An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Scoil Áine Naofa
Charleville, Co. Cork
Uimhir rolla: 17156C

Date of inspection: 6 October 2011
1. Introduction
Scoil Áine Naofa is a Catholic mainstream, all girls’ school situated in the town of Charleville, in north county Cork. The teaching staff comprises an administrative principal, seven mainstream class teachers and two support teachers There are 193 pupils enrolled in the school. The pupils attending this school come from a wide range of socio-economic backgrounds. In this whole school evaluation, the inspection team focused on the quality of teaching and learning in Irish, English, Mathematics and History.

2. Summary of Findings and Recommendations for Further Development

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

- The teachers work cohesively as a team and they approach their work in a dedicated and professional manner.
- Overall, good to very good standards are achieved by pupils in English and Mathematics.
- Good progress has been made in the use of information and communication technologies (ICT) as a teaching tool.
- The principal and the members of the in-school management team are committed to creating a positive school climate and the day-to-day management of the school is effective.
- Pupils’ behaviour and application to tasks and their engagement in the learning process are excellent.
- A commendable approach to the teaching of History is adopted.
- Pupils indicate high levels of satisfaction, enjoyment and engagement in their education.
- Parents indicate very high levels of satisfaction with the educational provision in the school.

The following main recommendations are made:

- The quality of school accommodation should be improved as a matter of urgency.
- The board should devise an Action Plan in consultation with the members of the school community for the future development of the school.
- The range of resources available to support teaching and learning should be substantially increased.
- The provision for pupils with learning difficulties needs to be reorganised.
- A policy on staff rotation should be devised and implemented.

3. Quality of School Management

Overall, the quality of school management is satisfactory. The board manages its finances in a prudent manner. The board discusses and ratifies policies and considers important issues such as pupil management and supports for the school. Specific tasks have been delegated to some board members. In the current school year the board is overseeing the building of a two classroom extension to the school. In general, the management of the school environment both internal and external is poor. Despite having secured improvements through the Summer Works Scheme, the school is still in need of extensive refurbishment. The prospect of acquiring additional land and amalgamation with the Junior School on the adjacent campus was discussed with the board and the principal during the evaluation. It is recommended that the board should in the short term
improve without delay the internal fabric of the building and in the longer term the board should consider the possibility of amalgamation with the adjacent infant school. The board should continue its efforts to extend the outdoor environment and set priorities for future school development.

- In general, the quality of management provided by the principal and the in-school management team is effective. The principal discharges her administrative duties in a capable manner and the day to day management of the school is good. It is recommended that future reviews of the post-holders duties would focus on developing curriculum leadership roles and school self-evaluation. Furthermore, there is a need for the leadership in the school to develop a strategic vision for the long term development of the school.

- The school has a limited range of teaching and learning resources in the classrooms. However, the resources that are available are used effectively particularly the interactive whiteboards in each room.

- Pupil management in this school is very good. The school promotes a supportive environment for pupils and very good attention is given to pupils’ holistic development. Pupils’ responses to questionnaires issued during the evaluation indicate that the pupils enjoy coming to school. It is recommended that consideration be given to establishing a student council.

- The school communicates effectively with parents through regular newsletters. The parents’ association are actively involved in the life of the school through a wide range of activities. Parent-teacher meetings are organised annually and end of year pupil progress reports are issued. Parent responses to the questionnaires issued during the evaluation indicate high levels of satisfaction with the education provision in the school.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- The school plan is well presented and contains a comprehensive range of organisational policies and plans. It is recommended that the future school review process, in respect of curriculum plans, should identify clear learning outcomes to be achieved at each class level, particularly in literacy and numeracy. These targets should be supported by detailed action plans to assist in their implementation, monitoring and evaluation. School self-evaluation is at an early stage of development.

- All teachers presented long-term and short-term plans during the evaluation process and in general, these plans were of a good quality. A clear link needs to be established between classroom planning and assessment in all class settings. Progress reports are completed by all teachers but their use to monitor curriculum implementation should be reviewed.

