1. Introduction

St. Manchan’s National School is a vertical, co-educational school under the patronage of the Catholic bishop of Meath. It serves a wide catchment area incorporating pupils from the immediate locality, wider community and nearby town. The attendance levels of the 153 pupils enrolled are very good for the majority of pupils. Enrolment has steadily increased in recent times and is projected to rise further in the coming years. The board of management of the school was given an opportunity to comment on the findings and recommendations of the report; the board chose to accept the report without response.

2. Summary of Findings and Recommendations for Further Development

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

- The principal’s well-developed organisational, administrative and interpersonal skills enable her to manage the school very effectively.

- The management of pupils is very successful; pupils are courteous, respectful and well behaved.

- Teachers create positive learning environments and are highly commended for the sense of care and community that exists throughout the school.

- The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in oral language and writing in English is very good.

- Teaching, learning and pupil achievement in Science are of a very high quality.

- Relationships and communications between the board, staff, parents and community are excellent.

- The quality of the school building is excellent.

The following **main recommendations** are made:

- In the teaching of reading, it is recommended that provision for differentiation be developed to encompass guided reading groups, focussed in-class support and appropriately challenging reading material.

- Group teaching for Mathematics should be introduced in order to meet the varying learning needs of the pupils.
3. Quality of School Management

- The board of management functions very effectively. It is commended for overseeing the refurbishment of the school building to an excellent standard. The chairperson is praised for the high level of commitment to the work of the school.

- The teaching principal provides good quality leadership. Her well-developed organisational, administrative and interpersonal skills enable her to manage the school very effectively. She is committed to the individual welfare needs and the holistic development of all pupils.

- The in-school management team is praised for meeting regularly and carrying out a wide range of duties competently. The curriculum leadership aspect of their roles should be developed, with greater responsibility for the management of priority curriculum areas.

- The management of resources is very good. An extensive range of resources including information and communications technology is competently used throughout the school. The special needs assistant and secretary carry out their duties capably.

- The management of pupils is very successful. Teachers create positive learning environments and are highly commended for the sense of care and community that exists throughout the school. Pupils are courteous, respectful and very well behaved. The results of pupil questionnaires, conducted as part of the whole-school evaluation, indicate that all pupils feel safe in the school and a high percentage of pupils like coming to school.

- Relationships and communications between the board, staff, parents and community are excellent. Effective and varied communication structures have been developed to communicate with parents and the wider school community. These structures include regular newsletters, meetings and a comprehensive school website.

- The parents’ association is very supportive of the work of the school. They organise fundraising events and support school celebrations and events. Responses to parent questionnaires indicate that almost all parents agree that the school is well run and think it has a good reputation in the community.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- The quality of the school planning and school self-evaluation process is good. The school engages in a collaborative planning process involving the staff, board and parents. Self-evaluation practices include staff and in-school management meetings, whole-school interpretation of standardised tests results and identification of priority areas for development. To build on this work, further action planning is required, with clear targets for development, planning of programmes and assigned roles and responsibilities for those involved in the development planning process.

- Comprehensive organisational polices are devised. The good quality curriculum plans provide useful guidance to teachers on content to be taught at each year level. Curriculum plans for Mathematics and English should be extended to provide greater guidance to class teachers in approaches to differentiation and assessment.

- The teachers complete good long-term and short-term plans consistently which include specific learning objectives. Detailed monthly progress reports are compiled. It is
recommended that all teachers make more explicit provision for differentiation within the learning objectives in planning for numeracy and literacy.

- 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

- The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement is competent. The teachers prepare stimulating learning environments and utilise a wide range of resources confidently in lessons. They demonstrate well-developed classroom management skills and purposeful lessons. Almost all parents surveyed agree teaching is good in the school. Whole-class teaching is the main methodology utilised with some provision for pair and group work. As reflected in the outcomes of the pupils’ questionnaires there is scope to provide for group-based teaching, including ability groups more frequently during lessons. The pupils are attentive and enthusiastic, and apply themselves with confidence to assigned tasks.

