Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Scoil Náisiúnta Bheinín Naofa
Duleek, County Meath
Uimhir rolla: 17839H

Date of inspection: 03 December 2009
WHOLE-SCHOOL EVALUATION

A whole-school evaluation of SN Bheinín Naofa was undertaken in November/December, 2009. This report presents the findings of the evaluation and makes recommendations for improvement. The evaluation focused on the quality of teaching and learning in English, Mathematics and History. 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.

INTRODUCTION – SCHOOL CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

SN Bheinín Naofa, Duleek, Co. Meath is a boys’ school which caters for pupils from the catchment area of Duleek. It was originally built in 1953 and was extended in 1984. It has experienced rapid growth in the past decade. Pupil attendance is closely monitored and is very satisfactory.

The following table provides an overview of the enrolment and staffing in the school at the time of the evaluation:

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<tr>
<th>Number</th>
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<tr>
<td>Pupils enrolled in the school</td>
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<td>Mainstream classes in the school</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teachers on the school staff</td>
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<td>Mainstream class teachers</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teachers working in support roles:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Special education (SET)</td>
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<td>English as an Additional Language (EAL)</td>
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<td>Special needs assistants</td>
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1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT

1.1 Characteristic spirit, mission or vision
SN Bheinín Naofa is under the patronage of the Roman Catholic Bishop of Meath. The school aims to promote the full and harmonious development of all aspects of the person, including his/her relationship with other people and with the environment. Religious education is provided for the pupils in accordance with the doctrine and tradition of the Catholic Church. Through the use of examples and teaching, the school aims to develop pupils’ appreciation and respect for people of different religious affiliations and of different nationalities. It also aims to recognise the dignity and value of each person, with strong norms of respect being evident among pupils and school staff during the evaluation.

1.2 Board of management
Meeting very regularly, the board of management undertakes its responsibilities in a strategic, focused and diligent manner. Concise and clear minutes are maintained for each meeting. Financial statements are also produced at these meetings. Board members have been allocated duties in accordance with their offices and also to exploit their various talents and expertise. Priorities of the board include the appointment of teachers, the provision of resources, the management of posts of responsibility, the management of budgets, staff development and the strategic management of the expansion of the school. The board stated that it is concerned about
the accelerating growth of the school and the consequent need to proactively provide for such expansion in an appropriate and strategic manner.

The board actively seeks to involve parents in the life of the school and to this end encourages them to become involved in school activities such as art days, garden days, science days, presentation nights and sports days. It also involves parents in the formulation of curricular and organisational school plans. The board stated that it was satisfied with the way the curriculum is taught and with the achievement of pupils. It appreciates and recognises the warm and nurturing school climate.

During the evaluation, it was noted that at times of opening and in particular, times of dismissal, considerable traffic congestion occurs at the school entrance. This is a concern in terms of pupil safety. The board of management is aware of the situation and is in the process of examining solutions.

1.3 In-school management
The school principal approaches his work in a committed, careful and systematic manner, providing strong leadership for the school community and empowering effectively those around him to create a warm and nurturing learning environment. He is keenly aware of the importance of maintaining high standards in both academic and pastoral domains and actively encourages his staff to engage in a range of educational activities and initiatives which foster pupils’ enthusiasm and interest in learning.

The in-school management team comprises the principal, deputy principal and two post holders. The members of this team approach their work in a collaborative and enthusiastic manner and make an important contribution to the effective management of the school. Duties attaching to particular posts reflect the needs of the school and are decided upon by the school staff and Board of Management. They are regularly reviewed. In order to complement the school’s recent commendable initiative to target numeracy within the special education domain, it is recommended that in the next review of posts, specific attention be given to duties attaching to curriculum leadership. The members of the in-school management team meet regularly within formal and informal settings. They liaise frequently with school staff and the wider community to meet the ongoing needs of the school and to promote initiatives which empower and involve all stakeholders.

