Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Scoil Mhichíl Naofa
Galmoy, County Kilkenny
Roll Number: 17222M

Date of inspection: 6 April 2011
1. Introduction

Scoil Mhichíl Naofa is a co-educational, vertical primary school under the patronage of the Catholic Bishop of Ossory. There are forty-nine pupils enrolled and the attendance of almost all pupils is very good. 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 pupils present as enthusiastic learners and demonstrate an eagerness to participate actively in their learning.
- A commendable feature of recent practice is the successful implementation of a paired-reading initiative in one particular class grade.

The following main recommendations are made:

- So that the board of management can fulfil its full range of responsibilities effectively, appropriate training is recommended.
- If core responsibilities of principalship are to be carried out effectively, appropriate and sustained external training and mentoring support are immediately essential.
- The board should engage external facilitation to address current interpersonal difficulties among staff members.
- The teaching staff should be deployed appropriately in accordance with the provisions of Primary Circular 07/03.
- A three-year plan to guide school activity should be devised; specific priorities should be addressed on a termly basis; and the involvement of the board and parents in the planning process and their access to the school plan should be facilitated.
- It is essential that the existing draft child protection policy be reviewed, ratified and communicated by the board as a matter of urgency in line with the Department's Child Protection Guidelines for Primary Schools.
- Current approaches to pupil assessment should be expanded, implemented consistently and outcomes used to cater for the range of pupils’ abilities and needs.
- Moltar níos mó deiseanna a thabhairt do na daltaí a scileanna cumarsáide sa Ghaeilge a fhörbairt, agus béim sa bhreis a chur ar láimhseáil na mbriathra. It is recommended that the pupils be provided with greater opportunities to develop their communication skills in Irish, including their ability to use verbs.
- The pupils should engage in a greater variety of writing genres and tasks in English.
- The quality of provision for pupils with special educational needs should be developed significantly. Special needs assistance duties should be documented clearly and communicated to all relevant personnel.
3. Quality of School Management

- The board of management, under a new chairperson recently appointed, is constituted properly and meets regularly. Significant board time is spent on parental complaints. So that the board can fulfil its full range of responsibilities effectively, appropriate training is recommended. In particular, the board should develop a clear understanding of its role and responsibilities and the manner in which they should be fulfilled. The board should immediately review and ratify key school policies – enrolment policy, the health and safety statement, the code of behaviour and the anti-bullying policy - to ensure that current legislative requirements and national guidelines are reflected fully. A formal parental complaints procedure should be devised without delay and communicated to all parents.

- The quality of in-school leadership and management is weak. While day-to-day administrative tasks are carried out appropriately by the principal, significant difficulties exist with regard to the management of personnel, curriculum leadership and school planning. If core responsibilities of principalship are to be carried out effectively, appropriate and sustained external training and mentoring support are immediately essential. The deputy principal fulfils many assigned duties suitably. The potential contribution of the in-school management team will best be exploited by frequent formal meetings of principal and deputy principal to progress teaching, learning and pupil achievement matters. Regular staff meetings are required to ensure whole-staff commitment to, and implementation of school improvement initiatives.

- Maintenance of school buildings and grounds is satisfactory. While recently installed interactive whiteboards and the purchase of laptop computers have the potential to aid implementation of the curriculum, the range of other teaching and learning resources is limited. The board should ensure that grants received for the provision of resources are expended and that adequate resources are provided to support the pupils’ active involvement in their learning. Regarding deployment of teaching staff, the provisions of Primary Circular 07/03 are being contravened. This issue should be addressed as a matter of priority.

- Staff morale is low and the quality of communication between staff members is poor. The board should engage external facilitation to address current interpersonal difficulties among staff members and to support the implementation of effective, whole-school communication practices. The quality of communication between school and parents is also poor. Annual parent-teacher meetings and written reports on pupils’ progress notwithstanding, all teachers should ensure that parents receive an accurate account of their child’s attainment, including consistent reporting of standardised assessment results. Parents should receive timely information regarding school activities, including proposed school closures. The parents’ association demonstrates commitment to the school and has made a valuable contribution to the provision of school resources. In order to support the work of the school more successfully, a clearer understanding of the role and contribution of a parents’ association is recommended.

