Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Scoil Náisiúnta Naomh Mhuire
Ceis Chorainn, Baile an Mhóta
Contae Shligigh
Uimhir rolla:15342M

Date of inspection: 28 April 2010
WHOLE-SCHOOL EVALUATION

A whole-school evaluation of Scoil Náisiúnta Naomh Mhuire was undertaken in April 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 Irish, English, Mathematics and Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE). The board of management 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.

INTRODUCTION – SCHOOL CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

Scoil Náisiúnta Naomh Mhuire is a co-educational, rural school located in south central County Sligo. The pupils are taught in two multi-grade classrooms; the junior room accommodates twenty-four pupils up to and including second class and the senior room accommodates sixteen pupils from third to sixth class. The pupils’ attendance levels are very good.

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

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
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<tr>
<td>Pupils enrolled in the school</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mainstream classes in the school</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teachers on the school staff</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mainstream class teachers</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teachers working in support roles</td>
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<td>Special needs assistants</td>
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The board employs a part-time secretary who provides careful, competent service to the school. A cleaner attends daily and caretaking services are contracted as the need arises.

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT

1.1 Characteristic spirit, mission or vision

The school, under the patronage of the Bishop of Achonry, has a Roman Catholic ethos. There is a welcoming atmosphere. All of the staff work in a spirit of collaboration and support each other in their work. Opportunities are provided for the pupils’ involvement in a range of co-curricular and extracurricular activities including Discover Primary Science, the Green-Schools Programme, the Comenius Project, the Hallelujah Chorus, local church services and community events.

1.2 Board of management

The board of management is properly constituted and is supportive of the work of the school. It meets regularly and minutes are taken of proceedings. Board members have attended relevant management training and they are to be praised for their ongoing commitment. The various talents of individual members are used to good effect. The chairperson displays commendable dedication to the school and remains in close contact with teachers and pupils. Updated accounts are presented by the treasurer at each meeting. It is recommended that accounts be audited
periodically. The board has recently discussed and ratified a number of organisational policies. This work should be strengthened into the future. The board maintains the school to a good overall standard. In the past year, it oversaw the upgrading of the heating system and its next task is to replace the windows and doors using funds obtained from the Department’s summer works scheme. As funding becomes available, the board intends to provide better office and meeting accommodation as current provision is unsatisfactory. The board should also arrange for enhanced display and storage facilities throughout the school. External playing areas, including the soft play area, are pleasant. The school garden is praiseworthy.

1.3 In-school management

The principal has long experience of the school and recognises its significance within the local community. He works in close collaboration with the other teachers and members of the school community. He has advanced several aspects of the school planning process to good effect. School rolls and registers are maintained with care and accuracy. The principal is fully accountable to the board of management and provides a comprehensive report at each board meeting. It is recommended that an account of the pupils’ literacy and numeracy progress be included, at least annually, in the principal’s report.

The role of deputy principal is undertaken very conscientiously. She attends to a broad list of duties which contribute significantly to the overall management of the school. It is now recommended that the duties for the post are formalised and periodically reviewed. Both the deputy principal and the assistant teacher work diligently and provide very good support to the principal.

1.4 Management of resources

The school has invested significantly in a range of teaching and learning aids including interactive whiteboards in both classrooms. During the evaluation, there was good use of the interactive whiteboard in the junior classroom. A satisfactory store of software has been acquired. More access to and use of information and communications technologies (ICT) by the pupils is recommended throughout the school. It is advised that an inventory of available resources be compiled to ensure that they are managed and used effectively in teaching and learning.

1.5 Management of relationships and communication with the school community

The board and teachers report high levels of co-operation from parents and the local community. Parents involve themselves in various activities including fundraising and maintaining the school garden. They report that teachers are very approachable and that there are very flexible arrangements to meet with teachers. Other modes of communication with parents include end-of-year reports on pupils’ progress and information notices about school activities. The board of management reports that the parents’ association supports the school very beneficially. A report of the association’s activities is presented at board meetings. Future affiliation by the association to the National Parents’ Council (Primary) should be considered.

