Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Scoil an Chroí Naofa
Baile Átha an Rí, Co. Na Gaillimhe
Uimhir rolla: 16071M

Date of inspection: 23 November 2011
1. Introduction

Scoil Chroi Naofa is situated in the town of Athenry, Co. Galway. The school is under the patronage of the Archbishop of Tuam and it espouses a strong Catholic ethos, underpinned by the philosophy of the Presentation Sisters. The school caters for boys and girls from junior infants to first class and for girls only thereafter. The school has an administrative principal, ten mainstream class teachers, five support teachers, two of whom are shared with other schools, five special needs assistants, a secretary, caretaker and cleaner. The school has undergone many changes since its foundation in 1910. The present school building was extended in 2010 and plans for a further extension are at an advanced stage.

This whole-school evaluation focused on the quality of teaching and learning in Gaeilge, English, Mathematics and Science. 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.

2. Summary of Findings and Recommendations for Further Development

The following are the main strengths of the work of the school:

- The school has a very effective, forward-looking board of management.
- The board, parents, staff and pupils collaborate very successfully to create an inclusive, caring school atmosphere.
- A very comprehensive school plan has been developed.
- High standards are achieved in the curricular areas evaluated.

The following main recommendations are made:

- The board should form a long-term action plan to guide its work.
- The board and staff should collaborate in strengthening and developing its whole-school self-evaluation processes and procedures.

3. Quality of School Management

- The board of management functions in a very effective manner. Tasks are shared, sub-committees are set up and school accounts are certified annually. The board engages in policy development and a very comprehensive school plan has been compiled. The board should now formulate a long-term action plan to guide its work giving due regard to the priorities and targets already identified by the teaching staff.

- The in-school management team comprises the principal, deputy principal and five special duties teachers. The principal is deeply committed to creating an effective school where learning environments reflect the cultural diversity of the pupils. A very inclusive, caring atmosphere is nurtured in the school and the strengths and skills of all staff
members are highly valued. Post holders very competently carry out a broad range of duties and collaborate effectively with the staff. They meet regularly with the principal and the board is provided with an annual report on their work. The team should now assume a strong leadership role in monitoring the implementation of the school plan and in evaluating the effectiveness of agreed curricular programmes.

- The board devotes considerable time to the management of resources. It has diligently overseen frequent upgrades to the school premises. The school is excellently maintained and is well resourced with teaching and learning materials including technological resources. Some additional resources are required, however, to support the use of activity and discovery-based teaching methodologies and the organisation of group work.

- The board is very positively disposed towards the staff engaging in continuing professional development. Staff members have completed a wide range of courses with some engaging in school-based research. It is praiseworthy that new knowledge and skills are shared with the staff. The staff development policy should now be expanded to include information on course providers and on the many national initiatives that serve to enhance the professional development of school personnel.

- Effective procedures are in place to ensure meaningful communication with parents. The parents’ association works very closely with the principal and board of management. The association embraces the inclusive ideals of the school and uses a number of very effective strategies to engage with the diverse body of parents.

- The pupils are very well managed. Pupils assume responsibilities and participate in a wide range of in-school and after-school activities. A student council comprises the pupils in sixth class. During the evaluation, the council proudly outlined its modus operandi and its successes in effecting change in the school.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- Commendable effort has gone into the development of the school plan. It contains very comprehensive curricular policies and an extensive range of organisational policies. Curricular policies provide very clear guidance in relation to the content to be covered at each class level. They also detail methodologies and special programmes agreed for use in the school. There is a need for some staff members to take greater ownership of the school plan in order for it to have optimal impact on classroom practice.

- The process of school self-evaluation is well developed. Almost all teachers employ a suitable range of assessment techniques. Standardised test results are analysed at class level and are compiled in a manner that facilitates the tracking of individual progress. The board and staff should now engage in analysing the school’s overall performance in literacy and numeracy in order to be in a position to identify future targets and to monitor progress in achieving school improvement.

- All teachers fulfil classroom planning requirements. A concerted effort has been made to develop a consistent approach to planning and to express objectives specifically in terms of the learning outcomes for the pupils. In some instances there is a need to clarify the content and to align classroom practice more closely with the school plan.

- Confirmation was provided that the board of management has formally adopted the Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools without modification and that the school is compliant with the requirements of the Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools.
5. **Quality of Teaching, Learning and Pupil Achievement**

- The quality of overall teaching and learning is high. There is scope for more frequent use of group work as a means of differentiating the curriculum and of matching activities to the varying ability levels in each classroom.

