

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**

**Department of Education and Skills**

**Whole School Evaluation  
REPORT**

**Scoil Áine Naofa  
Loch Cútra, An Gort, Contae na Gaillimhe  
Uimhir rolla: 17475S**

**Date of inspection: 20 February 2013**



## 1. Introduction

Scoil Áine Naofa is a mainstream co-educational primary school under the patronage of the Catholic Bishop of Galway. There are 57 pupils enrolled, a figure which reflects little variance in enrolment levels in recent years. Pupils are taught in three multi-grade classrooms. A learning support teacher and a resource teacher, both based in the school, but shared with neighbouring schools, provide additional support for pupils as needed. Attendance levels for the vast majority of pupils are very good and high attendance for all pupils is strongly promoted.

This whole-school evaluation focused on the quality of teaching and learning in Irish, English, Mathematics and Drama. 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 teachers display admirable dedication to promoting the holistic development of all pupils.
- There is an open, friendly and welcoming atmosphere in the school.
- Support for pupils with special educational needs is very well organised and delivered.
- Pupils presented as well-behaved, confident, affable and happy during the week of the evaluation.
- The positivity of staff and pupils towards the Irish language is noted and pupils have good standards in Irish, particularly in the senior classes.
- A broad programme of extra-curricular and co-curricular activities, which includes involvement in sport, music and the Green Schools project, is provided for pupils.
- The school is the key focal point and the heart of the community it serves. The support provided by parents and the wider community for the development and maintenance of the school infrastructure and facilities is indicative of the manner in which the school is valued in the locality.

The following **main recommendations** are made:

- To further enhance provision, it is recommended that a programme of structured play be introduced in the infant classroom and in this context *Aistear, the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework* should be considered.
- A more systematic approach to the collection, analysis and presentation of data for school self-evaluation purposes is recommended.
- It is recommended that teacher deployment and rotation be reviewed, with a view to ensuring that teachers develop skills in a broad range of settings and that pupils needs are accommodated accordingly.

### **3. Quality of School Management**

- The board is ably led by an experienced chairperson and various members of the board use their particular skills effectively in supporting the work of the school. Comprehensive and accurate records of board business reflect thorough consideration by the board of key policy issues as well as decisions which impact directly on pupils' learning. School accounts are carefully managed and certified. The present and previous boards are commended for progressing the upgrading of the school building and development of the general infrastructure, resources and facilities. Further development, including extension of the school playing field, the construction of a ball wall and modification of traffic arrangements are planned.
- The principal is highly experienced and capable and works diligently to ensure that all aspects of provision receive careful attention. He has demonstrated a strong capacity to lead an appropriate change agenda and to implement the recommendations of a previous incidental inspection. The principal is supported in the leadership tasks by a deputy principal and special duties post holder. Duties have been agreed and some very positive and worthwhile contributions to leading and managing the school are made. It is recommended that duties be reviewed on a regular basis, be more closely aligned to current priorities for development and that clear accountability structures be put in place. The willingness of other staff members to take responsibility for aspects of the work of the school and to share in leadership tasks is acknowledged.
- The school is very well maintained and resourced and features attractive displays of pupils' work. The recent addition of a well-stocked school library is a welcome development. It is recommended that teacher deployment and rotation be reviewed with a view to ensuring that teachers develop skills in a broad range of settings and that pupils needs are accommodated accordingly.
- The management of relationships within the school community is very good. There is strong evidence to suggest that parents are highly committed and generous in their support of the work of the school. In addition to fundraising and attendance at science fairs and book fairs, they provide practical help and support at various religious, sporting and co-curricular events. General meetings with parents are utilised to clarify curriculum change and innovation and to facilitate parental involvement in deciding policy on issues such as literacy and homework. In questionnaires distributed during the recent evaluation, all respondents expressed overall satisfaction with the school and feel that the school is welcoming of parents, well run and that the quality of teaching is good.
- The quality of pupil management is highly commendable and indicative of positive, affirming and nurturing relationships between teachers and pupils. The members of the students' council who met with the inspector displayed admirable skills of articulation in discussing a range of topics. Questionnaire responses indicate that a very high percentage of pupils get on well with their peers and feel that theirs is a good school.

### **4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation**

- The school planning and school self-evaluation process has many positive aspects and is developing well. Much good work has been done by the staff and board in reviewing a range of existing organisational and curriculum policies. This work has involved good levels of consultation and collaboration. Policy documents are detailed and reflect the context of the school. Initiatives progressed and those planned for the future are recorded in the school's strategic plan. This plan should be shared with the partners. Curriculum review and development priorities have mostly centred on literacy. A number of initiatives have already been implemented successfully, particularly in areas such as reading and

handwriting. Judicious use has been made by the school of the support agencies in progressing particular issues.