1.6 Management of pupils

During the evaluation, the management of pupils in the junior classes was satisfactory. Seating arrangements were conducive to interaction and group work and the pupils were well behaved and co-operative.
The majority of pupils in the senior classes responded courteously to questioning and engaged dutifully in assigned tasks. However, a number of pupils did not remain on task to a satisfactory degree. It is recommended that opportunities for pupils’ off-task behaviour be reduced in the senior classes by ensuring that activities be differentiated more effectively to meet the pupils’ learning needs. It was noted that the rules for discussion were not established as effectively as they should be. The single-seating arrangements limited pupil-pupil interaction and should be reconsidered in light of the approaches and methodologies promoted by the *Primary School Curriculum* (1999).

Activities in the playground at break times were supervised diligently. However, it is advised that the duration of break times be aligned more precisely with departmental guidelines.

### 2. Quality of School Planning

#### 2.1 Whole-school and classroom planning

An array of administrative plans and policies has been prepared and some have been discussed and ratified at board of management level. While draft curriculum plans of varying detail are available for the four subjects under review, much more work is necessary in terms of whole-school implementation. A number of curriculum policies should be revisited including the policies for learning support/special education and Relationships and Sexuality Education.

Teachers’ individual classroom planning is generally satisfactory but would benefit from a more consistent whole-school approach. Currently, monthly progress records are maintained in various formats. It is recommended that teachers review their record-keeping in terms of its usefulness for school review and self-evaluation.

#### 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 and school staff; 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. The board is now advised to inform the general parent body of the school’s child protection procedures.

### 3. Quality of Learning and Teaching

#### 3.1 Gaeilge

Moltar dícheall na n-oidí maidir le teagasc na Gaeilge aníos tríd an scol. Tugtar go rialta faoina snáitheanna éagsúla curaclaim. Cuirtear raon acmhainní ar fáil do mhúineadh na Gaeilge agus baintear feidhm eifeachtach as na háiseanna sin. Sna bunranganna, úsáidtear cluichí, scéalaíocht agus gníomhaochtáí simplí eile go tuiscneachach chun foclóir a mhúineadh agus chun caint a mhealladh ó na daltaí. Sna hardranganna, múintear foclóir nua go rialta dona dálaí agus tá stór
Irish

The teachers’ diligence in the teaching of Irish is commended. Work is undertaken regularly in the different curriculum strands. A range of resources is available and used effectively for the teaching of Irish. In the junior classes, games, story-telling and other simple activities are used effectively to teach vocabulary and to encourage the pupils to talk. In the senior classes, new vocabulary is taught regularly and the majority of pupils have acquired a reasonable store of nouns and adjectives. Other strategies to develop the pupils’ conversational abilities should be developed throughout the school.

Reading and writing exercises are conducted regularly throughout the school. Overall, however, there is a need to develop these areas further. It is advised that word-attack strategies be promoted and that the pupils’ phonological skills be expanded. A wide range of real books and large-format books should be used to broaden the pupils’ experience of reading. Much of the writing activity is based on workbooks. To strengthen writing in the school more emphasis should be placed on personal writing as a means of gradually fostering independence in writing.

It would also be helpful to examine appropriate evaluative processes which might direct and guide the teaching of Irish throughout the school.

3.2 English

Teaching and learning in English have a number of strengths but there are also areas where development is needed. Classroom teachers provide opportunity for talk and discussion but there needs to be a more systematic and progressive approach to the development of oracy skills. More emphasis on vocabulary enrichment is also recommended.

In the junior classes, pupils can recite many suitable rhymes and poems. In the senior classes, the pupils can recite some poems with reasonable accuracy but more emphasis should be placed on recitation. In the junior classes, most aspects of reading are taught successfully. The majority of pupils have good phonological awareness and phonemic skills. However, it is recommended that the introduction of formal reading for junior infants be delayed in line with curriculum recommendations. In the senior classes, there is considerable variation in pupils’ reading confidence. It is recommended that more use be made of class novels and supplementary readers and that recreational reading be emphasised.

