1. Introduction

Scoil Naomh Bríd is a mainstream, co-educational primary school under the patronage of the Catholic Bishop of Kilmore. The 123 pupils are distributed across five classrooms, four of which are dual grade. Class sizes vary from twenty to thirty-one pupils. A significant cohort of pupils for whom English is an additional language attend the school. Provision for Irish, English, Mathematics and Physical Education (PE) was inspected during this evaluation. 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.

2. Summary of Findings and Recommendations for Further Development

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

- The board of management works in a positive, purposeful and efficient manner.
- The school is led effectively by a very dedicated principal and a very able middle-management team.
- Progress in organisational planning and self-evaluation is commendable.
- Teaching is good overall; teachers are diligent, skilful and committed to their pupils.
- The management of pupils is very good and the learning environment is pleasant, happy and secure.
- Home-school links are effective and the parents’ association works positively in support of the school.

The following main recommendations are made:

- Moltar cur chuige uile-scoile níos córasaí a chur i bhfeidhm do theagasc na Gaeilge. A more systematic, whole-school approach to the teaching of Irish is recommended.
- In English, a well-planned, whole-school approach in respect of language acquisition, differentiated reading and comprehension is recommended.
- A targeted, whole-school approach to improving numeracy attainment is recommended.

3. Quality of School Management

- The board of management works in a positive, purposeful and effective manner. It meets regularly, manages its accounts appropriately and is very well informed. It has involved itself effectively in the ratification of school organisational and curriculum policies. The chairperson is a frequent and supportive presence in the school.
- The parents’ association is supportive, assisting with various events and partaking in policy review and development and fundraising.
• In-school management is very good. The school is led effectively by a very dedicated principal. He attends to his management and teaching duties in a very competent manner. He is supported very ably by the deputy principal and two post-holders. Opportunities for the middle-management team to meet in a formal manner would be beneficial as would a regular review of assigned duties. It is advised that a member of the team be assigned to co-ordinate intercultural education and English-language provision for pupils for whom English is an additional language.

• The development of the building, playing areas and garden is highly commendable. When funding becomes available, the board intends to provide a general-purpose room. Plentiful teaching aids, including interactive whiteboards, are available. Supported by an e-learning plan, and as resources permit, further investment in information and communications technologies (ICT) is recommended to enhance hands-on learning opportunities for pupils. Libraries should be augmented and graded.

• The board employs a special needs assistant who provides dedicated and caring support and a secretary, cleaner and caretaker, all part-time, who provide beneficial service.

• The management of pupils is very good. There is a happy atmosphere and interactions between staff and pupils are positive and mutually respectful. In questionnaires, most pupils indicated that they feel safe at school and that they know the school rules.

• School attendance levels have room for improvement; a significant number of pupils have been absent for more than twenty days in each of the last two years.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

• Administrative planning is effective. Policy committees, including board, parent and staff representatives, contribute to the planning process on an ongoing basis. The board intends to facilitate ongoing parental access to plans through a school web site; this would be very beneficial. Curriculum policies should be reviewed to ensure that they match the specific learning needs of the school. More guidance, possibly in grid format, should be included to support teachers in providing developmental learning experiences.

• The school engages positively in self-evaluation practices; appropriate action plans are in place and teachers are encouraged to reflect on their work and to innovate.

• Planning at the classroom level is good overall. The format of monthly progress reports should be reconsidered to support consistent implementation of the curriculum.

• School authorities provided evidence that, in compliance with Primary Circular 0061/2006, the board of management has formally adopted the Department’s Child Protection Guidelines for Primary Schools. Evidence was provided to show 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.

5. Quality of Teaching, Learning and Pupil Achievement

• Cé go léirítear dearcadh an-dearfach i leith na Gaeilge, tá gá le cur chuige córasach uile-scoile chun líofacht na ndaltaí a fheabhsú. Cé go bhfuil obair mhaith ar siúl ina lán
While a positive attitude is displayed towards Irish, a systematic whole-school approach is needed to improve the pupils’ fluency. Although good work is evident in many classrooms, there is need still for a comprehensive and coherent whole-school approach to listening and speaking. Some pupils demonstrate accuracy and comprehension in reading but it would be worthwhile to review the reading materials in use to ensure they match the pupils’ differing abilities. More attention to accurate pronunciation is also recommended. Writing is based on workbooks to a large extent and monitored carefully. More writing should be based on the pupils’ experience. Teachers intend to make use of standardised tests from now on; that would be very beneficial.

