Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Scoil Náisiúnta Fhinín Naofa
Clonard, Enfield, County Meath
Uimhir rolla: 16067V

Date of inspection: 15 March 2010
WHOLE-SCHOOL EVALUATION

A whole-school evaluation of Scoil Náisiúnta Fhinín Naofa was undertaken in March 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, and the response of the board will be found in the appendix of this report.

INTRODUCTION – SCHOOL CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

Scoil Náisiúnta Fhinín Naofa is located in the historic village of Clonard. Plans are underway to celebrate the centenary of the school’s foundation and a commemorative book is being prepared to mark this event.

The projected enrolment figures supplied by the school indicate no significant change in pupil intake numbers for the foreseeable future. While school attendance levels are good for many pupils, the high level of absenteeism for a considerable number of individual pupils is unsatisfactory. The preparation of a school attendance strategy to promote punctuality and attendance, as envisaged by section 22 of the Education (Welfare) Act 2000, is recommended in this regard.

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pupils enrolled in the school</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainstream classes in the school</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers on the school staff</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainstream class teachers</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers working in support roles</td>
<td>1</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

Scoil Náisiúnta Fhinín Naofa is a co-educational primary school under the patronage of the Catholic Bishop of Meath. The educational goals as stated in the school’s mission statement are to promote the full and harmonious development of all pupils and the development of life-long learning skills in a learning environment that espouses the Catholic ethos.

1.2 Board of management

The board of management is properly constituted and it reports that it meets on a regular basis. Members have been allocated specific tasks. Minutes of board meetings are maintained and accounts of income and expenditure are presented at board meetings. However, accounts should be properly audited or certified as required in section 18 (1) of the Education Act 1998 and it is
recommended that this be done annually. It is also advised that a portion of school funding be set aside and used to ensure that an appropriate range of resources to support teaching and learning is acquired and maintained.

At the pre-evaluation meeting, the board expressed as a main priority the extension of the present building and the construction of a suitable general purposes room. In the shorter term, it is recommended that the board reviews and further monitors the day-to-day maintenance of the school to ensure that appropriate standards of hygiene and general cleanliness are in place. The board should also satisfy itself that it is monitoring and dealing with potential hazards in areas of the playground effectively and appropriately.

It is clear that a number of pupils arrive to school late on a regular basis. This requires the attention of the board of management. Formal procedures should be put in place to clearly identify for pupils and their parents the official commencement of the school day. In addition, practices around the reception and dismissal of pupils need to be tightened. The use of a school bell would be helpful in this regard. A review of the recreation periods and of the timing of whole-school assembly is also required to further ensure that pupils are provided with their statutory educational entitlement in relation to time in school. It is recommended that the necessary arrangements be put in place to ensure that the integrity of the school day for pupils is properly maintained.

In relation to the maintenance of school records and, in particular, the roll books, practice was found to be very poor. In accordance with Rule 123 of the Rules for National Schools it is the duty of the principal teacher to carry out the instructions in the roll book, report book and register as to the keeping and care of school records. This area requires the urgent attention of the board of management. It is recommended that appropriate practices be implemented and that they be regularly monitored by the board to ensure compliance with Rule 123 of the Rules for National Schools.

For board members to discharge their duties effectively, they require some training. To this end, the chairperson should become proactive in ensuring that this need is addressed in a timely manner.

1.3 In-school management

The principal, who has full teaching duties, is instrumental in fostering positive staff relations in the school. He has initiated the school planning process and he successfully oversees the administration of annual assessment procedures. His interest in the rich history of the local area enhances pupils’ curiosity in local history and his expertise in information and communication technology (ICT) has brought to fruition the creation of a well-resourced and fully equipped computer room. The principal does manage some elements of school activity. However, considerable development of the administrative, organisational and curriculum functions associated with the role of principal is required. To this end, the principal needs to review the implementation of the whole-school plan to ensure that it is impacting successfully on learning outcomes for pupils.

The principal is assisted by the deputy principal in the day-to-day running of the school and she willingly undertakes administrative duties as they arise. However, to meet the needs of the school more effectively and to ensure compliance with Primary Circular 17/03 Appointments to Posts of Responsibility, it is recommended that an agreed schedule of duties be assigned to the deputy principal. Currently the principal and deputy principal collaborate on an informal basis. A more
formal structure should be put in place for the school to appropriately benefit from these posts of responsibility. It is unclear why the school did not implement and comply with Primary Circular 17/03 with regard to filling a special duties post which became vacant in recent years.