In the junior classes, the pupils’ early writing skills are developed with care. In the senior classes, pupils are given varied and frequent opportunities to write. During the evaluation, a number of senior pupils achieved very well in free-writing tasks illustrating good organisation and use of writing conventions.
Throughout the school, the overall quality of creative writing could be enhanced by an additional focus on pupil conferencing as part of the writing process. More writing prompts should be displayed in both classrooms and there should be more frequent use of dictionaries and thesauri. There is some inconsistency in handwriting styles and presentation throughout the school. Consideration should be given to introducing cursive script in the junior classes. More consistent review of pupils’ written work is recommended in the senior classes. Spelling is an area that requires development within the school. A review of the effectiveness of the spelling programme currently in use would be worthwhile.

3.3 Mathematics

While provision for Mathematics is generally satisfactory, there is room for improvement in a number of areas. Oral mathematics is an integral part of lessons in the junior classes. Good use is made of number songs, rhymes and manipulatives and most pupils show a satisfactory understanding of number. The use of team teaching, whereby the learning-support/resource teacher works in the junior classroom on a daily basis to support provision for first and second classes, is progressing very well.

During the evaluation, the four senior classes were observed to engage in written exercises on four different topics largely determined by textbooks. They worked industriously in the main. Some pupils performed very well in tasks assigned and showed sound computational skills and good awareness of place value. It is strongly recommended, however, that a thematic approach be undertaken to the teaching of Mathematics in the senior classes with far more emphasis on guided discussion and activity-based, hands-on learning approaches as detailed in the Primary School Curriculum-Mathematics. More suitable differentiated learning programmes should be provided in a number of cases where pupils are struggling to cope with the content of assigned textbooks. To assist in this, further intervention by the learning-support/resource teacher should be facilitated. Throughout the school, most pupils’ written work is neatly presented.

3.4 Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE)

Certain aspects of provision for SPHE are satisfactory but there are a number of weaknesses in whole-school implementation. The positive climate that prevails in the junior classroom influences progress to positive effect. Aspects of the three subject strands are implemented and various resources, including the interactive whiteboard, are used to good effect.

In the senior classes the SPHE programme concentrates mainly on health education. Various topics have been attended including environmental care, healthy eating and hygiene matters. Other topics which are closely linked with Social, Scientific and Environmental Education (SESE) were also covered. Monthly progress reports indicate that some aspects of personal safety have been attended. It is now recommended that the approaches and methodologies, as outlined in the curriculum for SPHE, be more fully utilised. These include co-operative games, peer-discussion and drama activities. It is advised that pupils throughout the school keep a portfolio of SPHE-related work.

There are weaknesses in certain areas in whole-school provision for SPHE. The Stay Safe Programme is not implemented consistently and this omission should be remedied without delay. An appropriate substance misuse prevention programme, for example Walk Tall, should be implemented. At the time of the evaluation, whole-school provision for Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) was unsatisfactory. Management and teachers are advised to work in
close consultation and collaboration with parents in planning for and delivering RSE throughout the school.

3.5 Assessment

While there is a written policy on assessment, some aspects of it are not being implemented fully. In the junior classes there is evidence of regular correction and good monitoring in some areas of learning. The infant pupils are screened for indicators of early learning difficulties using both the *Junior Infant Literacy Test* and the *Middle Infant Screening Test*. Standardised tests in English reading and Mathematics are administered in the junior and in the senior classrooms as required by Circular Letter 0138/2006.

While standardised tests have been administered, there is insufficient use of the test data. It is recommended that more appropriate systems be adopted to track and monitor the pupils’ progress in literacy and numeracy throughout the school. It is recommended that the results of standardised tests be included in the end-of-year reports to parents so that they are fully informed about their children’s progress. Assessment data for pupils who transfer to the school should be sought promptly from previous schools so that appropriate intervention programmes can be prepared as necessary. *Assessment in the Primary School Curriculum: Guidelines for Schools* (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, 2007) will be useful reference as teachers work to improve and consolidate their assessment approaches.

4. QUALITY OF SUPPORT FOR PUPILS

4.1 Pupils with special educational needs

Planning and recording for pupils with additional and special education needs are satisfactory. The pupils’ progress is monitored through the administration of appropriate diagnostic tests and a variety of teacher-designed tasks. It is recommended that the expected learning targets and outcomes be shared with parents in a more structured manner.