- Overall, management of pupils is good. They present as enthusiastic learners and demonstrate an eagerness to participate actively in their learning. The use of play areas during recreation periods should be reviewed to ensure adequate supervision of pupils at all times.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation
While a range of curriculum plans and organisational policies were in evidence, the quality of school planning and school self-evaluation is poor. In the main, plans and policies have not been devised collaboratively, they fail to reflect the particular circumstances of Scoil Mhichíl Naofa, and they are not being implemented appropriately. Only a limited number of organisational policies have been considered and ratified by the board. The school requires to develop a three-year plan detailing the particular curriculum, organisational and resource priorities to be addressed. An action-planning approach should also be implemented to tackle specific priorities for each school term. It is imperative that the board and parents be involved appropriately in this planning process, and that access to the school plan by the education partners be facilitated.

All mainstream class teachers engage in long-term and short-term planning. Planning for differentiation was observed in some instances and should be extended through the school to ensure that the needs of all pupils are being met. Monthly progress records should be completed by all teachers, retained centrally and reviewed to assess the quality of curriculum implementation.

While a draft child protection policy has been prepared and a designated liaison person (DLP) and a deputy DLP have been named, the policy has not been considered nor formally adopted by the board. It is essential that the existing draft policy be reviewed, ratified and communicated as a matter of urgency in line with the Department’s Child Protection Guidelines for Primary Schools. The school's child protection procedures should be brought to the attention of management, school staff and parents. A copy of the procedures should be issued to all staff (including all new staff) and management should ensure that all staff are familiar with the procedures to be followed.

5. Quality of Teaching, Learning and Pupil Achievement

The overall quality of teaching and learning in mainstream classrooms is satisfactory. Lessons are suitably structured and paced. While whole-class teaching is supported by some group work opportunities, less than half of the pupils who completed questionnaires report that they often work in groups. This points to the need for more regular collaborative learning activities. Further differentiation of teaching and learning is also recommended to ensure that all pupils are challenged and supported appropriately in their learning. ICT is used in some instances to support teaching and learning. The pupils' written work is well monitored and the teachers provide formative comments to support the pupils to improve their work further. While in many instances the pupils exhibit and discuss their learning confidently, some experience difficulties in demonstrating and communicating what they have learned.

The quality of assessment practices is poor. Standardised tests of English reading are administered inconsistently and those in Mathematics are administered rarely. Where assessment is undertaken, results are not analysed or used purposefully to monitor attainment at whole-school and individual pupil levels. A wider range of assessment modes should be utilised consistently at all class levels, including assessment-for-learning approaches. The outcomes of such assessment should be used both to identify pupils in need of supplementary teaching and to differentiate teaching and learning at individual classroom level. The development and implementation of a whole-school assessment policy is recommended.

Múintear an Ghaeilge go sásúil san iomlán, agus tugtar teoracha i rith an lae trí Ghaeilge. Éiríonn leis na hoidí rannpháirtíocht thormhór na ndaltaí a chothú agus léiríonn siadsan tsuiscint chuí ar ábhair thráthnúla. Baintear úsáid fhónta as amhráin agus as filíocht chun foclóir agus teanga na ndaltaí a neartú. Moltar anois níos mo deiseanna a thabhairt
dóibh an teanga a úsáid agus cumarsáid a dhéanamh le chéile as Gaeilge. Léiríonn cuid de na daltaí deachracthaí suntasacha in úsáid agus i láimhseáil na mbriathra. Moltar tuilleadh béime a leagadh ar gramadach a theagasc agus a chleachtadh go rialta, láimhsiú na mbriathra ach go h-áirithe. Léann fórmhóir na ndaltai le líofacht oiriúnach. Ba chóir éagsúlacht níos mó deiseanna scríbhneoireachta a a sholáthar.

