Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Scoil Mhuire Naofa
Menlough, Ballinasloe,
Co. Galway
Uimhir rolla: 17877P

Date of inspection: 26 November 2009
WHOLE-SCHOOL EVALUATION
A whole-school evaluation of Scoil Mhuire Naofa was undertaken in November, 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 Irish, English, Mathematics and Social, Personal and Health Education. 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.

INTRODUCTION – SCHOOL CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND
Scoil Mhuire Naofa is a co-educational primary school situated beside the main road in the village of Menlough, Ballinasloe, Co. Galway. There is a strong community spirit in the village and the school, with its long tradition of high quality provision, is a source of pride for the community. School records indicate very good attendance levels by the present cohort of pupils. Enrolments in the school have increased substantially in recent years and further increases are projected. The following table provides an overview of the enrolment and staffing in the school at the time of the evaluation:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pupils enrolled in the school</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainstream classes in the school</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers on the school staff</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainstream class teachers</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers working in support roles</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special needs assistants</td>
<td>2 fulltime, 1 part time</td>
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</tbody>
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1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT

1.1 Characteristic spirit, mission or vision
The school is under the patronage of the Catholic Archbishop of Tuam and it espouses a Christian ethos. It aims to foster an inclusive environment for all pupils regardless of their ability, creed or race. The school’s vision statement is beneficially articulated to provide direction for all the stakeholders. Thus, the board of management, staff and parents work closely together in their efforts to create a happy, safe and tolerant environment where a love of learning may be fostered and where pupils may be enabled to develop a positive self-image and the confidence to strive towards their unique potential.

1.2 Board of management
The board of management is properly constituted and meets at least once a term. Minutes of meetings are carefully maintained and indicate that, of late, the work of the board has encompassed health and safety issues, policy formulation and review, the appointment of staff, the provision of accommodation and resources, the upgrading of the school’s technological facilities and the development of the school grounds. The board works in an efficient manner with members taking responsibility for specific tasks and reporting to the full board as necessary. The board has identified a number of priorities for future attention including provision of additional accommodation and improving the pupil collection and set-down arrangements. Members of the board recently availed of training during which it was highlighted that school accounts should be
audited or certified annually. The board is now seeking to address this matter in association with other schools in the archdiocese. The board is to be commended on the maintenance and development work carried out to date on the school premises. The school’s four classrooms were originally built in 1956. Two cloakrooms have since been remodelled to provide a staffroom and a learning-support/resource room. Due to the limited size of the classrooms, the school’s technological resources are located in what was originally the fourth classroom. As the school has no hall or general-purposes room, this fourth classroom is also used for the organisation of drama activities, circle time and infant games. A small prefabricated unit has recently been purchased to accommodate a second learning-support/resource teacher. The school now requires complete refurbishment to include, among other things, a supplementary teaching room with access to an appropriately equipped multi-sensory area. The school is cleaned regularly, the grounds are very well maintained and the classrooms are bright and attractively decorated.

The school complies with departmental guidelines and regulations in relation to length of the school day, circulation of the school plan and development of specific policies. Currently, one of the class groupings is in excess of the recommended class size and the school is requested to make every effort in the future to distribute the pupils in a manner compliant with the guidelines.

The board is very aware of the importance of its support for staff development and for curriculum implementation. The principal has engaged with the Leadership Development for Schools service and the board is supportive of the deputy principal engaging with the service in the future. The board is currently focussing on supporting the staff and pupils in their efforts to achieve Green School status and to use the school’s technology facilities to full advantage. Teaching materials, including software, have been purchased for each curricular area and the need for further resources is under constant review.

1.3 In-school management
The in-school management team consists of the principal, deputy principal and one special duties teacher. The principal, appointed in 2006, maintains a positive attitude, has a clear vision for the development of the school, exhibits strong leadership qualities and acts as a very effective role model as regards classroom practice. Communication with the staff, board and parent body is conducted in a very open, caring and professional manner. The school climate is characterised by positive working relations with the principal strongly acknowledging the support and the commitment of all the staff members.

The deputy principal and special duties teacher provide a very high level of support to the principal. They are regularly involved in decision-making and in many aspects of school organisation, in addition to fulfilling the specific duties attached to their posts. Duties are regularly reviewed and currently include supervision, coordination of special education provision, development of the school website, organisation of swimming and school tours, management of the Green Schools initiative, preparation for religious ceremonies and celebrations, maintenance of corridor and window displays, and evaluation of the English and Irish curricular programmes.

1.4 Management of relationships and communication with the school community
The school has established a number of very effective channels of communication with the parent body and the school community. The school’s website provides up-to-date information on the school, the local area, community events, sporting activities, pupil achievements and the ongoing work for the Green Schools award. Parents receive regular notes and letters, a newsletter each term and an annual report at the end of the school year. School-related items are also regularly included in the local church newsletter. A pack containing specific school policy statements is
provided to parents. Parent-teacher meetings and an induction day for parents of new pupils are annual events. Parents may also arrange to meet teachers at other times.