- 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

- Overall the quality of teaching and learning in this school is good. The quality of lessons observed ranged from satisfactory to very good. In these settings, a good range of teaching approaches and strategies was employed. Some good work on differentiation was in evidence in some settings, particularly where learning support and the mainstream classroom teacher engaged in differentiated reading strategies to support pupils in some junior classes.

- Tá éagsúlacht le sonrú in éifeacht an teagaisc agus na foghlama sa Ghaeilge. I ranganna áirithe leagtar béim ar obair i bpéirí, grúpobair agus drámaí. Múintear dóthain agus amhráin go córasach i ranganna áirithe. Ar an iomlán, bhí éagsúlacht mhór i gcumas labhartha na ndaltaí ach bhí sé lag ar an iomlán. Bhi tuiscint cuí de na ndaltaí measartha ar an ábhar a bhí clúdaithe acu. Tá scileanna léitheoireachta formhór na ndaltaí ar chaighdeán cuí agus tá obair scríofa na ndaltaí teoranta ar an iomlán. Moltar anois an t-ábhar léitheoireachta sa Ghaeilge a leat. Ba chóir an Ghaeilge a úsáid níos minic i ngnáthchumarsáid an lae tríd an scoil. Tá an t-ábhar léitheoireachta sa Ghaeilge a leat níos minic i ngnáthchumarsáid an lae tríd an scoil.

- The effectiveness of teaching and learning in Irish varies from class to class. In certain classes emphasis is placed on pair work, group work and drama. In some classes poems are taught in a systematic manner. In general, there is a wide variety in the standards of the children's spoken Irish. Overall, the standards were poor. Some of the children had a fair understanding of the materials which had been taught to date. Most of the children's reading skills are at an appropriate level, however, overall their writing skills are limited. It is recommended that the Irish reading material in use be extended. It is also recommended that Irish be used more frequently in everyday conversation. It is timely now for the staff to place additional emphasis on communication phases in every lesson to enable authentic communication and improve the children's competence in Irish.

- The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in English is good. In most classes the pupils are able to discuss topics and argue their point view of cogently. However, the development of a discrete oral language programme which identifies clear learning outcomes to be attained at each class level is recommended. Overall, the majority of pupils achieve good to very good reading standards. A phonological awareness programme is systematically implemented throughout the school. A whole school approach to the teaching of formal reading and comprehension skills is recommended. In a small number of classes in the junior and middle standards some teachers have adopted a differentiated approach to the teaching of reading. It is recommended that this practice be extended to all classes and that suitable resources be deployed to support the implementation of such an initiative. The quality of the pupils' writing ranges from satisfactory to very good. The staff is to be commended for the introduction a structured approach to the teaching of writing and introducing children to writing in different genres.

- The quality of teaching and learning in Mathematics is very good. Pupil achievement in this area is of a high standard. Some very good lessons were observed during the evaluation period. In some classes concrete materials and ICT were used appropriately to engage pupils in their own learning. It is recommended that when a review of the whole school mathematics plan is carried out, additional emphasis be placed on the use of the environment, oral Mathematics and on collaborative problem-solving and also on ensuring that a balance in the teaching of the five strands of the curriculum is maintained.
The quality of teaching in History ranged from satisfactory to very good. In different classes, a wide range of resources such as photographs, power-point presentations, internet resources and documents were used to develop a sense of chronology. Local history trails were also planned and specific trails were planned for each class level. In many classes a range of topics has been completed and pupils were able to discuss these with very good understanding. Methodologies including group work, project work, dramatic response to topics and story were observed. In general, there was very good pupil participation and engagement in the lessons observed.

The data generated from standardised and diagnostic tests are effectively utilised to identify and support pupils with learning difficulties. There is scope for development in the range of assessment strategies currently utilised.