1.4 Management of relationships and communication with the school community

Although there is currently no parents’ association in place, parents are kept appraised of school events in an effective manner. Formal parent-teacher meetings are held annually and written reports are issued to parents at the end of the school year. Teachers are willing to meet with parents also as the need arises. Parents’ representatives on the board of management expressed appreciation of the efforts made by teachers to enrich the range of learning experiences provided for pupils. They are supportive of a number of school-related activities and assist with after-school and sporting activities. To facilitate the involvement of a wider group of parents and to promote more effective links with the general parent body, it is recommended that the school actively promotes and gives all reasonable assistance to the re-establishment of the parents’ association.

1.5 Management of pupils

A positive school atmosphere has been created and pupils respond well to the kindness and concern shown to them by their teachers and special needs assistants. The majority of pupils are very supportive of one another and are willing to engage in their learning activities. To ensure the co-operation of all pupils, however, measures to promote positive behaviour should be implemented more systematically. A review of the code of behaviour is recommended to further clarify positive strategies, rewards and sanctions for managing behaviour. The document *Developing a Code of Behaviour: Guidelines for Schools* published in May 2008 by the National Educational Welfare Board should be consulted in this regard. Pupils have opportunities to participate in a range of extracurricular activities of a sporting and artistic nature. Their enthusiastic fundraising for charity is a source of pride to themselves, to the staff and parents.

2. **QUALITY OF SCHOOL PLANNING**

2.1 Whole-school and classroom planning

A range of statutory policies has been devised in collaboration with the board, the teachers and some parents’ representatives. It is recommended that key policies such as the enrolment policy be reviewed to ensure full compliance with all relevant legislation. An action plan should be devised to manage policy development and policy review. It is recommended that all policies include a review date and be signed and dated by the chairperson upon ratification.

All required curricular plans are in place. However, there is need to contextualise them to the needs of this school to ensure that they have significant impact on individual teachers’ planning. While these curriculum plans are based on the principles of the *Primary School Curriculum* (1999), many of them are very general in nature and have limited impact on ensuring progression and continuity from class to class.

All teachers engage in long and short-term planning and maintain monthly progress records. However, there is a wide variety of practice evident in the school. For the most part, short-term planning is primarily content-focused outlining a list of text books and references to page numbers. The good quality planning available delineated the specific curriculum objectives, the
differentiated learning activities, the methodologies and the skills to be developed. It is recommended that this good approach be extended to all classrooms. A variety of approaches is used in the recording of monthly progress reports. It is recommended that a whole-school approach be adopted in maintaining these records in order to enable the effective monitoring of curriculum implementation.

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

Ar an iomlán, baintear caighdeán íséal amach i múineadh agus i bhfoghlaim na Gaeilge. Tá pleán scoile curtha ar fáil don Ghaeilge. Nuair atá an pleán á athbhreithniú b’fhiú ábhar teagaisc cinnté céimnithe a leagan amach do gach rang leibhéal. Tá caighdeán cuíosach maith bainte amach ag cuid de na daltaí sa Ghaeilge. I ranganna áirithe, baintear úsáid as raon straitéisí, ar nós clúchúí teanga, drámaíocht agus ceistiú, chun deiseanna cainte a thabhairt do na daltaí. Tá struchtúr na gceachtanna sásúil go ginearálta.

Is inmholta mar a aithrisíonn ranganna áirithe cuimhneacháin breá rann agus dánta go taitneamhach, le tuiscint agus le dea-fhoghraíocht. Moltar feidhm a bhaint as scéalaíocht sna ranganna seo mar straitéis do múineadh agus d’fhoghlaim na scileanna teanga ar fad. Tá raon maith foclóra ag cuíde de na daltaí agus úsáidte cuiriú tuiscint chuí ar an teanga. B’fhiú, áfach, breis a fhorbairt i cheart-ússáid na mbriathra agus na n-aimsirí i dteagasc na Gaeilge chun breis misnigh a thabhairt do na daltaí ina gcuid iarrachtaí i labhairt na Gaeilge.

