1. Introduction

Scoil Sheosaimh Naofa is a co-educational vertical primary school under the patronage of the Catholic Bishop of Meath. One hundred and twenty four pupils are enrolled in the school and attendance levels are very high. 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.

2. Summary of Findings and Recommendations for Further Development

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

- The board of management and parent body are highly supportive of the school.
- The principal promotes an inclusive and collegial school environment and fosters effective links between the school and members of the wider community.
- Discipline is very good and a positive learning environment was observed throughout the school during the evaluation.
- The teachers are hard-working and conscientious and demonstrate a firm commitment to the pupils.
- Pupil achievement in Mathematics and reading is very good.
- The school provides very good support for pupils with additional learning needs.

The following main recommendations are made:

- Specific and measurable targets for school development should be set and reviewed annually as part of the school self-evaluation process.
- Teachers’ short-term planning and monthly progress records should be based on the content objectives of the curriculum.
- A whole-school approach to writing should be created to ensure that all classes are exposed to an appropriate range of writing genres and that there is a consistent implementation of the school’s policy on penmanship and presentation.
- The school environment should be used to develop and extend pupils’ skills in Science and Mathematics.
3. Quality of School Management

- The work of the board of management is very good. The board is committed and well informed and members generously share individual talents and expertise for the benefit of the school. Financial accounts are audited and the board is commended for its incremental maintenance and improvement of the school's infrastructure. The length of school recreation intervals requires review to ensure compliance with Department Circular 11/95.

- The principal promotes an inclusive and collegial school environment and fosters effective links between the school and members of the wider community. The provision of a holistic education and a diverse range of learning experiences for pupils are articulated in his vision for the school. The deputy principal and special duties teacher undertake their assigned duties diligently. A review of these duties should be undertaken. A more formalised approach to in-school management meetings is advised.

- The school has a suitable range of teaching resources and these are used effectively by most teachers. There is some evidence of the use of information and communication technology (ICT) as a teaching resource. This practice should be extended.

- Discipline is very good and many pupils report that they like coming to school. A respectful and positive atmosphere is evident in all classrooms. The board is advised to review the current approach to the supervision and organisation of the playground at recreation periods and to satisfy itself that it meets the needs of all pupils.

- The management of relationships within the school and with the wider community is very good. The parents' association is commended for its support of the school and parents are involved in specific curricular projects in some classrooms. This very good practice should be further developed. The results of parents' questionnaires indicate that there is scope to develop the collaborative role of parents in the formulation of school policies. Data from questionnaires administered to parents indicate that parents feel welcome in the school and that there are good arrangements for parent-teacher meetings.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- The quality of organisational and administrative planning is good. A review of pertinent policies is recommended.

- There is scope for the development of whole-school curriculum planning and there is need to contextualise existing plans to reflect the multi-grade and split-class organisation of the school. These plans should include clear guidance on curriculum content for each class division and also ensure progression in pupils' learning outcomes across recurring themes and topics in a range of subject areas.

- There is considerable variation in the quality of teachers' planning and preparation. In some cases, there is an over-reliance on the structure and content of textbooks. Where long-term planning was good, a balanced programme of work was outlined across the strands and strand units of the curriculum and short-term planning reflected clear learning outcomes for pupils. A whole-school approach to teachers' planning and the maintenance of progress records is recommended.

- The process of school-self evaluation is at an early stage of development. Following an incidental inspection in April 2011, the school has collated the results of standardised tests. The use of this data underpins decisions made at school level. A range of self-
evaluation processes should now be developed that would allow for more in-depth analysis of curriculum implementation and school development.

- 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 overall quality of teaching and learning in Irish is good. Pupils demonstrate an appropriate understanding of the spoken language and in some classes pupils are able to use verbs competently and communicate in Irish. To ensure progression from class to class, an emphasis on language input and structure and further opportunities created for pupils to practise and consolidate the language during the communicative phase of the lesson is recommended. Most pupils read with understanding and good pronunciation and achieve a good standard in Irish writing. It is recommended that creative writing be further developed.

- The overall quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in English is good. Pupils’ attainment levels in reading are very good and a high number of pupils can read fluently with appropriate expression. The systematic use of a wider range of differentiated graded reading material is recommended to further support and challenge the range of reading abilities. Many pupils write competently, coherently and with confidence. Further opportunities for pupils to write about topics of interest to themselves, a systematic approach to process writing and the consistent implementation of the school’s penmanship policy is recommended.

- The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in Mathematics is very good. In the majority of classrooms, lessons are carefully structured with an appropriate focus on the use of mathematical language. The use of concrete resources and visual materials was central to many of the learning activities observed. Most pupils could recall number facts and complete computational tasks with speed and accuracy. Many pupils displayed an age appropriate ability in relation to problem-solving skills. Pupils’ attainment levels in standardised tests are very good.