6. Quality of Supports for Pupils

Pupils presenting with special educational needs are provided for by two Learning Support/Resource Teachers (LS/RTs). A number of mainstream teachers partially share responsibility for meeting the needs of some children with special educational needs. Some children’s needs are met by up to four different teachers. These practices are not in line with Special Education Circular 02.05 or The Learning Support Guidelines. In general, pupils attending for support teaching should be provided with support from one teacher only. It is recommended that these practices cease at the end of the current instructional term.

Overall the quality of teaching observed in support settings was of a good standard. Well-maintained records detail the initial concerns identified and the screening measures administered and records of progress. Support teachers have established very good relationships with pupils. Individual Pupil Learning Profiles (IPLPs) are in place for pupils receiving learning support. Individual Education Plans (IEPs) are place for the low incidence pupils receiving support. Supports are provided for pupils in literacy, numeracy and socialisation programmes. IPLPs/IEPs are shared with parents and the relevant teachers. Pupils are making progress and benefiting from the supports provided.

It is recommended that a higher level of collaborative planning be engaged in by support teachers and classroom teachers in order that the targets set in IPLPs and IEPs form part of the in-class programme provided for children attending for support. The monitoring of progress and the interpretation of results should feed clearly into planning at pupil, class and school levels.

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.

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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 welcomes the recognition that the quality of school accommodation should be improved as a matter of urgency. While the Board of Management has been working to a Building Development Plan, within its resources, we are very aware of the need to access further Department of Education funding to increase classroom space. A further application for a Devolved Grant is currently being prepared for submission.

However, we are happy to report that in the time since the Whole School Evaluation, our 1.5 classroom extension has been built. Also, in accordance with our stated plan for this school year, the Board has replaced the majority of flooring within the school with the remainder to be replaced during Summer 2012.

We would like to thank the reporting inspectors for acknowledging the commitment and hard work of our very dedicated staff team and for the high praise for our pupils' excellent behaviour and application to learning.

However, we were disappointed that the inspectors didn’t acknowledge the variety of co-curricular and afterschool activities offered by our teacher, (despite not receiving DEIS funding,) which we believe have contributed to our pupils’ engagement with education. These include: Homework Support Group, School Orchestra & Choir, Camogie, Basketball and Rainbows. These are particularly important at a time of economic recession in our country as all pupils are given an opportunity and are encouraged, to participate, regardless of socio-economic background.

Tá diomá orainn faoin leirmheas ar an nGaeilge. Tá dearcadh dearfach i Leith na Gaeilge in ár scol agus táimid i gconai ag obair chun spéis agus dúil inti a chothú.

We are very disappointed at the report received for Irish. We have a very positive attitude towards Irish in our school and we are always working to create an interest and desire to use it.

The Board was very pleased with the positive report on the standards of History, English and Mathematics in particular, in our school. We would like to thank the reporting inspector for the advice he gave to the principal and teaching staff in the area of literacy and comprehension development. Teachers have spent a lot of time this year trying out and evaluating possible new strategies and reading resources. The Board fully supports the Department of Education’s recent National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy.

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

- Further to the developments listed above, the Board has drawn up a plan and priorities for the further improvement of the school environment, subject to financial resources being available.

- The Chairperson has written to the Board of Management of our neighbouring Infant School requesting a meeting to discuss the possibility of amalgamation.

- Staff will continue to be rotated, as has been the practice for the last number of years.

- The storage of multiple amounts of our current resources would not be feasible with our current accommodation, as classroom space would not
facilitate same. However, we are planning to purchase a variety of new resources and books to support the development of reading and maths.

• Teachers are planning to extend our successful differentiated reading programme to all classes from September 2012. We are currently researching appropriate reading materials with a view to purchasing them. We have also prioritised the teaching of specific comprehension strategies on a whole school basis since the start of 2012 and we have purchased the books to support this plan.

• Since the visit of the Inspectors, we have continued to emphasise and promote the use of Irish in everyday conversation in all classes.

• There has been a re-organisation of support for pupils with learning difficulties/special needs.