- The gathering and analysis of evidence for the purpose of identifying areas for development features some very good work but requires further refinement in areas such as the analysis of strands and skills in Mathematics, and the comparison of scores in tests of ability with pupils' attainment in literacy and numeracy. Pupil surveys on attitudes to aspects of literacy have yielded valuable data. A system for tracking individual pupils' progress in literacy and numeracy has been implemented but requires further development to ensure that it is more easily accessible.
- The overall quality of teachers' planning is good. All teachers devise long-term and short-term plans and monthly progress reports. Commendable efforts have been made to implement a consistent approach to planning that focuses on identifying key curriculum objectives. Further development of this work together with the planned introduction of a book rental scheme should decrease the undue reliance on workbooks, which is occasionally evident.
- 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 lessons observed during the evaluation ranged from fair to very good. The majority of lessons observed were well paced and well delivered and featured expert questioning by teachers and high levels of engagement by pupils. Information and communications technologies (ICTs) are used effectively in some lessons. Co-operative learning is very much in evidence, particularly in the middle and senior rooms. In-class support is a strong feature of practice and current arrangements could be adapted to allow for team teaching in the infant classes. A variety of assessment methodologies is in use; there is scope for broadening the range of assessment practices. Over their time in Scoil Áine pupils achieve commendable standards in the curriculum areas evaluated and are very well prepared to meet the challenges of second level education. To further enhance provision, it is recommended that a programme of structured play be introduced in the infant classroom and in this context *Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework* should be considered.
- Téann tiomantas na n-oidí don Ghaeilge i bhfeidhm go mór ar dhearfacht agus ar chumas na ndaltaí i leith na teanga. Cothaítear scileanna labhartha go héifeachtach trí ról imirt, trí dhrámaíocht agus trí cheistiúchán agus trí leas agus taitneamh a bhaint as saibhreas teanga na filíochta. Tá scileanna maithe léitheoireachta ag formhór na daltaí agus ardchumas bainte amach ag daltaí áirithe. I dtaca le seo is tairbheach go mór an obair atá ar siúl ar an úrscéal sna hardranganna. D'fhéadfaí an cleachtas seo a scaipeadh tríd an scoil trí bhéim sa bhreis a leagan ar fhíorleabhair agus ar an scéalaíocht. Tugtar deiseanna fóinteacha do na daltaí a scileanna scríbhneoireachta a chleachtadh agus is léir ó na samplaí a bhreathnaíodh go sroichte, ar an iomlán, caighdeán maith sa ghné seo den obair.
- *The teachers commitment to Irish impacts greatly on the pupils' positivity towards and facility with the language. Speaking skills are fostered effectively through emphasis on role-play, drama and questioning and by making beneficial and enjoyable use of the rich language of poetry. The majority of pupils have good reading skills with some achieving quite high levels of competence. In this regard, engagement with the novel in the senior*

*classes is very beneficial. This practice merits wider application in the school through greater emphasis on real books and story. The pupils are given helpful opportunities to practice their writing skills and it is evident from the samples available that a good standard overall is achieved in this aspect of the work.*

- Teaching and learning in English is of a good standard overall with some pupils achieving very well across the strands of the curriculum. The majority of pupils have very good oral language skills and express themselves with commendable articulation and confidence. Wide ranging discussion of topics, character role-play and extensive work in exploring, memorising and reciting poetry are contributing factors. Pupils in senior classes demonstrated a particularly good understanding of poetry. Reading skills and a positive attitude to reading are effectively promoted through library work, paired reading and individualised reading programmes. A wide variety of writing genres is explored with a particular emphasis on encouraging creativity. Some samples of writing reviewed were of a particularly high quality.
- The quality of teaching and pupil achievement in Mathematics is good overall with some very effective, well-organised teaching observed in some settings. The majority of pupils achieve very well in Mathematics and it is noted that trends in overall achievement have shown consistent improvement in recent years. Further gains should accrue from upskilling in the teaching of problem solving. Among the features of the very good practice observed were sharing of learning objectives, clear explanations, well-prepared resources and the use of games and strategies to facilitate the ready recall of number facts. The school environment lends itself to the development of maths trails and problem solving tasks and these possibilities could be fruitfully explored.
- The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in Drama is commendable, with some very positive aspects observed. Drama is used effectively as a pedagogical tool to increase pupils' engagement with and understanding of aspects of Social Personal and Health Education, History and language, in particular. The majority of discrete drama lessons observed were very well managed and featured good use of strategies such as conscience alley, thought tracking and still image. In those lessons pupils were adept at and at ease with developing fictional relationships, exploring content through the fictional lens and co-operating in the improvisation of stories.

## **6. Quality of Support for Pupils**

- Overall the provision for pupils with additional needs is very good. Two support teachers, who are based in the school but shared with neighbouring schools, work with pupils. Pupils are supported in classrooms and on a withdrawal basis. There is a strong emphasis on early intervention, some of which could profitably be delivered on a co-teaching basis to facilitate the sharing of best practice. Individual education plans (IEPs) and group plans are agreed for pupils with additional needs and progress towards the achievement of targets is well monitored.
- Teaching observed was particularly affirming, energetic, skilful and well resourced, and featured a broad range of strategies and programmes including multi-sensory work in Maths, social stories, and the use of *Elkonin Boxes* to build phonological awareness.

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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 of Scoil Áine Naofa, Loch Cútra welcomes the WSE Report. The Board congratulates the staff, teachers, parents and pupils on the ongoing good work in the school. The Board would like to thank the Inspector for the report and for his professionalism throughout the WSE process. The Board is particularly welcoming of the statement, “the school is the key focal point and the heart of the community it serves”.

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

- These recommendations will be included in the school's Strategic Plan and the Board of Management have prioritised the recommendations for implementation.
- All partners in education at Scoil Áine Naofa, Loch Cútra will co-operate in working towards the full implementation of these recommendations.

Ní neart gan chur le chéile. (*No strength unless together*)