Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Scoil Íde Naofa
Loughrea
Co. Galway
Uimhir rolla: 16762Q

Date of inspection: 29 September 2010
1. Introduction

Scoil Íde Naofa is one of three primary schools in the town of Loughrea, Co. Galway. It caters for boys and girls at Junior Infant and Senior Infant levels and thereafter for girls only. Heretofore the Sisters of Mercy acted as trustees of the school. The trusteeship is now being transferred from the Mercy Order to the Diocese of Clonfert. The school’s ethos is inspired by the Mercy Order’s tradition of caring and inclusiveness. The school has 318 pupils and enrolments are not expected to increase further. Attendance, in general, is very good and transfer to second-level education occurs without difficulty. The school currently employs 23 teachers, four of whom are in job-sharing arrangements. 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:

- This school serves a diverse population and has a very welcoming, caring and positive atmosphere.
- The board of management provides a strong level of support for the work of the school.
- There is great enthusiasm among the staff and the pupils are afforded opportunities to participate in a wide range of curricular and extra-curricular activities.
- Effective teaching methodologies are used in Irish, English and Mathematics, and Music is particularly well taught.
- The pupils are very cooperative and respectful, and they engage with a high level of interest in all classroom activities.

The following main recommendations are made:

- As a means of monitoring the implementation of the school plan, of promoting best practice and of ensuring appropriate continuity and progression in the teaching and learning from class to class, the staff should engage more frequently in school self-evaluation and review.
- Further resources should be provided to support the creation of mathematics-rich classroom environments and the organisation of additional activities in Irish and English.
- To enhance standards in literacy and numeracy, early intervention strategies should be introduced and greater use should be made of differentiated approaches in the mainstream classrooms.
- As an aid to pupil assessment, teachers should clearly document expected learning outcomes and individual learning targets.
3. Quality of School Management

- The board of management functions in an efficient manner and provides a strong level of support for the work of the school. Tasks are regularly delegated and individual members display a high level of interest in and knowledge of the workings of the school. School accounts are carefully managed and are certified annually. The board should now issue an annual report on the work of the school and should engage in reviewing and discussing the overall standards being achieved in the school.

- The in-school management team comprises the principal, the deputy principal, two assistant principals and six special duties teachers. The principal diligently oversees the work of the school, performing administrative tasks very competently and communicating effectively with the board, staff and parents. The other post holders carry out an appropriate range of duties very conscientiously. The team meets regularly and it should now assume a leadership role in developing a school culture of self-evaluation and review.

- School resources are well managed. Staff members are deployed appropriately and there is evidence of good practice in the management of job-sharing posts. Great care is taken of the school building. Teaching and learning resources are reviewed on an on-going basis. Major emphasis has been placed on augmenting the school’s technological resources and on promoting their use for teaching and learning, and for communicating with the school community. There is currently a need to expand the quantity, quality and range of library books available in individual classrooms.

- A number of effective practices are in place to facilitate good communication with the staff, parents and local community. The school has an active parent association that strongly supports the pupils’ involvement in a wide range of activities and in many community events.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- The whole-school planning process is collaborative and collegiate. Some responsibility for the co-ordination and development of aspects of the school plan is assigned to post holders. The plan contains a wide range of administrative policies pertinent to the context of the school. It also contains curricular policies that provide a valuable framework for the implementation of the curriculum in the school. The teachers should now engage regularly in monitoring the implementation of the curricular policies and in evaluating their effectiveness in achieving planned whole-school targets.

- While all teachers fulfil classroom planning requirements, the planning should, in some instances, be more closely linked with the school plan. The impact of individual teacher planning on classroom practice should also be strengthened by specifying learning outcomes more clearly and by placing stronger emphasis on the use of differentiated approaches.

- 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

- Baintear feidhm éifeachtach as an gcur chuige cumarsáide chun an Ghaeilge a mhúineadh. Éirionn go geal le formhór na n-oidí suímh a chruthú ina gcleachtar florhumaí. Ar an iomlán, léirionn na daltaí tuiscint ar réimse maith foclóra. Labhraíonn siad go soiléir liofa faoi thopaicí áirithe agus léann siad le cumas. Cé go mbráinteas dea-éagsúlaíocht sná gnóthai scríbhneoireachta, b'fhíú an scríbhneoireacht phearsanta a chleachtadh níos minicí. Chun forchéimní cuí a chí ó rang go rang, ba chóir don fhoireann feidhmíu le chéile chuimhioná a cheapadh níos mórthéamaí teanga ag gach rangleibhéal. Ba chóir freisin clár gramadaí a aontú don scoil agus raon fiorleabhar a chur ar fáil i ngach seomra ranga.

