An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Scoil Sheosaimh Naofa
Woodford, Co. Galway
Uimhir rolla:15958F

Date of inspection: 24 February 2010
A whole-school evaluation of Scoil Sheosaimh 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 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.

INTRODUCTION – SCHOOL CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND
Scoil Sheosaimh Naofa is a co-educational primary school located in a picturesque setting in the village of Woodford, Co. Galway. Woodford is in a recognised CLÁR (Ceantair Laga Ard Riachtanais) area and the school accesses additional funding from Galway Rural Development under the school enhancement programme. The school was built in 1996 and has been so well maintained over the last fourteen years that it still presents as a new school. Projected enrolment figures indicate that the current enrolment level will be sustained or may even increase slightly in the forthcoming years. Pupil attendance levels are good.

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pupils enrolled in the school</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainstream classes in the school</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers on the school staff</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainstream class teachers</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers working in support roles</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special needs assistants</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT

1.1 Characteristic spirit, mission or vision
The school is under the patronage of the Catholic Bishop of Clonfert and espouses a Christian ethos. A very warm, welcoming and caring atmosphere is purposefully cultivated in the school. In line with the school’s mission statement, the staff, the board of management and the parent body strive to provide a holistic education and to expose the pupils to a wide range of educational experiences as a means of helping them to achieve their full potential. Praiseworthy attention is afforded to pupils with learning difficulties or special educational needs.

1.2 Board of management
The board of management is properly constituted and works in an effective and efficient manner, convening meetings at least once a term. Board members have availed of training and give of their time, skills and knowledge generously. Tasks are appropriately distributed among individual members and the chairperson maintains very regular contact with the principal. Minutes of meetings are carefully recorded and school accounts are certified on an annual basis. The board’s work of late has involved expanding the school’s technological resources and sourcing grant monies to install a water meter and to upgrade the insulation in the school building.
The board complies with departmental guidelines and regulations in relation to the length of the school day, circulation of the school plan and development of specific policies. The school issues a newsletter at least six times a year and it is suggested that the board should consider adapting an issue of the newsletter to constitute an annual report on the operation of the school. The board regularly engages in discussing, amending and ratifying school policy documents. The board is reminded to ensure that policy statements are appropriately signed and that their ratification is noted in the minutes of board meetings. The board is very diligent in its efforts to safeguard the health and safety of all those using the school premises. Recent guidelines in relation to hygiene and swine-flu prevention have been conscientiously followed.

The school was built in 1996 with four classrooms, a staffroom, a small kitchen, an office and a general-purposes room. The high-ceilinged classrooms are bright and spacious, and are very attractively decorated with teaching resources and displays of the pupils’ work. There is scope to develop the school premises further to accommodate additional staff and the board should now review the overall accommodation needs of the school. The school is well equipped with teaching resources which support the use of a variety of methodologies and approaches to modify the curriculum for the pupils. Each classroom has a data projector and the school has commenced investing in interactive white boards. It is noteworthy that a library of books and materials is being compiled to inform and support the teaching of specific curricular aspects.

The board is very supportive of the staff engaging in continuous professional development. A budget is committed annually to subsidise staff attendance at relevant courses and the school premises is made available for cluster meetings of learning-support and resource teachers working in the area. It would be of value now to expand the school policy document on staff development and to include information on courses provided by the Professional Development Service for Teachers and the Special Education Support Service. It would also be of value to detail initiatives focussed on promoting the use of information and communication technologies in education and those fostering communication between teachers on a national and international basis.

1.3 In-school management
The in-school management team comprises the principal, deputy principal and a special duties teacher. The principal is highly organised and dedicates considerable time to administration tasks in addition to preparing for teaching duties. A very positive school climate is fostered and a vision for the school is shared effectively with all the partners. Communication with the board, staff, parents and pupils is effected in a very caring and professional manner. Organisational, curricular and pastoral priorities are clearly identified and staff meetings are organised in addition to specific planning days to facilitate a team-approach to policy development, organisational review and curriculum innovation. Engagement with the national support services is encouraged and teachers are given opportunities to teach a variety of class levels and to gain experience in different roles.

The deputy principal and special duties teachers very competently and diligently carry out assigned duties in support of the principal and of the overall work of the school. The duties span a range of curricular, organisation and pastoral activities. There is a high level of teamwork and collegiality among the in-school management team and other staff members. Praiseworthy emphasis is placed on developing whole-school practices and the team contributes very effectively to building and sustaining positive relationships with the school community.
1.4 Management of relationships and communication with the school community
The school has an active parent association which is in the process of affiliating to the National Parents Council. The association works effectively in consultation with the board and principal, engaging the parent body in the life of the school and establishing and maintaining valuable community links. Parents assist with fund-raising activities, attend viewings and oral presentations of the pupils’ project work, take part in the shared-reading programme and help with the swimming programme. An annual Christmas concert and a carol service are among the highlights of the school year and provide further opportunities for parents to participate in the life of the school. With parental support, the school engages with the local youth club, library, church and credit union, and with Coillte which plays a major role in managing Woodford’s natural resources. Parents also actively support the pupils’ involvement in a range of after-school activities, some of which are organised in conjunction with the youth club.

