetings are held once a month and minutes are kept on proceedings and on decisions made as well as on ongoing expenditure. At the initial meeting of this evaluation the board highlighted a number of areas of concern including the lack of a general-purposes room in the school, transport services to the school and the need for additional support hours for pupils with low-incidence special needs. Plans are currently being put in place by the board to address these issues.

The board is aware of its responsibilities in school governance and has participated in the development of the school plan and in the training opportunities for board members offered by the diocese. It was confirmed that the chairperson of the board meets with the principal on a regular basis. Correspondence received is usually discussed and reports are received from the principal and from the treasurer at board meetings. An annual report on school progress is orally submitted to the board of management and is recorded in the proceedings.

1.3 In-school management
The school principal has managed the growth of this school for over twenty years and is held in high regard by all the parties in the school. He presents an open style of management and allows staff and other partners space and authority to engage in school initiatives and enterprises. The in-school management team consists of the deputy principal and four special-duties teachers. They organise different school activities ranging from the procurement of resources, to the schools participation in national and local events such as Write a Book, schools science programmes, Green Flag and numerous sporting and drama activities. Although a review of the allocated duties to post-holders was undertaken recently the current practice does not provide opportunities for the team to meet and plan professional development collaboratively. It is recommended that a schedule be formulated to provide for formal meetings of the in-school management team to strengthen policy and practice in the development and implementation of the school plan. The team should engage in formally reviewing current school practices in implementing the differentiated curriculum, in guiding the implementation of the developing information and technology policy, in planning and co-ordinating strategies for school contingencies such as job sharing partnerships, as well as devising an overall policy on pastoral care strategies, to include supervision for early arrivals. In-school communication systems are characterised by openness, and clarity. Formal staff meetings are held once per term and are timetabled in line with Department recommendations. An agenda is agreed in advance of these meetings, the chair rotates from meeting to meeting and minutes are recorded. A summary of key decisions is circulated prior to the next scheduled meeting.

1.4 Management of relationships and communication with the school community
At the pre-evaluation meetings all the partners acknowledged the professionalism and competence of the teachers and indicated their appreciation of the contribution they make to the school and community. The parents representatives and the board of management members confirmed that they were very satisfied with the way in which the school was operating. They
indicated that the school had an open-door policy for parents and they were involved constructively in the education of their children. They felt that a pleasant and welcoming atmosphere pervaded all the activities of the school and that all the staff members contributed conscientiously to this ethos. The parents’ association is affiliated to the National Parents’ Council and supports school activities primarily through fundraising for curricular resources and extra-curricular activities in the school. Parents are encouraged as partners in school activities and they contribute practically to their children’s education through schemes such as shared reading, mathematics for fun and through monitoring homework.

1.5 Management of pupils
A mutually respectful and co-operative relationship is evident in this school between all the partners. A range of interesting and challenging opportunities and resources is available and widely used for pupils thus ensuring that the work programme is structured and developmental. Pupils are divided into nine classrooms with similar numbers in most of them, apart from second, fifth and a mixed fifth and sixth class. The numbers in these classes are above the agreed pupil teacher ratio and the principal assured the inspectors that a new classroom and mainstream teacher will be added to the school next year to remedy this difficulty. All the parties in the school are on first name terms and this school practice is extended to visitors and guests. School policies reflect this openness and mutual respect, and issues are dealt with through discussion and equality of rights to everyone irrespective of age or status. Very high expectations are placed on all the parties and a friendly safe and committed work ethos pervades the school. There is a high level of attendance by the pupils and a broad range of extra-curricular activities is available. Participation in local competitions and in other events is practised. Team games, dancing, drama, swimming, concerts and school tours are organised throughout the school year.