1.4 Management of resources
The school which benefits from the sterling services of a caretaker and school secretary is presented in a very neat, stimulating and attractive manner. It has a general purpose room, a tarmacadam area and a small football field. All classrooms have a computer and internet access and two have interactive whiteboards. The school has been proactive over the past number of years in accumulating a wide range of resources to meet the needs of the curriculum. It is keenly aware of the value of mentoring and makes a very deliberate and concerted effort to assimilate and support new staff.

Teachers are keenly aware of the value of continuing professional development and have attended a wide range of courses. They are proactive in sharing and disseminating their learning from such courses. Teachers are provided with a range of opportunities to teach in various class settings and learning scenarios.

School staff are specifically commended for their efforts and devotion to providing in-school and after-school activities for the boys across a range of academic, pastoral, artistic and sporting
domains. Such activities include Gaelic football, soccer, chess, quizzes, basketball, rounders, gardening, green-flag activities, science projects, art activities, athletics, guitar lessons and French lessons for fifth and sixth classes.

1.5 Management of relationships and communication with the school community
Guided by a home-school links policy, the school adopts an open-door approach to communicating with parents. Such communication occurs on a number of fronts. The school communicates regularly with parents via newsletters, memos and letters. Parents are met regularly on an informal basis by teachers and the principal to discuss pupils’ progress. In some infant classes, parents are provided with an overview of the weekly programme to be taught. This is very effective in assisting parents to support their child’s learning. Formal parent teacher meetings are held in the spring term each year. In addition, each pupil receives a written report on his progress in the summer term each year. It is specifically notable and commendable that the school invites parents to respond to these written reports. Such invitation provides the school with valuable feedback on parental perspectives.

The school also meets the parents of junior infant pupils prior to their commencement in school. Parents of the fifth and sixth class pupils are met at the commencement of the first term in each academic year to outline parents’ role in supporting and guiding their children’s learning. It endeavours to involve parents and the general school community in its work in a variety of commendable ways. Examples of such involvement include: presentation nights, open days, sports days, Christmas celebrations, guest speakers, gardening activities, sports activities and pupils’ project work.

SN Bheinín Naofa Buachaillí shares its parents’ association with SN Bheinín Naofa, Cailíní. Both schools share the same campus, with considerable overlap between them in relation to various school activities and functions. Jointly, the two schools have a vibrant and industrious parents’ association. Meeting very regularly, this association seeks to support the school in a variety of ways. Guest speakers are invited to speak to parents or pupils. Fundraising activities such as raffles, table quizzes and cake sales are organised to finance various school resources and initiatives. The association communicates regularly with the school community through the use of fliers and newsletters. It encourages parents to become involved in the life of the school through activities which include garden duties, sports events, art displays, presentation nights and class drama productions. The association is involved in the development of the school plan. Its representatives stated that it is very satisfied with the education provided in the school. The association indicated that it is concerned about the future development of the school and its capacity to meet the needs of a fast growing enrolment.

1.6 Management of pupils
The management of pupils in this school is of a very high quality. A strong sense of order and efficiency permeates the school. Pupils are most courteous and pleasant, frequently greeting adults through the medium of Irish. They are very respectful of their peers and school staff. Equally, members of the school staff interact very positively with pupils showing respect and concern for their happiness and welfare.

2. Quality of school planning

2.1 Whole-school and classroom planning
Overall, the quality of whole-school planning is very good. In constructing school plans and policies, the school adopts a collaborative approach. Areas in need of attention are prioritised and
then a concerted approach which endeavours to draw on the expertise and interest of school staff is set in motion. Where appropriate, cuiditheoirí from the Primary Professional Development Service (PPDS) are also consulted. Policies are initially formulated on a trial basis, with feedback from the relevant school stakeholders being gleaned. With time they are distilled and finalised. A number of policies contain dates of review and ratification. It is recommended that all school policies should specify a date of review and ratification. In the next review of school organisational policies, it is recommended that the school’s critical incident policy be reviewed to take account of some recent changes in school personnel. The school has created a very wide range of administrative policies to facilitate its efficient, structured and effective operation. These policies are detailed and focused. All teachers have a copy of the school’s policies. Parents are informed that all school policies can be accessed in the school. Policies are in place for all aspects of the curriculum. These policies are detailed and purposeful in design.