A range of effective strategies is used to maintain meaningful communication with the parent body. Parent representatives on the board of management provide a link between the board and the association while a school calendar, regular notes and newsletters are used purposefully to inform the general parent body of issues, school happenings and upcoming events. Open nights have been arranged in the past to inform parents of curricular change and to facilitate their participation in the design of specific school policies including those pertaining to Relationships and Sexuality Education and the Stay Safe programme. As part of the enrolment process, parents are provided with an information pack that includes the school’s mission statement, code of discipline and other pertinent policy documents. Parent-teacher meetings are held during the first term of the school year and praiseworthy efforts are made to arrange the meetings at convenient times for the parents. Written reports on individual pupil progress are issued at the end of the school year.

1.5 Management of pupils
The pupils are divided in an appropriate manner into four dual-class groupings. The organisation of weekly assemblies serves as an effective means of fostering the school ethos among the pupils. The assemblies facilitate whole-school discussion of rules and provide opportunities for the pupils to share achievements, to sing, play music and perform recitations together. As part of their holistic education, the pupils are encouraged to participate in a wide range of activities. They fundraise for charity, provide music for church and community events, participate in healthy-eating initiatives and engage in such activities as Cumann na mBunscol competitions, the Green Schools initiative, the Science in Excellence Awards, the Heritage Award scheme and Gradam an Phobail. Many of the pupils avail of the school’s extra-curricular programme which incorporates games training, computer skills, music, speech and drama. The pupils are valued members of the school community and are treated with equality, fairness and respect. They engage wholeheartedly in classroom activity and present as happy individuals, interested in their work.

2. QUALITY OF SCHOOL PLANNING

2.1 Whole-school and classroom planning
Commendable effort has gone into developing clear and helpful policy statements to guide organisational practice, classroom activities and curriculum implementation. The board, staff and parents are involved to varying degrees in the planning process. Generally, draft policies are prepared by the staff and circulated to board members prior to their consideration at meetings. The draft policies are made available for viewing in the school and it is suggested that they should also be issued formally to the parent association as a further means of enhancing parental participation in the planning process. Monitoring and evaluation of the impact of curricular
planning is an ongoing process and a number of curricular policies are identified for further development. It is praiseworthy that as part of the review process, the staff is focussing on identifying the content to be covered at the different class levels and on clarifying how that content is to be addressed in the dual-class situation. Teacher planning is also very diligently undertaken. All teachers provide comprehensive short-term and long-term plans and maintain clear records of the work covered each month. Further refinement of short-term planning in some instances could be effected by stating objectives in terms of the expected learning outcomes for the pupils in preference to the intended work of the teachers.

2.2 Child protection policy and procedures

Confirmation was provided that, in compliance with Department of Education and Skills Primary Circular 0061/2006, the board of management has formally adopted the Department’s Child Protection Guidelines for Primary Schools (Published 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_
Déantar an cur chuige cumarsáideach a úsáid go héifeachtúil chun Gaeilge a mhúineadh. Baineann éagsúlacht bhreá le cur i láthair na gceachtanna agus bráitear forchéimníú suntasach ó rang go rang. Léiríonn na hoidí dearadh an-dearach i leith na Gaeilge agus tá siad lánsásta i a úsáid go minic i rith an lae. Afritear idir mhímhín, cuich, comhráite réamhseachtana, scéaltaíocht, tuairiscí, scéaltaíocht agus amhránaíocht i measc na straitéisí rathúla a úsáidtear chun tuiscint ar dhea-réimse teanga a ghnóthú ag na rangleibhéil dhíriúla. Cuiritear ar chumas na ndaltaí abairtí a chumadh, seanfhocal agus nathanna saibhre cainte a úsáid agus go leor braithra agus réamhfhocal a láimhseáil go críonnaíonta. Déantar níos naomhacht a chur i gcaoi de réir a chuid mhíre a thabhairt do范围 the standard of their writing, and there is distinct progress from class to class. The teachers display a
very positive attitude towards Irish and are very happy to use it frequently during the day. Mime, games, pre-prepared conversations, storytelling, reporting, sketches, recitation and singing are among the successful strategies used to foster an understanding of a good range of language at the different class levels. The pupils are enabled to compose sentences, use proverbs and rich idioms of speech, and manage many verbs and prepositions accurately. They also sing a lovely selection of traditional and newly composed songs with enjoyment. It would be very beneficial now to develop the school plan in Irish and to express clearly in it the range of the work. Towards that end it is recommended that sub-themes be formulated under the main language themes at each class level and that the school’s language appreciation programme and the cultural appreciation programme be recorded.