In general, Irish is taught to a satisfactory standard and informal classroom instructions are given in Irish throughout the day. The teachers succeed in encouraging the participation of most pupils who demonstrate a suitable understanding of current topics. Competent use is made of songs and poetry to reinforce the pupils' vocabulary and language. It is now advised that further opportunities be provided for the pupils to use the language and to communicate with each other in Irish. Some pupils demonstrate significant difficulty in the use of verbs. Further emphasis should be given to the formal teaching and practise of grammar, in particular the use of verbs. Most pupils read with appropriate fluency. A greater variety of writing opportunities should be provided.

- The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in English is satisfactory. Appropriate learning contexts develop the pupils' oral language skills suitably. A variety of effective methodologies stimulates the pupils' interest in reading. Pupil questionnaire responses indicate that most consider they are doing well at reading. A commendable feature of recent practice is the successful implementation of a paired-reading initiative in one particular class grade which resulted in positive progress in pupil attainment. An appreciation of poetry is fostered and the pupils are provided with opportunities to listen to, learn and respond to poetry. The development of expressive and communicative skills is in evidence in pupils' writing activity. More regular opportunities to engage in a greater variety of writing genres and tasks are advised.

- The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in Mathematics is satisfactory. In implementing the mathematics programme, an appropriate balance is achieved between the strands. Most pupils are positively disposed to Mathematics and active-learning approaches are practised, insofar as the limited resources permit. Due emphasis is placed on the acquisition and usage of mathematical language. The pupils perform number operations competently and demonstrate appropriate understanding of aspects of measures and data. Many pupils display a keen interest in problem solving and a good ability to do so.

- The quality of teaching, learning and pupil engagement in the lessons observed in Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) was good. A broad range of topics was addressed and the pupils' contributions were well managed through the use of talk and discussion, circle-time approaches and brainstorming activities. To build on this work, a more focused and suitably resourced SPHE programme should be collaboratively devised and implemented to ensure continual progression in the pupils' understanding, values, attitudes and skills.

6. Quality of Support for Pupils

- The quality of provision for pupils with special educational needs (SEN) is poor. The staged approach to assessment, identification and programme planning, outlined in Special Education Circular 02/05, is not being implemented.

- Detailed individual education plans (IEPs) are developed by the mainstream class teachers for most pupils in receipt of supplementary teaching. However, separate IEPs prepared in the learning-support setting are vague and do not delineate specific learning targets for the individual pupils concerned. The selection of pupils for supplementary teaching does not reflect attainment levels in English reading and some pupils with low
attainment do not attend. The absence of regular diagnostic testing militates significantly against the preparation and implementation of pertinent programmes of learning and the evaluation of individual pupil progress. Very limited samples of the pupils’ work are retained and none are displayed in the learning-support room. Appropriate progress records of pupil achievement are not completed and records of pupil attendance are not maintained.

• Provision for pupils with SEN should be reviewed immediately and the quality of provision developed significantly. This process should include criteria for selecting pupils for support, the use of appropriate diagnostic tools, collaborative development of IEPs and specific learning targets, implementation of appropriate intervention programmes and maintenance of various records. It is further recommended that duties involving assistance to pupils with special needs be documented clearly and communicated to all relevant personnel.

Published October 2011
Appendix

School response to the report

Submitted by the Board of Management

Area 1: Observations on the content of the inspection report

Scoil Mhicil Naofa board and teachers wish to thank the Department Inspectorate for the fair and thorough manner it conducted its evaluation. Its recommendations have provided the board and staff with a great chance to put a clear road-map for the future together. Some considerable changes have taken place since the publication of this report and we would like to take this chance to detail them below.

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

- A new principal was appointed in August.
- SNA role defined.
- Child Protection Policy has been amended and ratified.
- A Numeracy Strategy has been put in place and procedures for resource procurement agreed.
- An overall plan for the school has been developed and will be reviewed termly.
- Procedures for planning have been detailed to and adopted by the staff.
- SEN procedures have been put in place involving, Early Intervention, Parental Involvement, Tracking Behaviours, IEP Development and communication throughout the staged procedures with all relevant parties.
- As part of the school plan, school rules have been enhanced and communicated to families.
- Staff morale has improved markedly.