The quality of classroom planning is good. All teachers write weekly and termly plans to guide teaching and learning in their classrooms. Such plans are detailed and show progression and development in their delineation of content. In some cases, teachers should make more specific reference to differentiation, integration and linkage. All teachers complete monthly progress reports. The school recently agreed a monthly report template which is focused and provides suitable scope to describe the work completed in each classroom.

2.2 Child protection policy and procedures
 Confirmation was provided that, in compliance with Department of Education and Science Primary Circular 0061/2006, the board of management has formally adopted the Child Protection Guidelines for Primary Schools (Department of Education and Science, September 2001). Confirmation was also provided 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.

3. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

3.1 English
 Teaching and learning in English is guided by a wide-ranging school plan. It is recommended that in the next review of this plan, attention be paid to structuring its various sections in a more coherent manner. The development of pupils’ oral language skills is undertaken by means of discrete lessons in English and lessons in other curriculum areas. Pupils display an enthusiasm for discussion and an ability to express themselves clearly. A variety of approaches such as group work, circle-time, project presentations to peers and to parents, class plays, debates and word games is utilised effectively to develop oral language and comprehension skills. There have also been a number of visitors to the school to speak to pupils on a wide variety of topics and this adds to the richness of language experiences provided for pupils. Pupils in the infant classes display a good knowledge of a range of appropriate rhymes and poetry. It is good practice that the core poetry identified in the school plan for study at each class level is being taught. In the infant classes, language learning possibilities across the curriculum need to be more detailed in teachers’ planning. In some classes, greater use could be made of pair work. In the senior classes, a greater emphasis needs to be placed on higher order questioning in order to probe further pupils’ responses and comments.
The teaching of reading is undertaken systematically. A variety of reading sources is in evidence including class readers, large format books, class novels, texts relating to other curriculum areas and library books. There is a good selection of library books available to pupils although in some classrooms there needs to be a greater number of factual books. Novels are effective in developing pupils’ imagination, comprehension and empathy in other curriculum areas most notably History. In most classes, teachers read to pupils on a daily basis and this is effective in presenting reading as an activity to be shared and enjoyed. A very good quality print-rich environment is in evidence in classrooms and within the school generally. A variety of initiatives such as silent reading and paired reading between older and younger classes add to the ways in which reading skills are developed. Lessons in reading are suitably structured using a good variety of appropriate activities to develop both decoding and comprehension skills. To optimise the impact of reading lessons, teachers might consider utilising a resource such as the Drumcondra English Profiles to identify class-specific reading skills and to seek to develop these in a co-ordinated fashion. The practice whereby some teachers maintain running records of pupils’ reading could usefully be employed by all teachers to monitor pupils’ progress and to provide for more focused teaching of specific skills where necessary.

The teaching of phonological awareness in the infant classes is effective and pupils demonstrate a good knowledge of letter sounds. A structured programme is followed in the teaching of spelling. A good variety of activities is utilised in this programme to develop both visual and auditory spelling skills. In some instances, there is a need for a more differentiated programme to take account of varying pupil ability levels. Personal dictionaries and strategies for spelling unfamiliar words are in evidence in many classrooms.

The teaching of grammar and punctuation is undertaken systematically. It is suggested that teachers utilise pupils’ own writing more explicitly as the basis for teaching the conventions of grammar and punctuation.

