An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Scoil Fhlannáin Naofa
Rathcabbin, Co. Tipperary
Uimhir rolla: 17512V

Date of inspection: 01 February 2012
1. Introduction

Scoil Fhlannán Naofa is a national school under the patronage of the Catholic Bishop of Killaloe. It is a mixed school with three mainstream class teachers and two shared support teachers. There are 71 pupils enrolled in the school. Overall, the attendance of pupils is good.

This whole school evaluation focused on the quality of teaching and learning in English, Irish, Mathematics and Visual Arts. 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 quality of teaching and learning in this school is of a good to very good standard.
- The board of management is committed to the provision of a well maintained school environment and has been involved in the review and development of relevant school policies.
- During the evaluation period a positive school climate was evident and this is further characterised by good relationships in the school community.
- The special education needs team provides good support for pupils with learning difficulties.
- The parents and the pupils are very supportive of the school staff.

The following main recommendations are made:

- The board should prioritise the provision of additional resources to support teaching and learning particularly in the areas of literacy and numeracy.
- It is recommended that the school develop a discrete oral language programme which identifies clear learning outcomes to be attained at each class level and a differentiated approach to the teaching of reading throughout the school.
- It is recommended that a review of the in-class support provision be carried out in order to ensure that, where early-intervention is provided, it is clearly focused through the delivery of specific intervention programmes and that the expected learning outcomes are identified in advance for all concerned.

3. Quality of School Management

- This is an effective board of management. It is properly constituted, meets on a regular basis and minutes of meetings are recorded. Individual board members manage specific tasks. Finances are prudently managed and certified on an annual basis. The board is aware of the school's strengths and challenges and is working strategically to address the needs of the school. The priority of the board is the maintenance of a safe and welcoming school in which pupils can learn and attain standards appropriate to their ability.
• The newly appointed principal promotes a very positive school atmosphere and has high expectations in respect of the quality of learning and teaching in the school. He discharges his duties in a very capable and conscientious manner. He is an effective leader who has gained the support, confidence and trust of the board, staff and parents. A clear vision for the school is exemplified by his focus on the raising of standards, the distribution of leadership roles among the staff, the development of good communication systems and the cultivation of good relations among all members of the school community. Priorities for development of the school have been identified and formal action planning is being implemented.

• The principal in collaboration with the deputy principal and staff have begun a review of the school’s effectiveness through a self-evaluation process. This has entailed setting targets for the physical development of the school and curricular attainment particularly in literacy and numeracy. A number of curricular and organisational plans have been updated and ratified by the board.

• The school is resourced with a limited range of teaching and learning materials and will require significant investment to bring its current provision to optimum levels. This is an area that needs to be prioritised in the context of available funding. The school has recently invested in interactive whiteboards in each classroom which teachers utilise to good effect. In general, the school accommodation is fit for purpose. However, the school building is in need of upgrading and the grounds require further development. The board of management has applied to the Department of Education and Skills for funding to build additional classrooms and to improve the existing accommodation.

• Pupils responses in the questionnaires administered during the evaluation indicate that they are very positive in their views about the education that is provided in the school. However they do state that they have limited opportunities to engage with information and communication technologies (ICTs) and that they do not engage in group work very frequently. The management of pupils is of a very high standard in this school. Pupils are kind and courteous in their interactions with their peers and others. During the evaluation all pupils presented as enthusiastic and motivated. Consideration should now be given to the establishment of a students’ council.

• A recently formed parents’ association is involved in a wide range of initiatives in the school. The parents’ representatives reported that there was open and trusting communication between the parents and the school. The parents’ representatives also expressed their satisfaction with the quality of education provided within the school. Parent responses to the questionnaires distributed during the evaluation indicate high to very high levels of satisfaction with the school.

Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

• Over the past few months, the principal in collaboration with the staff has carried out a strategic review of the school plan. Good to very good curriculum plans have been drafted and ratified by the board in all subject areas. Some curricular policies are currently under review. There is evidence of staff collaboration in the development of these plans. It is now recommended that a strategic plan be drawn up to evaluate the impact of these plans on pupil learning. Plans should be reviewed to ascertain the effectiveness of the direction they provide to individual teachers in relation to continuity and progression in pupil learning between classes. In general, organisational policies are of a good standard and their implementation is essential to the smooth running of the school. All teachers prepare good to very good long-term and short-term planning.
Monthly progress records are maintained. Some very high quality approaches to individual teacher planning and reporting were observed. It is recommended that the staff develop a common approach to planning and reporting in the future. Furthermore, it is recommended that monthly progress records be utilised to inform the process of school self evaluation.

Confirmation was provided that the board of management has formally adopted the Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-primary Schools (September 2011) without modification. The school is compliant with the requirements of Primary Circular 0061/2006. School authorities provided evidence that arrangements are being put in place to ensure compliance with the requirements of the recently published Circular 0065/2011 and Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools as a matter of priority.

5. Quality of Teaching, Learning and Pupil Achievement

The quality of teaching and learning in this school is of a good to very good standard. Classrooms are very well organised with supportive displays of illustrative materials and pupils’ work. Where concrete materials are used they are utilised effectively to support pupils’ learning. Pupils’ learning is incrementally developed and individual support is provided for pupils experiencing difficulties. Effective team teaching was observed during the evaluation period, particularly in Mathematics, where support teachers worked collaboratively with class teachers to provide well planned and differentiated learning experiences for pupils.