2. Quality of school planning

2.1 Whole-school and classroom planning
The quality of planning overall in this school is good. The school plan is arranged in four parts: general details about the school; organisational policies; curriculum plans; development section. The organisational plan includes a health and safety statement, a code of behaviour and policies on anti-bullying, special education, child protection school ethos, relationship and sexuality education, equality of opportunity, and a school safety statement. The strategic review framework currently in place plans the revising and updating of the school plan on a continuous basis. The plan should also include a building development plan to reflect the priority attached to this issue, a critical incident plan, a plan on individual teacher planning requirements as well as on methodologies and specifically the differentiated approach to teaching and learning practised in the school. The review should include a personnel development plan inclusive of board members as well as prioritising an investment plan in information and communication technology, mathematics and science equipment, learning-support materials and library books, particularly books in Irish. It is recommended that the process of review be inclusive of parents and that an agreed framework be identified to ensure that parents can access all of the plans on an ongoing basis whether on the schools intended website or in hard copy during parent-teacher meetings. It was also agreed that individual education plans would be submitted to parents and that case conferences would be inclusive of all the parties, including the pupils, when appropriate.

The quality of classroom planning varies considerably from generic comments which use the curriculum framework terminology and are largely dependent on text-books, to specific and detailed learning objectives planned in a thematic fashion itemising support materials and workshop tasks to consolidate learning. The template used could be amended to accommodate a
statement of objectives and learning outcomes, assessment processes linked to the learning outcomes expected as well as a facility to specify story and verse elements attached to the language programmes at the different class levels. The job-sharing partners also use different approaches to their planning both in detail and effectiveness. These approaches should now be standardised. It is recommended that the approach adopted by the teachers in the middle standards be used as the model of best practice. The school participates in the Modern Languages Pilot Project and the pupils are exposed to German in preparation for second level education.

2.2 Child protection policy and procedures
Confirmation was provided that, in compliance with Department of Education and Science Primary Circular 0061/2006, the board of management has formally adopted the Child Protection Guidelines for Primary Schools (Department of Education and Science, September 2001). Confirmation was also provided that these child protection procedures have been brought to the attention of management, school staff and parents; that a copy of the procedures has been provided to all staff (including all new staff); and that management has ensured that all staff are familiar with the procedures to be followed. A designated liaison person (DLP) and a deputy DLP have been appointed in line with the requirements of the guidelines.

3. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

3.1 Language

**Gaeilge**

Tá dearcadh an-dearfach i leith na Gaeilge sa scoil agus sroichtear caighdeán maith i múineadh agus i bhfoghlaim na Gaeilge i gcoitinne. Baintear leas as an teanga go minic i rith an lae i gcoitinne. Tugtar go díthreachacht faoi mhídh na cumarsáide a úsáid Chun na ceithre scil teanga a chur chun cinn ar bhealach comhláthaithe. Déantar sár-chúram de ghníomhaíochtaí éisteachta agus labhartha a eagrú i ranganna ar leith. Cuirtear ábhair níthiúla, cáirteacha agus léaráidí ar fáil ag an t-ceilt. Déantar sáraisc an teanga go minic i rith an lae i gcoitinne. Mealltar caint shoiléir mhunúneach ó na daltaí agus treoraithe iad chun chluichí, scríobhneóin, amhráin agus clúiteanna a úsáid chun tuiscint ar réimse leathan teanga a chothú. Mealltar caint shoiléir mhunúneach ó na daltaí agus treoraithe iad chun chluichí, scríobhneóin, amhráin agus clúiteanna a úsáid chun tuiscint ar réimse leathan teanga a chothú. Mealltar caint shoiléir mhunúneach ó na daltaí agus treoraithe iad chun chluichí, scríobhneóin, amhráin agus clúiteanna a úsáid chun tuiscint ar réimse leathan teanga a chothú. Mealltar caint shoiléir mhunúneach ó na daltaí agus treoraithe iad chun chluichí, scríobhneóin, amhráin agus clúiteanna a úsáid chun tuiscint ar réimse leathan teanga a chothú. Mealltar caint shoiléir mhunúneach ó na daltaí agus treoraithe iad chun chluichí, scríobhneóin, amhráin agus clúiteanna a úsáid chun tuiscint ar réimse leathan teanga a chothú. Mealltar caint shoiléir mhunúneach ó na daltaí agus treoraithe iad chun chluichí, scríobhneóin, amhráin agus clúiteanna a úsáid chun tuiscint ar réimse leathan teanga a chothú. Mealltar caint shoiléir mhunúneach ó na daltaí agus treoraithe iad chun chluichí, scríobhneóin, amhráin agus clúiteanna a úsáid chun tuiscint ar réimse leathan teanga a chothú.
Irish
There is a very positive attitude to Irish in the school and a good standard in the teaching and learning of Irish is attained generally. The language is used frequently during the day in many classes. The communicative approach is employed diligently to develop the four language skills in an integrated manner. Listening and speaking activities are very well organised in particular classes. Concrete materials, charts and illustrations are made available and some teachers succeed very well in using an extensive range of games, stories, riddles, rhymes, poems and songs to develop understanding of a wide range of language. Clear and confident speech is elicited from the pupils and they are led to handle verbs, adjectives and adverbs, to ask questions and to use full sentences when appropriate. It is apparent throughout the school that there is good variety in the teaching strategies used. These include mime, role-play, prepared conversations and enjoyable drills. A review of the school plan is now recommended in order to ensure that it gives clear direction as to the range of language that should be addressed at the different class levels and the range of activities that may be undertaken to develop knowledge and appreciation of the language and culture.