There are some good examples of the writing process being modelled in the infant classes. There is scope for this to be developed further through the creation of language experience charts in a variety of curriculum areas. Throughout the school, pupils have opportunities to engage in independent writing on a regular basis. A number of imaginative approaches to the development of pupils’ writing were in evidence during the evaluation and the pupils enjoyed engaging with them. Pupils have explored a variety of genres such as recount writing, diary writing, recipe writing, letter writing, book reports and poetry writing. They enjoy such activities and reveal pride in their finished work. According as pupils proceed through the school, it is suggested that teachers focus more explicitly on helping them to understand and apply the conventions of style in their writing.

In reviewing the school plan, it is suggested that sections on correcting pupils’ written work, the writing process and the cultivation of pupils’ spelling skills be re-visited to decide on and ensure implementation of policy within all classrooms in a co-ordinated fashion. Although handwriting is taught by means of an appropriate sequential programme, the presentation and lay-out of pupils’ written work requires attention in some classes. Documenting a whole-school approach to this would be of assistance in ensuring that this aspect of pupils’ learning develops in a co-ordinated manner as they proceed through the school.

3.2 Mathematics

Teaching and learning in Mathematics is guided by a well-formulated school plan. In particular, it provides a very clear and focused outline of the development of content from one class to another and makes very good provision for the use of methodologies and language. It is recommended in
the next review of this policy, that more specific reference be made to integration and to the use of mathematics trails in the school environment. The school has a good selection of resources for the implementation of the curriculum. Classrooms are very well presented as mathematics-rich environments. There is some scope for the further development of other areas of the school as mathematics-rich environments. On a whole-school level, the school recently embarked on a commendable initiative to target numeracy from classes second to sixth. This initiative combines the efforts of support teachers and mainstream class teachers in a concerted approach to identify and meet the needs of pupils who are underachieving in numeracy.

Pupils enjoy Mathematics lessons which are delivered in a lively and structured manner. They place suitable emphasis on mathematical language and on mental mathematics. Teachers make good use of resources, with some creative and commendable use of ICT being noted during the evaluation. Explanations are clear with suitable activities being planned for pupils to practise and develop their conceptual understanding. A number of teachers have devised creative and imaginative approaches to providing for mental arithmetic. Pupils are encouraged to ask questions.

In the main, teachers make very good provision for linkage and integration. In some cases, teachers could make greater provision for linking lesson content to the environment and experience of pupils. There is also scope for providing pupils with wider opportunities to create and evaluate their own problem-solving strategies. Teachers employ a variety of assessment techniques to monitor and assess pupils’ progress in Mathematics. During lessons, some teachers make very effective use of formative assessment techniques. It is recommended that the school investigates approaches for the wider use and dissemination of such practices.

### 3.3 History

The school plan for History is well constructed. It makes very clear, specific and systematic provision for the sequential development of content from class to class. An appendix, which provides a synopsis of local history, would be of use in the further development of this plan. In addition, greater emphasis on modern History and the use of methodologies should also be considered.

Teaching and learning in History is of a very good standard. Pupils demonstrate interest and curiosity in historical topics. Lessons make very good provision for the involvement of pupils, with teachers making very effective use of ICT resources, artefacts and visual aids to ignite and focus pupils’ interest in the subject. Teachers employ a range of methods in teaching History, with very effective use of collaborative learning being noted during the evaluation. Very good emphasis is placed on the development of the pupils’ skills as historians, most notably in terms of their research skills and their abilities to synthesise and reconstruct events from the past. In developing such skills, teachers make very effective use of stories, project work and the pupils’ own experiences.

In various classrooms and around the school, samples of the pupils’ projects are in evidence. The standard of work in these projects is very good. Teachers make very good provision for the study of local History and pupils have undertaken a number of studies in this regard. Lesson content in History is creatively integrated with a number of other subjects, most notably, Drama, English and Visual Arts.

### 3.4 Assessment

The school has developed a clear and focused assessment policy. It administers the Belfield Infant Assessment Profile (BIAP) in all junior infant classes. All pupils from first class to sixth class are
tested using standardised tests for English and Mathematics. Test results are used in a formative manner, most notably as one of the criteria in the identification of pupils in need of additional support. In addition to standardised tests, the school also makes use of a number of diagnostic tests, especially in English. Teachers use a variety of assessment practices which include teacher observation, teacher-designed tests and tasks, pupil portfolios and work samples. During the evaluation, some very effective and creative exemplars of the use of formative assessment techniques were observed. It is recommended that the school examines approaches to the sharing and dissemination of such good practice.