- Tá caighdeán an teagaisc, na foghlama agus gnóthachtáil na ndaltaí go maith. Múintear foclóir nua go beoga anamúil agus bainteársan úsáid éifeachtach as pictiúir, acmhainní tairbheacha agus cluichí cainte sna gceachtanna. Bíonn foighne aiste ar na ndaltaí cumarsáide a dhéanamh trí Ghaeilge agus is féidir leo ceisteanach a chur agus a thabhairt. Aithrisíonn agus canann siad réimse leathan naíonrain agus amhráin i ngach rang. Tá ard chaighdeán bainte amach ag na daltaí sa litéitheoireacht agus deantar cleachtáí scríofa oiriúnacha sna seanraí éagsúla. I bhformhór na ranganna, baintear úsáid as an nGaeilge mar mhéan teagaisc i rith na gceachtanna agus moltar an dea-chleachtas seo a leathnú ar fud na scoile.

- The standard of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in Irish is good. New vocabulary is taught in a lively, stimulating way and effective use is made of pictures, resources and language games in lessons. The pupils are very willing to communicate in Irish and most can ask as well as answer questions. They recite and sing a very good range of poems and songs confidently in all classes. The pupils achieve a high standard in reading and undertake appropriate writing activities in various genres. Irish is used as the medium of instruction during most lessons and it is recommended that this good practice be extended throughout the school.

- The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in oral language and writing in English is very good. The pupils engage successfully in structured oral language activities, are responsive to questioning and engage confidently in discussions relating to topics and aspects of the curriculum. The pupils are producing writing of a very good quality in a variety of genres. Overall, the standard of penmanship and presentation in copybooks is high.

- There is scope for development in the teaching of reading. Teachers have reviewed their approach to teaching phonics and have prioritised comprehension as an area for development. Libraries are well stocked and most pupils display an enthusiasm for reading. As the pupils demonstrate varying reading abilities it is recommended that
provision for differentiation be developed to encompass guided reading groups, focussed in-class support and appropriately challenging reading material.

- The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in Mathematics is good. Careful attention to the acquisition of mathematical language, use of manipulatives and clear explanations are features of practice. Competent whole-class teaching is the main methodology utilised. Most pupils can capably perform number operations and apply them selves appropriately to assigned tasks. There is scope for development in relation to lesson structures; they should include greater provision for mental Mathematics and problem solving.

- Some pupils in every class are experiencing difficulty with core elements of the Mathematics curriculum. Other pupils are not sufficiently challenged. To cater for the range of abilities, it is recommended that group teaching for Mathematics be introduced as a priority and that activities are provided that challenge the pupils at an appropriate level.

- Teaching, learning and pupil achievement in Science are of a very high quality. Excellent use is made of resources, experiments and the local environment in lessons. A very good balance is achieved between the acquisition of scientific knowledge and the development of skills through the science programme. High levels of pupil engagement and enthusiasm are evident in lessons. The pupils are very knowledgeable about topics they have covered.

- Assessment practices are adequate. All teachers monitor the pupils’ written work and utilise a variety of assessment modes including teacher observation, checklists, teacher-designed tests and standardised tests. To develop assessment practices further it is recommended that assessment information be used to inform ability grouping in classes. In addition, more regular formative assessment of the pupils’ mastery of specific objectives and targets is required in all settings.

- The school is advised to furnish parents with the results of standardised tests in written format as outlined in Circular 0138/2006 Supporting Assessment in the Primary School.

### 6. Quality of Support for Pupils

- The quality of support for pupils with special educational needs is good. Lessons, which are primarily provided by withdrawing the pupils, are well structured and tailored to their particular needs. Individual education plans are drawn up and include specific targets for most pupils.

- The learning support teacher has full responsibility for teaching the 3rd class Mathematics programme five hours per week. This practice should be re-evaluated in the context of providing more differentiated support and targeted interventions where specifically required.

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