Great efforts are made to create print-rich classrooms to support the development of reading and writing skills. Appropriate pre-reading activities are organised and aspects of a phonemic and phonological awareness programme are skillfully undertaken at certain class levels. Different genres of texts are read and various writing tasks are progressively completed so that the pupils develop competency and confidence in reading and writing the language. It would be beneficial to expand the school’s stock of Irish books so that there is an appropriate range of large format books, little books and real books available in each classroom. It would also be of value to place earlier emphasis on personal writing to provide a foundation for the work in the higher classes.

**English**
The teachers competently address the teaching of oral English, reading and writing. Appropriate emphasis is placed on language development and discrete language lessons are taught at all class levels. Picture series, large-format books, little books, news-time, story-time, class novels and media items are among the strategies used to develop the pupils’ receptiveness to language and their confidence and competence in using language. Poetry is given a special place in the pupils’ language experience and the school plan provides commendable guidance in relation to exploring and identifying the various effects and techniques used in poetry. At all class levels the pupils experience a rich and varied repertoire of poetry and they are given regular opportunities to respond to, memorise and recite poetry appropriate to their age and stage of development.

Oral language activities appropriately underpin the work in reading and writing. A very creative approach is adopted to stimulate early interest in books and to engage pupils in the reading process. As pupils proceed through the school, they develop a firm understanding of letter-sound relationships. They acquire a good sight vocabulary and attain a high level of confidence in using a variety of cueing strategies and word-attack skills. Parallel reading series, library books and class novels appropriately supplement class readers. The development of writing skills is purposefully progressed from class to class. Written work is very neatly presented and pupils are provided with opportunities to write in a variety of genres. Stories, summaries, descriptions, book reviews, poetry and complete books are among the samples of work observed in the classrooms. There is scope now to focus further attention on the reader-listener relationship and to develop greater expressiveness in reading. It is suggested that the serialised reading of a novel should be explored at junior level, that greater prominence should be afforded the classroom library in some instances and that the development of the school’s central library should be a component in any future building project.

**3.2 Mathematics**
Mathematics is taught in a practical and well-structured manner with mathematics-rich classroom environments supporting the work at each class level. The language of mathematics is prominently displayed and a good supply of practical materials is available in each classroom. Very effective use is made of the school’s technological resources to enhance the presentation of
lessons. Delightful counting rhymes, number songs, clapping games, stories and interesting activities are used as part of the early mathematics programme. Activity-based methodologies continue to dominate classroom practice thereafter with a series of enjoyable games and attractive materials being used to enhance memorisation and recall of number facts. The use of estimation strategies and the development of problem solving skills are also given due attention. Written work is regularly monitored and it is noteworthy that pupils in some classes are very conscious of how self-corrective strategies may be used to check the accuracy of computations. Pupils, in general, recall number facts very swiftly and display good understanding of the concepts covered across the different strands. It would be of value now to develop a whole-school approach to the recording of problem-solving and of extended computation so that the manner in which solutions are arrived at is clearly evident from the recorded material.

3.3 Drama
The staff is to be commended for the quality of the work in this area of the curriculum. The school plan for Drama is extremely informative and provides a very effective and practical guide to the organisation of activities in the four dual-class settings. The consistency of approach, the progression of activities from class to class and the range of approaches used clearly reflect the contents of the plan. During each session, a review of the agreed rules provides the conditions for entry into a safe and respectful environment in which issues and events are explored through the medium of drama. A variety of well paced warm-up activities are used to draw the pupils into the realm of drama. Teachers competently enter into role to guide the dramatic experience and masks, dress-up clothes and an array of props are used effectively to create such settings as a house, a ship, a monastery or a hairdressing salon. The teachers display a clear understanding of the use of process drama to explore the real world. Human relationships, real-life scenarios, environmental issues and historical settings are considered. The pupils are gradually enabled to explore themes through improvisation and appropriate attention is given to reflecting on the dramatic experience. The work is beneficially integrated with curricular areas and it is suggested that teachers should explore how the use of particular genres of music and of the pupils’ own musical compositions can be used to enhance the atmosphere of the drama created.