A range of strategies is used to foster a liking for reading and writing. Effort is put into providing printed materials to create a print-rich environment and these materials are skilfully used in many classes to interweave listening, speaking, reading and writing activities. Aspects of the school’s phonetic programme are ably handled in some of the junior classes as a preparation for literacy and in many senior classes as a part of the formal reading programme. A programme in grammar is followed from third class onwards. The pupils are encouraged to make books and by degrees to write in a variety of genres. In general, the pupils read accurately and they achieve a reasonably good standard in written tasks. It would be beneficial now to provide further resources for reading and to give more opportunities to the pupils to practise personal writing.

English
English language classes are taught very effectively in this school and pupils are making very good progress to a level commensurate with their abilities. Considerable emphasis is placed in all classes on developing oracy skills and on fostering higher-order thinking. A variety of approaches is used, including circle time, talk and discussion, active learning, mime, drama, play and games. Pupils are appropriately challenged in developing their listening and speaking skills. Pupils display confidence in oral expression and effectively communicate their ideas and opinions. There is commendable emphasis on the teaching of phonics through a structured developmental programme. Supplementary and effective learning support also assists in the development of pupils’ skills in this area.

Almost all pupils read confidently and fluently and pupils’ success is reflected in scores attained on standardised reading tests. Parental involvement in supporting pupils’ interest and competence in reading is encouraged. A wide range of suitably graded library books is available in each classroom for supplementary reading. It was evident that pupils engage in writing in a wide range of genres including factual reporting, book reviews, news items, poems and personal writing. The use of information and communication technology (ICT) could be further utilised for drafting and re-drafting pupils’ individual samples. Samples of pupils’ writing are attractively displayed and are regularly monitored by the teachers.

3.2 Mathematics
The overall quality of teaching and learning in Mathematics is of a high standard. Mathematics-rich classroom environments have been developed throughout the school and there is a clear focus on the language of Mathematics. Lessons in general are very effectively structured and paced and the activities are thoughtfully differentiated to cater for varying levels of ability within
the different class groupings. Pupils are provided with opportunities to manipulate materials and group work is a regular feature of classroom practice. Stories, rhymes, songs and games are very effectively interwoven with talk, discussion and activity and serve to stimulate interest, enhance understanding and consolidate learning. In almost all classrooms there is clear evidence of regular engagement in a range of enjoyable activities to enhance memorisation and recall of number facts. It would be of benefit to outline these successful strategies in the school plan. It would also be of benefit to provide further resources to support hands-on activity at particular class levels. The pupils display a very positive attitude to Mathematics. They recall number facts very swiftly, approach problem-solving activities in a structured manner and record their work very neatly.

3.3 Drama

The curriculum in Drama is very effectively implemented at each class level. Discrete time, consistency of approach, engagement in a variety of activities and appropriate progression from make-believe to improvisation are key elements of the practice in evidence in the school. All teachers carefully structure the lessons with pupils co-operating readily to create physical space for the classroom activities. The teachers facilitate entry into the safe world of drama by sensitively reviewing rules and by engaging in a series of well-paced, enjoyable activities incorporating warm-up exercises, word games, co-operative games, mime and movement. Listening, turn-taking, voice projection and communication using appropriate gestures and facial expressions are among the aspects developed. Pictures, story maps and pre-texts are used to provide appropriate content and context for the drama. Teachers ably enter into role when necessary to guide the direction of the dramatic experiences. Pupils are provided with opportunities to live through stories, to explore emotions, to create scenarios, to solve problems and to resolve conflicts in the fictional world created. Particular emphasis is placed on reflecting on the drama activity and parallels with real life experience are purposefully explored. Pupils at senior level engage creatively in improvisation and display an appropriate understanding of the different genres of drama.