- Effective use is made of the communicative approach to teach Irish. The majority of teachers successfully create contexts in which real communication is practised. On the whole, the pupils display understanding of a good range of vocabulary. They speak clearly and fluently about specific topics and they read with competence. While writing tasks are well varied, it would be of benefit to practise personal writing more often. To ensure appropriate progression from class to class, the staff should work together to devise sub themes under the main language themes at each class level. A grammar programme for the school should also be agreed and a range of real books should be made available in each classroom.

- The quality of teaching and learning in English is good. Pupils regularly practise oral communication skills and they express themselves confidently and articulately. Some commendable work is done on phonological awareness and the majority of pupils achieve good standards in reading. Some effective use is made of novels and other reading materials at middle and senior level. It is recommended, however, that the structure of reading lessons be reviewed on a whole-school basis and more regular use should be made of class libraries and reading logs. Praiseworthy emphasis is placed on the teaching, study and writing of poetry in most classrooms. The quality of creative and functional writing is very good, especially in the middle and senior classes. Written work is neatly presented and regularly displayed. There is a need for a more co-ordinated approach to the teaching of handwriting in order to achieve a cursive style.

- The quality of teaching and learning in Mathematics is good. Appropriate emphasis is placed on mathematical language and activity and discovery methods are used in most classrooms. Mathematical games and concrete materials are effectively utilised to motivate pupils and improve their mastery of concepts. Most pupils demonstrate a good understanding of the topics covered. Many are competent in solving mathematical problems. More attention should be paid to encouraging reluctant pupils to participate in this work, however, and a mathematics-rich environment should be created in all classrooms. While some pupils demonstrate considerable skills in mental arithmetic, greater emphasis could be placed on this work and on the memorisation of number facts in some classrooms.

- Music is very well taught in the school. The musical elements are developed through a wide range of interrelated activities and through exposure to music of different styles, periods and cultures. Song-singing is of a very high standard throughout the school. Good quality percussion instruments are available to motivate the pupils to explore sound
and to compose. Listening activities are suitable varied and very well managed. Opportunities are provided for pupils to engage in choral singing and to participate in the school’s traditional music group, the school band and the majorettes. Further consideration should now be given to co-ordinating the programmes from class to class and to using pentatonic songs for teaching music literacy. The staff should also explore how the school's technological resources may be utilised to support musical activities.

6. **Quality of Supports for Pupils**

- Very good provision is made for pupils with special educational needs. There is frequent and effective collaboration between the class teachers and the support teaching team. The learning support rooms are well resourced and an attractive, stimulating learning environment has been created. A range of suitable teaching approaches is used and the support teachers maintain comprehensive records of the work covered with each pupil in receipt of supplementary teaching.

- Assessment data is used effectively to plan and implement support programmes, particularly in literacy. Due consideration is taken of professional reports and other relevant documentation in drafting individual education plans (IEPs). To improve on the quality of these plans, it is recommended that more specific, measurable, short-term targets be set. Pupil progress in attaining targets should be monitored and recorded. It is also suggested that the approach taken to the use of data from diagnostic testing in literacy be replicated in the area of numeracy. Early intervention strategies should be introduced in both literacy and numeracy.
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 of St. Ita’s N.S. would like to acknowledge the courteous and professional manner in which the Whole School Evaluation was carried out by the team of inspectors.
- The Board welcomes this WSE Report which affirms much of the positive work being carried out in our school; the existing school practices, the excellent team spirit among the teachers, principal and staff, the high level of co-operation with parents, the supportive Board of Management, the wide range of co-curricular and extra curricular activities and the welcoming and caring atmosphere – all of which contribute to the creation of a positive learning environment which facilitates the holistic development of all of our pupils.
- The results of the Parent Questionnaire and the Pupil Questionnaire administered by the inspectors as part of the WSE process are very positive and confirm the very high levels of parent and pupil satisfaction with the school.

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 of St. Ita’s N.S. acknowledge the benefits of a Whole School Evaluation and welcome the positive findings, constructive comments and recommendations as outlined in the report.
- The Board of Management, in consultation with the staff and the whole school community intend to incorporate the recommendations into our School Development Plan in order to continue to provide a positive learning environment for all of our pupils.
- While the Board accept the recommendations as outlined in the WSE Report, we would like to register our disappointment at the recent education cutbacks which resulted in the loss of our three RTT Posts. We feel that the loss of three resource posts in a school serving such a diverse population is a retrograde step.