3.4 Assessment
The teachers draw on a range of assessment strategies to monitor pupil progress, to provide information for reporting purposes and to inform the planning and organisation of teaching and learning activities. All teachers were observed to be conscious of the benefits of assessing pupil learning as an integral part of daily teaching. Observation, discussion, oral questioning, project work, teacher-designed tests and tasks, reading logs and the monitoring of written work are among the strategies used on a regular basis. Collections of work in various formats, records of test results and individual pupil profiles also provide evidence of progress made. The Middle Infant Screening Test (MIST), standardised tests in English and Mathematics, achievement tests, intelligence tests and diagnostic tests are used to inform the organisation of early intervention, learning support and class-based group activities. Standardised test results have been compiled in a manner which will facilitate the future tracking of individual pupil progress. Support teachers carefully monitor progress related to the learning targets set for individual pupils and consult regularly with mainstream teachers and parents regarding progress. To aid this process, it would be of benefit to ensure that pupil competencies, as recorded in individual learning programmes, are stated in a manner which clearly establishes the baseline from which the programmes commence. It would also be of value to review the school’s reporting templates and the school policy on assessment in light of the most recent work completed by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment.
4. QUALITY OF SUPPORT FOR PUPILS

4.1 Pupils with special educational needs
The school has a highly committed special education support team whose members have undertaken a range of professional development courses including postgraduate studies. The team comprises two fulltime special needs assistants, a learning-support teacher who is shared with two other schools in the area, a learning-support/resource teacher who works fulltime in the school and a resource teacher who visits the school four days a week. The support programme is organised mainly on a withdrawal basis with pupils receiving supplementary teaching in one-to-one or small group settings. The provision incorporates learning support in English and Mathematics and supplementary teaching focussed on addressing specific individual needs. Comprehensive learning programmes or education plans, prepared for all pupils, are reviewed at regular intervals and are appropriately informed by diagnostic testing or professional reports. The special needs assistants have clearly defined roles and they are extremely diligent in providing for the care needs of the pupils in their charge.

The teachers develop very good rapport with the pupils and it is noticeable that the pupils’ interests and strengths feature in the materials and activities chosen to effect progress. There is appropriate focus on language and on the development of phonological and phonemic awareness. The relevancy of mathematics for real life underpins the choice of practical mathematical activities in many cases. Individual needs are also addressed through a range of cross-curricular themes. Learning activities are carefully planned to accommodate success and to enhance the pupils’ confidence and self-esteem. Learning outcomes are effectively achieved through the skilful use of a variety of materials, strategies and approaches including the use of games, graded high-interest reading schemes, talking books, PowerPoint presentations and other software packages. Future development of the support service should incorporate the planned review of the learning-support and special education policies, the expansion of in-class support provision and the development of a consistent approach to parental consultation. Consideration should also be given to reviewing the organisation of the service in consultation with the other schools in the cluster and to the possibility of implementing the Reading Recovery programme in the school.

4.2 Other supports for pupils: disadvantaged, minority and other groups
An inclusive and very caring atmosphere prevails in the school and the board, staff and parents collaborate to ensure that all pupils are enabled to participate fully in the life of the school. The school avails of funding from Galway Rural Development under the CLÁR initiative. This funding has been used in the past to enhance playground facilities and to provide additional resources for the development of literacy and numeracy skills in the school. The school also operates a book rental scheme and is encouraging of pupils applying for and availing of scholarships to second level colleges.

5. CONCLUSION
The school has strengths in the following areas:
- The board of management, staff and parents work very effectively together to support the involvement of the pupils in a wide range of activities in keeping with the school’s mission statement.
- The teachers are implementing the curriculum in a measured and thoughtful manner and good standards are achieved in each of the curricular areas evaluated.
- A praiseworthy level of care and attention is afforded pupils with learning difficulties and special educational needs and the teaching provision for such pupils is of a high quality.
• The staff is engaging very effectively in self-evaluation and review.
• The pupils are very courteous, well-mannered, friendly and co-operative.

The following key recommendations are made in order to further improve the quality of education provided by the school:
• While the accommodation in the school is of a very high standard, there is scope to develop the premises further.
• The on-going process of self-evaluation and review should incorporate further development of curricular policies in order to reflect the current good practice in the school and to guide future curriculum innovation.
• Further refinement of the support provision should be effected and the policies on assessment, learning support and special education should be updated.

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.
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 and Staff of St. Joseph’s N.S., Woodford welcome the Report on the Whole School Evaluation carried out during February, 2010. We appreciate the courtesy shown to us by the Inspector and the fair and constructive manner in which she carried out the inspection. We welcome the positive nature of the Report and we are very pleased to note the recognition given to the high quality of learning and teaching in our school especially in the area of Special Educational Needs. Her commendation of the school premises and of the very high standard of maintenance of same is also greatly appreciated.

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

• The Board of Management is actively drawing up a strategic plan to meet the growing accommodation needs of the school with a view to extending the school building in the near future.
• The on-going process of self-evaluation will continue within the school and as a Staff we will endeavour to include the current good practice in the school in our curricular policies in the future.
• In relation to the recommendation made to the Support Policies the Learning Support and Special Education Needs Policy has been already updated and the policy on Assessment will be prioritised at our imminent planning day.