Moltar timpeallacht Ghaelach a chruthú trí thaispeáintsí tharrainnteach prionta a sholáthar. Moltar freisin nós mó abairtí iomlána a chur ar taispeáint chun scilfill a thabhairt d’fhorbairt scileanna léitheoireachta agus scríbhneoireachta na ndaltaí. Léiríonn cuíde de na daltaí tuiscint áirithe ar an méid atá léite acu agus crúinnneas ginearálta ina bhuaimníu. Moltar scéim léitheoireachta a úsáid, ó rang go rang chun eispéireas nós saibhre a thabhairt do na daltaí agus chun go mbeadh a chuid scileanna léitheoireachta á bhforbairt go córasach. Bunaíonn na hoidí an obair scriofa ar ábhair ins na leabhair saothar. Sa saor scríbhneoireacht, taispeáinann na daltaí botúin bhútshasach maidir le struchtúr na n-abairtí agus úsáid na n-aimsirí. Moltar córas céimnithe a chur i bhfeidhm chun scileanna scríbhneoireachta na ndaltaí a fhorbairt.
**Irish**

In general, the standard of teaching and learning in Irish is poor. A whole-school plan has been devised for the teaching of Irish. When this plan is reviewed, it would be worthwhile to outline clearly graded content for each class level. Some pupils have achieved a reasonable standard in Irish. In particular classes, strategies such as language games, drama and questioning are utilised to provide pupils with opportunities to communicate. In general, lessons are appropriately structured.

In some classrooms, pupils recite a good selection of rhymes and poetry with enthusiasm, expression and correct pronunciation. In these classes, the use of story is recommended as a strategy for the teaching and learning of the language skills. Some pupils have acquired a good vocabulary and display good comprehension skills. However, greater attention should be afforded to correct verbal usage and tenses to ensure that the pupils acquire further confidence in the speaking of Irish.

The creation of an appropriately print-rich environment for Irish is recommended. The display of complete sentences is also recommended as a method of supporting pupils’ reading and writing skills. Some pupils display reasonable success with reading comprehension and their pronunciation is satisfactory in general. As pupils progress from class to class, it is recommended that a reading scheme be used to enrich the pupils’ experience and to systematically develop their reading skills. The teachers use workbooks as a resource for writing. In their written work, pupils display basics errors in sentence structure and the correct usage of tenses. A systematic approach to the development of pupils’ writing skills is recommended.

**English**

The quality of teaching in some aspects of English is satisfactory. The whole-school plan should be reviewed to ensure that it is more relevant to the context of the school and to pupils’ needs. A suitable plan to guide the acquisition and development of literacy skills should be outlined for each class level. There is potential at all class levels to implement the variety of reading strategies outlined in the whole-school plan.

In all classrooms, a cross-curricular integrated approach to the development of pupils’ oral language skills is in evidence. Many pupils display a satisfactory ability to communicate across a range of topics and themes. However, in order to ensure that all pupils are enabled to articulate their views and opinions with confidence and competence, it is recommended that oral language skills be addressed more consistently, comprehensively and systematically throughout the school. All teachers should ensure that discrete time is allocated to oral language development and that learning activities are guided by clear curriculum objectives. In some contexts, pupils recite an appropriate range of rhymes and jingles. The use of thematic approaches to poetry should be considered at whole-school level, with pupils in all classes being encouraged to commit a wide range of poetry and excerpts to memory.

While adequate reading standards are in evidence for some pupils, scope for development exists regarding the achievement levels of many pupils. In particular classrooms, commendable efforts are made to develop pupils’ phonological and phonemic awareness and large-format books promote a range of comprehension skills. A graded text book is used in all other classes as the main instructional material for all pupils. It is advised that pupils have access to a wider variety of differentiated graded and parallel reading material appropriate to their instructional level. The teaching of reading should now be more closely guided by the analysis of the school’s assessment
results. Individual teachers encourage pupils’ interest in personal reading including excerpts from the print media and information texts. The recent development of a school library is commended. Some individual teachers use their classroom library resources creatively. However, in most classrooms, there is considerable need to provide suitable reading material that will meet the diverse range of pupils’ needs and interests within each classroom.