3.4 Assessment

A range of assessment tools is used to assess pupils’ competencies. These include standardised tests, spelling and word checklists, teacher questioning, homework and teacher-designed tests and tasks. Progress records are held centrally and shared with parents during parent-teacher meetings. Monthly progress records, as well as individual and personal profiles, are also collated and held centrally. Test results are used to identify learning needs of pupils and to guide mainstream teacher and learning-support teacher interventions. It is recommended that norm-referenced standardised tests be collated sequentially by class standard and utilised primarily to deliver a differentiated curriculum. Time should be used during teacher meetings to review case-by-case progress and to encourage collective analysis. Time and consideration should also be given to the development of user-friendly assessment modes across the curriculum to monitor individual pupil progress and to guide differentiation.

4. QUALITY OF SUPPORT FOR PUPILS

4.1 Pupils with special educational needs

The school has a support team comprising five teachers and three special-needs assistants. Two teachers work share while one other teacher and one of the special-needs assistants are employed on a part-time basis. The support team provides for three categories of pupils, namely, pupils learning English as an additional language, pupils experiencing learning difficulties and pupils identified with special educational needs. The service is organised mainly on a withdrawal basis with some in-class support being provided. Consideration should now be given to organising
more in-class support and to providing cross-curricular support where appropriate. There is also a need to review the scheduling of supplementary teaching in some instances in order to organise shorter and more regular timeslots for particular pupils. Additional modules based on the development of self confidence and self esteem should now be included in the programmes. The quality of accommodation currently available to the team varies somewhat. Some support rooms are well proportioned and adequately resourced with teaching and learning materials including information and communication technology while others are inadequate in size and require further resources. The provision of appropriate accommodation should be addressed shortly as part of the current building project.

Standardised test results are used effectively to screen pupils for learning support while English language proficiency tests are used to establish proficiency levels and monitor the progress of pupils learning English as an additional language. Pupils receiving additional language-support in English are making good progress in integrating and interacting with peers. Assessments from external professional personnel are used to good effect to inform the provision for pupils with special educational needs. Individual programmes are prepared in respect of all pupils availing of supplementary teaching. The programmes are reviewed at regular intervals in consultation with class teachers and parents. The support teachers also provide planning to guide their practice in the short-time. There is a need, however, for agreed practice in relation to planning and consultation with parents.

The support team engages in a very positive manner with the pupils. Conscientious efforts are made to match the teaching and learning activities to the identified needs of the pupils. The activities in most instances are effectively structured and well-paced. Guidelines in relation to the care needs of the pupils are implemented with due consideration, patience and understanding. To assist in evaluating progress, it would be of benefit in some instances to state more precisely the baseline of competencies from which individual programmes commence and to provide a clearer statement of the targeted learning outcomes for the pupils.

4.2 Other supports for pupils: disadvantaged, minority and other groups

It was indicated that all curricular and extra-curricular activities are accessible to all pupils. The board of management has ratified an inclusiveness programme and insures that there are no impediments to pupils participating in school activities.

5. CONCLUSION

The school has strengths in the following areas:

- The good behaviour of the pupils is commendable.
- The attitude and effectiveness of the school staff in regard to their work is commendable.
- A constructive and positive learning environment has been created in the school.
- The pupils are presented with a structured and developmental learning programme.
- Good provision is made for pupils with learning difficulties.

The following key recommendations are made in order to further improve the quality of education provided by the school:

- It is recommended that the school undertake a building and resources audit and develop a plan inclusive of the needs of the support services currently in the school.
• It is recommended that the school include the parents pro-actively in the current review of the school plan.
• It is recommended that the in-school management team seek the support of the curriculum support service to assist then in engaging in a review process to strengthen policy and practice in the development and implementation of the school plan.

Post-evaluation meetings were held with the staff and the board of management where the draft findings and recommendations of the evaluation were presented and discussed.