The quality of teaching in the support setting is commendable. The teacher interacts with pupils in a kind and supportive manner and there is regular use of ICT. As aforementioned, a team-teaching approach is utilised in the junior classes. It is now recommended that similar approaches be undertaken in the senior classes.

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

Teachers are sensitive to any instances of disadvantage which manifest and endeavour to be as supportive as possible of pupils who may need additional support.

5. CONCLUSION

The school has strengths in the following areas:
- The board is very supportive of the work of the school and, amongst other things, works diligently to maintain the school to a suitable standard.
- Parents involve themselves in various activities to support the work of the school including fundraising, assisting in extracurricular activities and maintaining the school garden.
• There is a welcoming atmosphere. All of the staff work in a spirit of collaboration and support each other in their work.
• Opportunities are provided for the pupils’ involvement in a range of co-curricular and extracurricular activities.
• The school has invested significantly in a range of teaching and learning aids including interactive whiteboards in both classrooms.
• The use of team teaching is progressing very well in the junior classes.
• The quality of provision for pupils in the support setting is good.

The following key recommendations are made in order to further improve the quality of education provided by the school:
• A more systematic approach to the development of oracy skills is recommended throughout the school. Consistent whole-school implementation is also needed for certain aspects of reading and writing.
• It is recommended that assessment approaches in the mainstream classrooms are reviewed and that pupils’ progress in literacy and numeracy is monitored more carefully.
• It is recommended that some of the teaching approaches and methodologies utilised in the senior classes are reviewed. A thematic approach to teaching and learning and the careful development of the pupils’ discussion skills are also advised.
• A more effective whole-school approach to differentiation is needed so as to meet the pupils’ learning needs. A review of how textbooks and workbooks are being used is also recommended.
• More consistent implementation of curriculum plans is needed. Ongoing staff review of progress in this area is also needed.
• A review of the programme content and the methodologies employed in providing for Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) is recommended.

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.

Published November 2010
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 is satisfied with the W.S.E. Report. The B.O.M. appreciates the thorough but fair inspection of the school carried out by the School Inspectorate and accepts the findings of the Report.

Area 2: Follow-up actions planned or undertaken since the completion of the inspection activity to implement the findings and recommendations of the inspection

1.2 The B.O.M. plan to have the accounts audited in the present school year. Organisational policies are being updated on an ongoing basis. Discipline updated Code of Conduct revised. The B.O.M. recently improved storage facilities by providing safe access to the attic space, which doubles as a Temporary Principal’s Office.

1.3 Duties of the Deputy Principal are now formalised and will be reviewed annually. Better use of ICT by pupils has commenced and an inventory of available resources has been compiled.

1.5 The P.A. are considering affiliation to the N.P.C. (Primary).

1.6 Group seating arrangements have been introduced in the senior classes for some subject areas.

2.1 Policies on L.S./R.T. and R.S.E. are being reviewed. A common format for staff record-keeping has been agreed.

2.2 Parents have been provided with a copy of the school’s child protection procedures.

3.1 Teachers have incorporated more personal writing in Gaeilge in order to foster independent writing.

3.2 The delivery of oracy lessons has been given priority in all classes. Formal reading has now been delayed until Senior Infants as suggested in the report. Supplementary readers have been sourced for the senior room and these are being used on a daily basis. The area of recitation has been addressed in the senior room. The school has started to implement the cursive script across the school. Recreational reading is being actively promoted in the senior classroom.

3.3 A thematic approach to Maths is now in use throughout the school. The learning support/resource teacher is assisting pupils who find their textbook difficult.

3.4 The Stay Safe Programme and the Walk Tall Programme has now been implemented.

3.5 A facilitator for R.S.E. has attended the school in May and covered the R.S.E. course with 5th and 6th class. A more systematic approach to monitoring pupils progress has commenced.

4.1 Team teaching has commenced in the senior classes.
5. A thematic approach to teaching and learning in both classrooms is currently being employed with early indication of beneficial results.