A conscious effort is made to involve parents in the life of the school. Parents have been given opportunities to participate in formulating policy statements including those on healthy eating, mobile phone usage, enrolment, discipline and homework. They assist with maintenance, school concerts, celebrations and tours. They actively support the pupils’ participation in a wide range of sporting events by attending matches and providing transport. Parents also participate in surveys and questionnaires pertaining to the pupils’ work in different curricular areas. The board is very encouraging of parental involvement and is currently assisting with the revival of the school’s parent association. To this end, contact has been made with the National Parents Council and a meeting to clarify the role of a parent association is to be convened in cooperation with other schools in the parish.

1.5 Management of pupils
The pupils are currently divided into a dual class grouping at infant level while the pupils in first, second and third classes and those in fourth, fifth and sixth classes form two multi-grade classes respectively. The pupils, in general, are very well mannered. They cooperate readily with their teachers and with other staff members. They are eager to engage with visitors to the school and are confident in their communications. They participate in a wide range of activities including quizzes, Knex challenges, local and national art competitions, story, letter and poetry writing competitions, skills-training programmes in Gaelic games, inter-school competitions, church-related activities and community events.

2. QUALITY OF SCHOOL PLANNING

2.1 Whole-school and classroom planning
The quality of whole-school planning is good. The school plan includes a policy statement on each curricular area and a wide range of administrative policies pertinent to the context of the school. The curricular policies provide valuable guidance for the teachers. Future development of the curricular policies should focus on clarifying how content is to be managed in the dual class or multi-grade situation and on identifying specific opportunities for cross-curricular thematic studies. All teachers fulfil the requirements in relation to the provision of forward planning and the maintenance of records of work completed. Further refinement of classroom planning could be effected by ensuring that all short-term objectives are stated in terms of the learning outcomes for the pupils rather than focussing on teacher intention as regards the work to be covered.

2.2 Child protection policy and procedures
Confirmation was provided that, in compliance with Department of Education and Skills Primary Circular 0061/2006, the board of management has formally adopted the Department’s Child Protection Guidelines for Primary Schools (Published 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 Language

Gaeilge

The teachers use the communicative approach very successfully to achieve high standards of understanding, oracy, reading and writing in the different classes. The teachers are very willing to use Irish to communicate among themselves, with pupils and with visitors. Listening activities are capably organised in each classroom. Interesting materials are used to input a wide range of language. Both class teaching and group work take place and different age groups are mixed very effectively during the organisation of paired work. Gradually the pupils are enabled in a very enjoyable way to use questioning words, prepositions, adjectives, verbs and adverbs. Great pleasure and benefit are derived from playing games and reciting poems. Praiseworthy emphasis is placed on practising continuous speech in addition to giving the short answer. Textbooks are judiciously used to complete different reading and writing activities but it would be beneficial now to place earlier emphasis on personal writing.

Irish

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The manner in which aspects of cultural appreciation are developed in the school is praiseworthy. The pupils play a range of tunes on the tin whistles musically and they are able to sing a lovely collection of songs including rounds, traditional songs and newly composed songs very sweetly. The main characteristics of the school approach to teaching Irish should now be embedded in the school plan. It would be of value to clarify the range of language for the different class levels by forming sub-themes under the main language themes and by identifying the grammar to be covered at each class level. The language appreciation programme and the cultural appreciation programme should also be included.
**English**

English is competently taught at all class levels. Discrete lessons and an integrated approach are used successfully to advance listening and communication skills. Pupils are encouraged to question, to engage in discussion and to respond orally to written texts. Pupils are exposed to a wide range of poetry from the infant classes onwards. The work observed in the middle standards is particularly worthy of note with pupils being given opportunities to hear poetry read expressively and to discuss the choice of language, the sounds, tone, rhythm and atmosphere of the poems. It would be of value now to include in the school plan an outline of how poetry may be approached at the different class levels and how poetic techniques may be appropriately explored.

Classroom libraries, class novels, graded schemes, worksheets and carefully arranged displays of print are among the materials used to foster competence in reading and writing. A well structured phonological awareness programme is taught in collaboration with the support teachers. Big books are used to good effect to engage pupils in the reading process and to develop understanding of the conventions of print. Appropriate emphasis is placed on clear articulation and expressive reading as pupils advance through the school. The pupils attain good standards in reading and engage with interest in discussing characters and themes from the stories or books they have read. The school plan provides comprehensive guidance in relation to the teaching of spelling at each class level. Pupils learn to spell with accuracy and they are provided with opportunities to write in different genres and for different audiences. Writing tasks are carefully differentiated and the pupils develop good presentation skills. It would be of value to review the school policy for handwriting so that all pupils may be enabled to develop a cursive style of handwriting in appropriate stages.