- Múinteoir an Ghaeilge go hféachtaigh agus sroicheann na daltaí caighdeán maith sna ceithre scil teanga. Cleachtar raon leathan de straitéis uile-scoile chun an Ghaeilge a chur chun cinn. Baineann éagsúlacht, taltneamh agus an-tairbhhe leis na himeachtaí a eagraítear i bhformhór na ranganna. Baithean leas inmholta as modh na ráite i ranganna áirithe chun nathanna saibhre cainte a chur i seilbh na ndaltaí. Múinteoir raon breá filíochta, amhrán agus iomann tríd an scoil.. Glaic an daltaí páirt i gcásceadál agus seinneann siad ceol Gaelach. B’fhíú an clár léitheoireachta a thairsingiú agus béim níos luaithe a chur ar shribhneoireacht pearsanta agus ar úsáid bhriathra. Ba thairbhcheach scrúdaithe caighdeánacha a úsáid chun dul chun cinn na ndaltaí a mheas.

> Irish is taught effectively and the pupils achieve good standards in the four language skills. A wide range of whole-school strategies are employed to promote the language. In the majority of classes the organised activities are varied, enjoyable and of great benefit. In certain classes praiseworthy use is made of the methodology whereby pupils learn rich idioms of speech. A lovely range of poetry, songs and hymns is taught throughout the school. Pupils participate in choral singing and play Irish music. It would be of benefit to expand the reading programme and to place earlier emphasis on personal writing and on using verbs. It would be worthwhile to use standardised tests to evaluate pupil progress.

- English is very well taught. In nearly all classrooms appropriate activities are organised to enable pupils to acquire and use language, and to learn through language. At junior level very effective use is made of visual materials to assist pupils learning English as an additional language. This practice should be maintained in subsequent years. A rich repertoire of poetry is taught throughout the school and the standard of recitation in many classrooms is highly commendable. In general, pupils develop into confident, expressive readers and the content and presentation of their written work is of a very high standard. An agreed phonological and phonemic awareness programme is taught with varying levels of success. Greater emphasis should be placed on developing word-attack skills in the early years and on organising differentiated reading groups throughout the school. Station-work and the use of co-teaching methodologies should also be considered.

- The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in Mathematics is good. Effective practices observed included the skilful teaching of oral mathematics, the successful management of group work and the organisation of interesting, well structured activities. There is scope to create more mathematics-rich classroom environments and to develop the teaching of oral mathematics on a whole-school basis. Greater use of activity-based methodologies incorporating the use of manipulatives and more regular organisation of group work is also recommended. The range of mathematical resources available permanently in each classroom should be augmented and equipment and materials to facilitate sand and water play at infant level should be provided.

- The quality of teaching and learning in Science varies from good to very good. In some classrooms scientific concepts and skills are very successfully developed through the organisation of suitably challenging activities. Pupils are provided with opportunities to engage in group work, to predict outcomes, to set up fair tests and to present their findings orally. Work is carefully recorded and learning is regularly reviewed. In a small number of cases, teacher demonstration and an overemphasis on the use of textbooks
and worksheets militate against appropriate levels of talk, discussion and practical activity. It is praiseworthy that an open science day is organised annually and that pupils also participate in a range of national initiatives.

6. **Quality of Support for Pupils**

- The support team effectively organises supplementary teaching for pupils with learning difficulties or special educational needs and for pupils learning English as an additional language. An early intervention programme in English commences at senior infant level and a number of pupils are participating in Reading Recovery programmes. While some in-class support in English occurs, the provision is organised mainly on a withdrawal basis. The teachers prepare very clear individual programmes focussed on the pupils’ needs. Teaching and learning activities are skilfully structured to accommodate both success and progress. Records of progress are meticulously maintained. The team should now strive to increase the levels of in-class support, to provide early intervention in Mathematics and to start the intervention programme in English at an earlier stage.

*Published June 2012*
Appendix

SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

Submitted by the Board of Management
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 and staff have discussed the thirteen recommendations, which are deemed by all as specific, measurable, achievable and timed. The staff have initiated and will continue to implement all targets. The Board of Management’s long term action plan is to support the implementation of the literacy and numeracy strategy, to engage in the planning of our building project and to equip rooms with Maths materials.