Provision for English is strong in several areas. Talk and discussion are prioritised in all contexts and pupils respond with enthusiasm to well-chosen poetry. More specific focus on language acquisition across the curriculum is needed, however. Emergent reading is enhanced greatly by skilful in-class support. Throughout the school, pupils have a broad reading experience. However, in the context of this school, greater emphasis should be placed on differentiated reading activities. A whole-school focus on improving comprehension skills is recommended. The pupils’ attainment in standardised reading tests is an area of concern for teachers; they are committed to substantially improving literacy standards as part of their action plan. The teaching of writing is good overall; some examples of effective practice were noted during the evaluation.

The quality of provision for Mathematics is good overall. The lessons observed were clear, well paced and active. Pupils show enthusiasm for the subject. However, results of standardised tests indicate that overall attainment has room for improvement. Closer scrutiny of errors in standardised tests is advised so as to determine areas of particular weakness. Also, further focus on mathematical language, problem-solving and exploration of the immediate environment would be beneficial.

Provision for Physical Education (PE) is satisfactory overall. Lessons are conducted out-of-doors as there is no general-purpose room. The lessons observed were inclusive, purposeful and well organised. The school receives very good coaching support from the Gaelic Athletic Association. Pupils participate in the Active School programme and partake very successfully in inter-school competitions. In developing PE, there will be need for greater progression and continuity between classes, a broader experience within the Games strand and consistency in respect of aquatics.

Overall, teaching is good in the school; teachers are diligent, skilful and committed to their pupils. A number of aspects deserve commendation including the literacy intervention programme at infant level, the presentation of classrooms and the willingness to share ideas and skills. There is need, as aforementioned, to provide consistent differentiated learning activities to accommodate pupils’ abilities. Most parents, in questionnaires, indicated that teaching is good and that their children are progressing well.

Assessment practices are good; records’ maintenance and the tracking of pupils’ achievement are particularly effective. From now on, standardised test results should be systematically shared with parents of their individual children. In questionnaire
responses, a minority of pupils indicated uncertainty with regard to how well they were progressing in their learning. Whole-school use of pupils’ self and peer-assessment strategies would be helpful in this context.

6. Quality of Support for Pupils

- The learning-support teacher and the resource teacher for pupils with special educational needs are shared with other schools. Currently, the resource-teaching post is undertaken in a job-sharing capacity and one of the job-shareers was on extended leave at the time of the evaluation. A substitute was employed in her place. Provision for pupils in receipt of special and additional learning support is commendable. Planning and recording are pertinent and consistent. Reading Recovery is undertaken with great care. It is advised that a member of the support team be facilitated to undertake further accredited study in special education.

- A teacher is assigned to provide language support for pupils for whom English is an additional language (EAL). Teacher-pupil rapport is good and the pupils’ communicative language is developed satisfactorily. More appropriate long-term planning is needed. There should also be systematic development of pupils’ cognitive language, particularly through in-class support structures. A review of the intercultural and EAL policies is advised.

- The quality of home-school partnership is good. Regular newsletters are issued and there is an open-door policy towards parents. In questionnaires, most parents indicated that the school is a well-run, welcoming place which provides a happy, safe environment for their children. The school has a good reputation in the community.

- Pupils participate successfully in a broad range of co-curricular and extracurricular activities including the Green-School programme, cross-border initiatives, concerts, exhibitions, quizzes and charity events.
Appendix

SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

Submitted by the Board of Management
Area 1: Observations on the content of the inspection report

The Board welcomes and accepts the findings of the Whole School Evaluation on the workings of our school. We thank the Inspector for her diligence and professionalism in her interaction with the board, parents, pupils and staff of Scoil Naomh Brid. The whole process proved to be a very positive and beneficial experience for all involved. The findings of the report will give renewed impetus and direction to our School Development Plan. The Board pledges its support to the staff, pupils and parents in the implementation of the recommendations 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

This school year, the staff will develop a more systematic approach to the teaching of Gaeilge, concentrating on speaking, phonics, differentiated reading and creative writing. Standardised tests will also be introduced in Gaeilge.

A new whole school English policy has been drawn up and a three year development plan based on the new Literacy Strategy will be implemented this year. The aim of this strategy is to improve reading and comprehension.

The whole school Mathematics policy has been reviewed and a three year strategy has been drawn up with the principal aims being improvements in mental maths, problem solving, maths language and standardised test scores.