In general the standard of pupils’ writing is poor. Suitable approaches to the fostering of pupils’ letter-formation skills are in evidence in some classes. However, pupils’ handwriting and presentation skills require development in other classes. There is substantial variation in the extent to which pupils are exposed to an appropriately balanced range of writing tasks at each class level. The over-emphasis on functional-oriented writing in the majority of classrooms needs to be reviewed. In some contexts, examples of process writing are in evidence and the use of ICT in this regard is commended. It is recommended that all pupils have regular opportunities to experience writing across the full range of genres and for a variety of purposes and audiences. A whole-school approach to the use of copybooks should also be implemented to develop pupils’ independent writing skills. The implementation of the writing strategies outlined in the whole-school plan is recommended.

3.2 Mathematics

In almost all classrooms, the quality of teaching observed in Mathematics during the evaluation was good. In those settings, well-structured talk and discussion and skilful teacher questioning facilitated pupils’ understanding of the mathematical concepts. Also, significant efforts are made by teachers to model the use of appropriate mathematical language and pupils benefit from their participation in a range of oral mathematical games. In some class contexts, satisfactory collaborative group work was observed. The provision of additional mathematical resources would enhance this approach. In other classes however, there is need to provide sufficient instruction to pupils to ensure that they understand the learning activity. The mathematics-rich environments in evidence in some classrooms should be extended on a whole-school level.

Appropriate achievement levels in Mathematics are in evidence for some pupils. However, standardised test results indicate that there are very few pupils achieving high scores across the school. The results of standardised test results should be further analysed to guide differentiated planning and to take account of varying pupil ability levels. While appropriate computational capacities are in evidence for a number of pupils, challenges are being experienced by some pupils in applying place-value concepts, estimating, problem-solving and in utilising and applying the language of mathematics. Further and more systematic implementation of the strategies outlined in the whole-school plan for Mathematics is recommended with regard to mental mathematics and problem-solving. The over-reliance on the recording of pupils’ work in textbooks should be reviewed and independent copybook work should be further promoted.

3.3 Drama

Some good teaching and learning was observed during lessons in Drama. All teachers encourage pupils’ desire to make-believe and to solve simple problems in and through drama. In most classrooms, there is good use of the environment, collaborative learning, talk, discussion, story and mime in the teaching of drama. A range of strategies such as hot seating, role play and games is carefully employed in the teaching of this subject. Pupils in some classrooms confidently explore fictional encounters and they improvise and create dialogues for familiar characters. The school has acquired a good range of props as a stimulus to drama lessons and these are used
effectively and confidently. Pupils engage co-operatively in the creation of scenarios based on well-known stories and fables.

In some settings, good use is made of questioning and discussion to involve the pupils in evaluating activities and in exploring how the drama can be developed further. Pupils display high levels of enjoyment, engagement and confidence at each class level. The school also has a tradition of presenting an annual Christmas drama which enables the pupils display their talents to the wider community. A drama instructor is engaged by the school for a number of weeks for each year and teachers report that this is an opportunity to augment and enhance the skills available within the school. Notwithstanding this, the board should review its practice of employing external teaching personnel for Drama. This review should involve parents, particularly since they are currently requested to make a specific annual financial contribution to fund the provision.

3.4 Assessment

Pupils’ progress is regularly monitored through teacher observation. Checklists are used effectively to record assessments of the pupils’ sight vocabulary. The use of screening tests guides the provision of the early intervention programmes. Most teachers adopt a systematic approach to the monitoring of pupils’ copybooks and in some contexts, effective and frequent feedback is provided to the pupils. This good practice should be extended to all settings.

Standardised tests are administered annually to monitor progress in literacy and numeracy. The results of these tests are appropriately used to identify pupils for supplementary support. Further analysis and tracking of these results longitudinally for the duration of each pupil’s time in primary school is also recommended. To further develop and embed assessment as an effective tool in the teaching and learning process, it is recommended that the school now drafts an assessment policy. Assessment in the Primary School Curriculum – Guidelines for Schools issued by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) should be used to guide this process.

4. QUALITY OF SUPPORT FOR PUPILS

4.1 Pupils with special educational needs

Supplementary teaching is provided for pupils with low achievement in English and Mathematics. Overall, the quality of this provision is satisfactory. An individual education plan (IEP) is in place for all relevant pupils. Further consideration should be given to collaboration with pupils’ parents during their drafting. Targets for each instructional term are conscientiously devised. To further refine these targets, it is recommended that the school acquires suitable diagnostic assessments and that learning targets be guided by this more specific testing. The role of the classroom teacher and the pupils’ parents should be clarified within the IEPs.