**3.2 Mathematics**

The teaching and learning in Mathematics is of a very high standard. Attractive, stimulating, mathematics-rich environments support the work in each classroom. The organised activities are very well structured and paced. An appropriate balance is maintained between the teaching of concepts, skills and problem-solving. Commendable emphasis is placed on the language of mathematics and oral work is a significant feature of the lessons at each class level. Simple number patterns are explored very skilfully at infant level and number rhymes and songs are appropriately used to consolidate learning. The pupils are exposed to progressively more challenging games, drills and activities as they proceed through the school and they are enabled to recall number facts with ease and confidence. Attention is drawn to mathematics in the immediate environment and problem-solving is embedded in real life situations. Pupils are encouraged to work collaboratively, to discuss problems, to choose materials and to engage in hands-on activity. Appropriate attention is placed on number formation in the infant classes and on the presentation of work in the middle and senior classes. The school is encouraged to invest in future resources particularly in the area of measures and to ensure that an adequate supply of basic mathematical equipment and mathematical games is permanently located in each classroom.

**3.3 Social, Personal and Health Education**

In keeping with the school’s stated philosophy and aims, class programmes in this area of the curriculum place emphasis on identifying and celebrating the uniqueness of each individual. Discrete time is used to organise a range of suitable activities to assist pupils in developing a positive self-image, good self-esteem and appropriate social and communication skills. Talk and discussion, circle time, paired work, story and poetry are used effectively to enable pupils to reflect on their strengths and abilities, to explore contexts for decision-making and to consider the consequences of the decisions made. The promotion of environmental awareness, the
development of a sense of pride of place and the nurturing of cooperation among the pupils, parents, staff and the wider community are also significant elements of the programme. Individual policy statements on such areas as healthy eating, anti-bullying, relationships and sexuality education, substance use, health and safety, and child protection underpin the implementation of the programme. The teachers draw on a range of resources including Walk Tall, Let’s Talk, Stay Safe and Bí Folláin. Guest speakers are invited to address parents and pupils on certain topics.

3.4 Assessment
Teacher observations, objective-based checklists, teacher-designed tests, standardised tests, analyses of work samples and the compilation of pupil profiles and digital folders are among the techniques used to record and monitor pupil progress. The Belfield Infant Assessment Profile, the Middle Infant Screening Test and Non-Reading Intelligence Tests are used appropriately to identify pupils for supplementary teaching. Parent-teacher meetings are held once a year to inform parents of their children’s progress. Written reports are to be issued to parents at the end of the current school year. The school policy on assessment mainly focuses on assessment for the purposes of identifying pupils with learning difficulties and special educational needs. There is scope to develop the policy further and to expand the uses of assessment in line with the most recent guidelines on assessment issued to schools by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment.

4. QUALITY OF SUPPORT FOR PUPILS

4.1 Pupils with special educational needs
The school provides the base for two learning-support/resource teachers. The second teacher is recently appointed and is shared with a neighbouring school. The teachers provide supplementary teaching mainly on a withdrawal basis. The provision encompasses early intervention programmes, group programmes in literacy and numeracy and programmes specifically tailored to the needs of individual pupils. Class groups are also withdrawn periodically to work on specific aspects of the English curriculum. The school has three special needs assistants, one of whom works on a part-time basis. The special needs assistants work in consultation with the support and classroom teachers and care for the pupils in a manner which allows them to develop independent life skills and confidence in engaging in social interactions.

Through a process of consultation with class teachers, parents and appropriate outside agencies, comprehensive learning programmes are prepared for each pupil identified with learning difficulties or with special educational needs. It is suggested that in some instances the pupils’ competencies could be more clearly detailed in order to establish a distinct baseline from which the programmes commence. Short-term planning incorporates very clearly stated short-term learning targets. Commendable efforts are made to provide attractive teaching and learning materials and to structure individual and group learning activities in a purposeful manner. In particular instances, a very creative approach is adopted to the development of pre-reading skills. Further development of the support services in the school should seek to provide more appropriate accommodation in which the sensory deficits of some of the pupils may be addressed. Consideration should also be given to developing the reporting and consultation process further in preparation for the full implementation of the legislation for the education of persons with special educational needs.
5. **CONCLUSION**

The school has strengths in the following areas:

- The school has a very interested and active board of management whose members give generously of their time and expertise in pursuit of the school’s stated aims.
- A very positive relationship exists between the school and the parent body, and parents are eager and willing to support and assist the work of the school.
- The pupils are exposed to a broad and balanced curriculum and achieve very good standards in each of the curricular areas evaluated.
- A high level of care and attention is given to pupils with learning difficulties and special educational needs.
- The pupils in the school are commended for their attentiveness, diligence and courtesy.

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

- There is a need to agree a programme of development for the school premises.
- Further development of curricular policy statements should focus on reflecting the current good practice and guiding future curriculum implementation particularly in relation to the content to be covered at each class level.
- The school is encouraged to develop its assessment policy and to incorporate into it guidelines in relation to both assessment for learning and assessment of learning.
- The support teachers should continue working as a team to develop agreed approaches to planning, consultation, assessment and reporting.

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.

*Published, December 2010*
Appendix

School response to the report

Submitted by the Board of Management
Area 1  Observations on the content of the inspection report

We accept the content of 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.

- A programme of development has since been agreed for the school premises.
- Curricular policy statements are currently been updated to reflect the current good practice.
- The assessment policy has since been reviewed and updated.
- Support teachers have continued to work as a team and have taken part in SESS and INTO online courses.