Is inmholta cumas labhartha na ndaltaí sa teanga sa scoil. Úsáidtear raon leathan d’áchmhainní mar thaca don chlár teanga Gaeilge agus éiríonn go maith leis na daltaí na bunscoilanna a thabhairt le. Tá prionta sa timpeallacht le feiceáil go forleathan sna rang seomraí. Go ginearálta, dírítear aird céimniúil ar an ngramadach agus ar Ghaeilge theidhmhuil sa scoil. Baintear úsáid rialta as scéim grádaithe chun léitheoireacht theidhmhuil na ndaltaí a chothú agus b’fhiú anois infheistíocht bhreise a dhéanamh sa stoc leabhar Ghaeilge. Léirítear taisteáltais suimiúla de scriobhneoireacht na ndaltaí go tarrainnteach tríd an scoil. Sroichtear ard-chaighdéan san obair seo na ndaltaí sa teanga go háirithe.

The children’s oral language ability is of a praiseworthy standard. A wide range of resources is utilised to support the Irish language programme and the children achieve a good standard in the basic skills of the language. A print-rich environment is in evidence throughout the school and in the classroom. In general appropriate attention is focused on grammar and formal Irish in the school. A graded reading scheme is in use to develop the pupils’ formal reading skills. It would be appropriate now to consider investment in an additional stock of Irish reading materials. Interesting displays of pupils’ writing are displayed attractively throughout the school. High standards are achieved in this work particularly in the higher classes.

The quality of the teaching and learning in English is of a good standard. Some examples of good practice were observed in the teaching of specific oral language skills. It is recommended that a whole school approach be adopted to ensure that all pupils’ oral language skills are systematically developed throughout the school. It is recommended that the school develop a discrete oral language programme which identifies clear learning outcomes to be attained at each class level. The teaching of reading is carried out to a high standard. The provision of a wider range of opportunities for pupils to read at a level commensurate with their abilities through the use of a differentiated reading programme is recommended. This would further enhance pupils’ attainment in reading.
Examples of pupils’ writing in copybooks and on display in classrooms were of a good standard and reflected a variety of writing genres. Furthermore, it is recommended that the pupils be given opportunities to experience personal writing in an even wider range of genres.

- Pupils’ attainment and the quality of teaching observed in Mathematics were of a good to very good standard. All lessons were logically structured and some teachers based the teaching and learning explicitly on the content objectives from the mathematics’ curriculum. This was clearly reflected in the outcomes of these lessons. Most teachers employed a very effective range of approaches and methodologies and successfully addressed the different learning abilities of the pupils. The school has recently placed additional emphasis on problem solving during mathematics lessons. Pupils’ attainment could be further enhanced by ensuring that concepts in mathematics are consolidated through the provision of authentic learning experiences based on the children’s own prior knowledge and the development of maths-rich environments throughout the school.

- The teachers are commended for the way in which they implement a broad and balanced Visual Arts curriculum. The school has recently reviewed and developed a plan for the Visual Arts that outlines the content objectives for each class level that will be provided under each of the six strands and two strand units. A range of activities utilising all of the strands of Visual Arts was evident in the practice of teachers during the evaluation process. This work is integrated with other areas of the curriculum. Samples of the children’s artistic work are attractively displayed in all classrooms and the corridors. There are displays of children’s work completed in the areas of drawing, paint and colour, print, construction, clay, fabric and fibres. There is also evidence that pupils, as well as making art, are encouraged to look and respond to their own work, the work of their peers and the work of artists. Talk and discussion is also a feature of teaching and learning in these classes. It is recommended that continued emphasis be placed on Looking and Responding to the work of artists and working in the style of the artist. While teacher observation is used to assess pupils’ work, the implementation of a range of assessment strategies including digital portfolios of children’s work would support the progressive development of pupils’ skills as part of a whole school approach.

- A range of assessment modes is in use in the school. While some good practice was observed in all classes, particularly in relation to the assessment of learning, there remains scope for development regarding the use of data generated to inform classroom practice as outlined in the Initial Steps in the Implementation of the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy, Circular 0056/2011.

6. Quality of Supports for Pupils

- The work of the special education team is characterised by effective collaboration and innovative practice.
- A range of support initiatives have been successfully implemented through in-class support and team-teaching.
- In general, the quality of the lessons observed in the different settings was of a high standard. Programmes of work for individual pupils and groups are well researched and planned. Pupils’ progress is systematically recorded and it is evident that pupils are making progress commensurate with their abilities. A range of diagnostic testing is used to inform teaching and learning.
• It is recommended that a review of the in-class support provision be carried out in order to ensure that these programmes are clearly focused and that specific learning outcomes have been identified in advance of their implementation.
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 at St. Flannan’s N.S. on its own behalf and on behalf of the staff and the school community would like to thank the inspector for the professional, courteous and thorough manner in which he carried out the WSE.

The Board of Management is very pleased with the report and welcomes the positive findings and recommendations made.

The Board appreciates and is heartened by findings in the report of very good standards of teaching and learning, a positive school climate and the commitment of the Board that exists in 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 recommendations made by the inspector have been carefully considered and are currently being implemented in the school by the Board, middle management and staff.