4. QUALITY OF SUPPORT FOR PUPILS

4.1 Pupils with special educational needs
Additional support is provided to pupils in both Mathematics and English. Appropriate planning is undertaken for this work. Care has been taken to identify the particular learning needs of each pupil and teaching activities correlate with these needs.

The opportunity to allocate a teacher to support pupils’ learning in Mathematics is relatively new to the school. Operating largely on a withdrawal basis, lessons in numeracy are targeted at pupils who are underachieving in the area. These lessons are delivered in a lively manner. They make good use of resources, games and discussion to ignite pupils’ interest and to prompt them to analyse and examine mathematical concepts. Pupils clearly enjoy these lessons which make suitable provision for their active involvement. Very good provision is in place for revision and for linkage. It is recommended that in the further development of this initiative, greater consideration be given to in-class support, to targeting intervention in the junior classes, and to the review of resource provision in this area. Such development could also dovetail with some of the senior in-class support in numeracy currently being delivered by the school principal and associated class teachers.

Pupils enjoy lessons in English which are delivered in a warm and affirming manner. Every effort is made to build the pupils’ confidence and to stimulate their interest in literacy. These lessons are well paced, making creative and effective use of resources. They are generally appropriately challenging. It is suggested that a greater emphasis be placed on assessment prior to teaching in order to optimise pupils’ learning. There is scope for greater co-ordination of writing activities between the support and the mainstream setting.

Some pupils also have the opportunity to engage in activities such as cookery and fretwork. The pupils in question derive great enjoyment from these activities. They are successful in helping pupils apply learning from other curriculum areas, in developing social skills through working together and developing study skills such as concentration and pride in work completed well. With pupils in the senior classes, it is suggested that they have a role in target setting. It is also suggested that time be spent at the beginning of each week with these pupils discussing their mainstream programme for the week and identifying expectations collaboratively. Similarly, at the end of the week, some time could be spent allowing pupils to review and discuss their progress in the mainstream setting.

4.2 Other supports for pupils: disadvantaged, minority and other groups
The school receives funding to provide support for pupils who have needs in relation to English as an Additional Language (EAL). Lessons are delivered in a very warm and affirming manner and make good use of activities and games to ignite pupils’ interest and to prompt them to partake in lessons. Teaching and learning in EAL lessons is guided by detailed and specific short-term
planning. It is recommended that more specific long-term plans be established to guide and direct such instruction.

5. CONCLUSION

The school has strengths in the following areas:

- The school benefits from the committed and focused leadership of the school principal and in-school management.
- School planning is of a very good quality.
- Every effort is made to provide the pupils with a rounded education where they experience success and derive confidence and enjoyment from their primary school experiences.
- A strong spirit of collaboration and enthusiasm exists among all school staff.
- Lessons are presented in a stimulating and structured manner.
- Support for pupils with special educational needs is delivered in a warm and nurturing manner.
- Pupils reveal pride and interest in their work.

The following key recommendation is made in order to further improve the quality of education provided by the school:

- It is recommended that in the further development of the school’s recent initiative to target numeracy, greater consideration be given to in-class support, to targeting intervention in the junior classes, and to the review of resource provision in this area.

Post-evaluation meetings were held with the staff and the board of management where the draft findings and recommendations of the evaluation were presented and discussed.

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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 welcome the whole school evaluation report and are pleased that it affirms the good work being done in the school and recognises the efforts being made “to provide the pupils with a rounded education where they experience success and derive confidence and enjoyment from their primary school experiences”.

The board wish to express their gratitude to the inspectors who carried out the report.

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 recommendation in the report has been noted by the board of management.