Lessons are well structured and well paced incorporating a variety of appropriate activities. The teacher is affirming of pupils’ efforts and there is a commendable focus on the nurturing of their confidence and self esteem. Planning for individuals and groups is provided on a fortnightly basis. However, it is recommended that this be devised on a weekly basis. Daily records are maintained of pupils’ progress. A stimulating and well-organised learning environment has been created and a good range of resources is available in the support room. ICT is also used proficiently. However, is recommended that mainstream teachers and the support teacher further
co-ordinate provision for pupils with special educational needs. The development of more effective links with a wider range of outside agencies is recommended to further support individual pupils.

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

The school aims to nurture the well being of every pupil and the board is supportive of all the pupils. At present, a very small number of pupils are learning English as an additional language (EAL) and support is provided at classroom level. It is recommended that further support under the school’s general allocation be utilised in this endeavour. Appropriate assessment procedures should be used to monitor pupils’ progress and guide further provision. In the past, grant aid from the Department of Education and Skills was used to support a larger number of EAL pupils. Discussion at school level indicates that arrangements for this provision were not in line with best practice. It is recommended that the board ensures that all appropriate procedures and reporting requirements are fully met in relation to resources provided by the Department and that an acceptable level of accountability and transparency is maintained.

5. CONCLUSION

The school has strengths in the following areas:
- A range of plans and policies has been devised which will serve as a firm foundation for the ongoing and future development of the school.
- Drama lessons are successful in motivating pupils and in providing them with an interesting range of learning experiences.
- The pupils are friendly and courteous and a majority of the pupils exhibit positive attitudes towards learning.
- The school has ensured that there are adequate resources for the development of pupils’ ICT skills with the provision of a well-equipped computer room.
- A spirit of collegiality is evident among all school staff.

The following key recommendations are made in order to further improve the quality of education provided by the school:
- Appropriate practices should be implemented in relation to the maintenance of school records and these should be regularly monitored by the board to ensure compliance with Rule 123 of the Rules for National Schools.
- Arrangements to ensure the integrity of the school day for pupils should be put in place.
- The board of management should play a more active role in leading and supporting the process of school improvement and development.
- The principal should further develop his capacity to manage the school effectively and to lead the staff in the implementation of the whole-school plan.
- An action plan should be put in place to improve pupils’ attainment levels in the areas of literacy and numeracy.
- Moltar clár teagaisc a fhorbairt chun scileanna teanga na ndaltaí a fhorbairt sa Ghaeilge. (It is recommended that a teaching programme be devised to develop pupils’ language skills in Irish.)
• A consistent approach on a whole-school basis to individual teacher planning, preparation and recording of progress is recommended.
• It is recommended that mainstream teachers and the support teacher further co-ordinate provision for pupils requiring support for EAL and special educational needs.
• It is recommended that strategies be devised to facilitate the establishment of a parents’ association.

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 would like to acknowledge the professionalism and courtesy of the inspector during the period of the school inspection. We thank the inspector for highlighting the strengths of the school and clearly identifying facets of school life which require attention.

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 deputy principal as part of her newly revised administrative duties actively assists the school principal in maintaining school records. The Board of Management has taken steps to familiarise itself with what this involves.

The integrity of the school day has been clearly defined and clarified for all members of the school community.

The Board of Management is now clear with respect to its role in actively supporting and leading the development of the school and is committed to this aspect of its role. Board Members have undertaken training.

A clear strategy has been established by the Board of Management to put in place a Parents’ Association. A parents’ association now exists in the school.

During the summer of 2010 school toilets have been thoroughly renovated and upgraded.

The Department of Education and Skills in September 2010 have sanctioned and made available funding for a new classroom at the school.

Action plans are being implemented in the areas of literacy and numeracy taking the following into consideration; paired reading scheme, yearly comparison of test results. Improved investment in Maths resources and use of manipulatives.

Interactive whiteboards are now in all classrooms.

Revitalisation of school policy in Literacy and numeracy.

Gaeilge; frásaí na seachtaine agus Lá gaeilge to be developed.

Increase in use of Gaeilge neamhfhoirmiúil;

Short term planning documents and cuntas míosúil format have been revised and new templates are being drawn up.