- The quality and teaching and learning and pupil achievement in Science is good. Many pupils can confidently speak about the outcomes of investigations using a well-developed science vocabulary. In some instances, pupils can confidently apply scientific processes to suitable realistic contexts. Participation in the Green School’s Programme is successful in fostering positive attitudes to environmental awareness and care. In some contexts,
learning experiences provided are primarily based on textbooks. The school should ensure that the science programme being implemented reflects the full breadth and balance of the curriculum. There is a varied approach to pupils’ recording in Science. This should be reviewed.

- The overall quality of teaching and learning is good. Lessons are generally well structured and pitched at a level appropriate to pupils’ learning needs. There was evidence of some group work and the school is advised to extend and embed more frequent pair work and small group work in lesson presentation. It is recommended that further opportunities for pupils to use ICT as a learning tool be created. Additional learning experiences such as the Green School’s Programme, participation in the Modern Languages in Primary Schools Initiative (MLPSI) and a range of extracurricular activities adds variety to pupils’ learning experiences.

- Appropriate standardised and diagnostic assessment practices are in evidence. It is recommended that a whole-school approach to informal assessment at classroom level be implemented. There is potential to enable pupils to use and apply assessment for learning strategies to their own work. The school should document its assessment policy. The school is also advised to provide to parents the results of pupils’ standardised test results in written format as required by Department Circular 0138/2006.

6. Quality of Support for Pupils

- Very good quality support is provided for pupils with special educational needs. The current model of provision includes withdrawal and in-class support for early intervention. To further support and challenge the range of abilities, differentiation for early intervention and the extension of in-class support to other classroom contexts is recommended.

- Good quality individual plans are developed for pupils in receipt of support and there is effective collaboration with mainstream classroom teachers and pupils’ parents. Pupil-teacher relationships are affirming and respectful.

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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

We very much welcomed the visit of the Department of Education and Skills Schools Inspector to Scoil Náisiúnta Naomh Seosamh, Boyerstown, Navan for a week on 21st October 2011. We saw it as an opportunity to comprehensively review our teaching and learning practices, to review our organisational policies and to examine closely the relationships between pupils, teachers, parents and management in order to ensure a safe and fruitful learning environment and to ensure each pupil is catered for spiritually, emotionally and academically. We would like to thank the Inspector for her professional approach to the evaluation and for being positive and constructive throughout all elements of the evaluation. We are very proud of our school and of the pupils in our school and we are very appreciative of the high levels of effort shown by all members of staff, teaching and ancillary. The significant role of parents in the school and in the childrens’ learning continues to be a central facet in the life of our school. The Board of Management plays an important part in providing a safe learning environment for all staff and pupils and ensuring that support be provided where needed to all staff and pupils. The Board also ensures that the highest teaching standards are maintained in the school. We are very fortunate that we are supported strongly by the wider community in Boyerstown and this positive link which has been identified in the report has benefited the school and its pupils enormously over the years. We acknowledge the fact that discipline is reported as being very good in our school and that a positive learning environment was found throughout the classes. We note the high attainment levels of pupils particularly in Mathematics and English and Irish reading. We note also the specific mention of our very good support for pupils with additional learning needs highlighting the quality of our learning support and resource teachers and our special needs assistants.

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

We have reviewed our recreation intervals to ensure compliance with Department Circular 11/95. We have restructured the supervision arrangements in the playground at recreation intervals to meet the needs of all our pupils. A review was undertaken of our in-school management meetings and a more formalised approach has been adopted. We noted the positive response by the inspector towards our approach to ICT in the school as a teaching resource and we are happy to confirm that this programme is to be further extended in the future. We wish to build on the excellent relationship with the parents in the school and we will further develop the collaborative role of parents in the formulation of school policies. We feel it is a wonderful reflection on our school that practically all the pupils that were surveyed reported that they enjoyed coming to school. We appreciate the constructive comments on our whole-school curricular planning and we are developing these plans further to ensure a more streamlined and cohesive approach in this area.

We were pleased to receive an IT programme that now allows us to more easily collate our standardised test results in a graphical form meaning teachers and learning support/resource teachers are facilitated in interpreting data and ensuring improved learning outcomes for all pupils.

We acknowledge the recommendations made by the Inspector in certain curricular areas and as we continuously review these subject areas we plan to implement these recommendations. It has been decided to document our current standardised diagnostic and informal assessment practices into formal assessment policy. This will include AOL (Assessment of Learning) AFL (Assessment for Learning).

We look forward to continued progress in all aspects of our school.

Ní neart go cur le chéile.