1. Introduction

Scoil Chaitríona Naofa, situated in Oristown, Co Meath, is a Catholic primary school under the patronage of the Bishop of Meath. There are 125 pupils enrolled in the school and attendance is good. The board of management was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the report; a response was not received from the board.

2. Summary of Findings and Recommendations for Further Development

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

- Overall the standard of teaching and learning is very good.
- High standards are achieved by pupils in literacy and numeracy.
- The board of management actively supports the development of the school.
- The principal provides effective leadership within the school community.
- A dedicated teaching staff works collaboratively for the good of the school.
- The school enjoys a high level of support from the parents’ association and the parent body in general.
- Pupils are very courteous, well-behaved and enthusiastic learners.
- Effective strategies are in place to ensure purposeful communication between all members of the school community.

The following main recommendations are made:

- The whole-school planning process should be developed in order to effectively guide the review of school policy. A whole-school approach to classroom planning is also recommended.
- Ní mór athbhreithniú a dhéanamh ar mhúineadh na Gaeilge chun a chinntiú go bhfuil leanúnach ag teacht ar scileanna labhartha agus cumarsáide na ndaltaí. (The teaching of Irish should be reviewed to ensure the incremental development of pupils’ oral competencies and communicative skills).
- The development of cooperative teaching, including strategies to support in-class differentiated learning for pupils of varying abilities, is recommended.

3. Quality of School Management

- The quality of the work of the board of management is very good. It plans strategically and works purposefully to support the development of the school. Members fulfil clearly defined roles effectively. The board communicates regularly with the school community.
• Very good in-school management was evident. The dedicated principal leads the school in a competent manner. Positive relationships are built with members of the community to optimise their contribution to school life. The facilitation of distributive leadership and capacity building among staff is praiseworthy. The instructional leadership of the principal is reflected in the sustained focus on pupils’ holistic development and individual achievement.

• The members of the in-school management team undertake their duties with commitment and competently support the principal in the efficient organisation of the school. In the planned review of postholders’ duties, greater emphasis should be placed on curricular leadership. A collegial spirit is in evidence among the teaching staff.

• The management of resources is good. Staff is deployed appropriately. The use of gender as a criterion for organising combination classes should be reconsidered in line with the school’s policy of inclusion and current legislation. An extensive range of resources is purposefully employed to support learning. The use of information and communication technology by pupils in their learning should be further extended.

• Positive relationships have been cultivated between the board, the staff and the parent community. Parent representatives attested to the effectiveness of a range of home-school communication channels which reflect the school’s open and welcoming ethos. The parents’ association makes a significant contribution to the school’s development in a variety of ways which include policy development and involvement in school-based activities. Questionnaires administered to parents during the evaluation indicate that parents are very satisfied with the work of the school.

• The management of pupils is very good. Pupils are treated with care and respect. They are enthusiastic and motivated in their learning and demonstrate positive levels of confidence and self-esteem. Pupils are provided with some opportunities to actively participate in relevant decision-making, for example, through their involvement in the Green Schools initiative.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

• In general the quality of school planning and school self-evaluation processes is satisfactory. Some organisational policies require review in order to reflect the current context of the school. Some curricular policies are clear and give appropriate guidance for their implementation. There is scope, however, to clarify how progression of pupils’ knowledge and skills is planned for in certain aspects of curriculum areas.

• A development plan has been devised to facilitate school self-review. In its further development specific targets should be identified that can be achieved within a realistic timeframe. An action plan should also be devised to guide this process.

• The quality of classroom planning varies. It is advised that a whole-school approach to classroom planning be adopted. The maintenance of monthly progress records should also be reviewed to support the implementation and review of the school plan.

• 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 and learning is very good. Effective whole-class teaching combined with purposeful pair and group work create industrious learning classroom environments. Teacher expectations are high for pupils’ learning outcomes. Pupils’ higher thinking and problem solving skills are effectively developed. Further development of cooperative teaching would enhance differentiated provision. Teachers employ a range of assessment tools to monitor pupils’ progress. In general, records are maintained carefully and results analysed. The extension of this good practice to all areas of the curriculum is advised.

- Baintear caighdeán maith amach i ngnéithe de theagasc agus d’fhoghlaim na Gaeilge. Is féidir le roinnt daltaí abairtí simplí a struchtúrú go neamhspleách agus iad a úsáid i gcomhthéacsanna éagsúla. Ní mór, áfach, a gcuid scileanna teanga agus cumarsáide a fhorbairt a thuilleadh ar bhonn uile scoile. Moltar plé an uile-scoile, bunaithe ar mhór-théamaí an churaclaim, a leagan amach agus a chur i bhfeidhm do labhairt na Gaeilge. Tá sé ar chumas na ndaltaí téacsanna simplí a léamh a léamh le tuiscint áirithe. Déantar cleachtaí éagsúla scribhneoireachta agus éiríonn le is na daltaí abairtí simplí a scriobh go cruinn. Ní mór soláthar breise leabhar a chur ar fáil chun taithi níos leithne léitheoireachta a thabhairt do dhaoine a shaibhriú.

- A good standard is achieved in aspects of teaching and learning in Irish. Some pupils can structure simple sentences independently and use them in different contexts. However, their language acquisition and communicative competencies need to be further developed on a whole-school basis. It is recommended that a whole-school plan based on the main themes of the curriculum is devised and implemented for all Irish. Pupils are able to read simple texts with fluency and understanding. Various genre are practised in writing and pupils write simple sentences accurately. A wider range of books is required to enhance their reading experiences and to enrich their language.

- The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in English is very good. Pupils’ receptive and expressive language skills are appropriately developed. Commendable attention is directed to the recitation, appreciation and creation of poetry throughout the school. Pupils demonstrate a high standard in reading commensurate with their abilities. The content and presentation of pupils’ writing is very good.

- The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in Mathematics is very good. Pupils display a keen understanding of mathematical concepts and apply a range of procedures with confidence. Suitable emphasis is placed on the acquisition and use of appropriate mathematical language. Pupils are provided with a range of opportunities to develop their reasoning and problem solving skills.

- The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in Geography is good. The majority of pupils demonstrate a satisfactory knowledge of local, regional and national environments and their sense of place is appropriately fostered. The further development of pupils’ geographical investigation skills would enhance their learning. Positive attitudes have been cultivated towards care of the environment through the work of the Green School’s Programme.
6. Quality of Support for Pupils

- The quality of support for pupils with special educational needs (SEN) is very good. Appropriate education programmes have been developed. The range of screening and diagnostic tests employed to identify and review suitable learning targets is praiseworthy. Interactions observed in the supplementary teaching setting were very affirming and encouraging of pupils and commendable progress was evident in learning. A variety of methodologies and learning activities are effectively employed to enhance learning. Creditable in-class support is provided for some pupils with SEN. It is recommended that the full potential of this strategy be further explored to facilitate differentiated programmes of work for pupils of varying abilities.

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