Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Scoil Naomh Molaise
Grange, County Sligo
Uimhir rolla: 18575E

Date of inspection: 26 November 2010
1. Introduction

Scoil Naomh Molaise is a sixteen teacher co-educational, primary school in Grange, County Sligo. The school is under the patronage of the Catholic Bishop of Elphin. There are 275 pupils enrolled in the school and the pupils' overall attendance is good. Four subjects were evaluated during this evaluation: English, Irish, Mathematics and Science. 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:

- Scoil Naomh Molaise is a very welcoming, positive school which effectively nurtures and values the pupils in its care.

- The board of management is effective in supporting the work of the school. The chairperson assists in creating a purposeful atmosphere and shows commitment towards the development of the characteristic ethos of the school.

- The principal provides very good leadership to the teaching staff and school community. He has a clear vision for school development and improvement and leads by example. He has initiated very good processes of school self review and planning.

- All teachers work in a very conscientious manner and are committed to school improvement.

- The quality of teaching and learning in Science is very good and much of the work undertaken in English and Mathematics is commendable.

- School assemblies are very well organised and community involvement in school-related curricular activities is highly praiseworthy.

The following main recommendations are made:

- Moltar athbhreithniú a dhéanamh ar mhúineadh agus ar fhoghlaim na Gaeilge agus béim bhreise a chur ar an tréimhse chumarsáide le linn an teagaisc chun caighdeán cumarsáide na ndaltaí sa teanga a thairbméadóir níos mó. (It is recommended that the teaching and learning of Irish are reviewed and that further emphasis be placed on the communicative approach during teaching to develop the pupils’ standard of communication in the language.)

- Further differentiated teaching approaches should be implemented across the curriculum aided by appropriate planning and, where possible, team teaching.
3. Quality of School Management

- The board of management works effectively. It has prepared a strategic plan for 2010-12 for the development of the school and this structured approach to its work is commendable. Board members actively support the work of the school and engage in policy development and review. The board supports the school’s self-assessment procedures and has identified the provision for Irish as an area that needs further development. The board is satisfied with the pupils’ overall achievement. It intends to promote greater parental involvement in policy development as this is an area where there is scope for development currently.

- The in-school management team works very successfully. The principal displays strong leadership skills and promotes school review and self-evaluation. He demonstrates efficient organisational skills and is committed to developing teamwork and collaboration. He visits classrooms regularly and uses school assemblies very effectively as a way to involve and encourage pupils. The other members of the team work very diligently in support of the principal and the school community and they are committed to school improvement. It is recommended that the duties of post-holders be aligned more closely to the priority needs of the school in areas such as literacy, assessment and Irish.

- School resources are managed very well. Teachers are allocated appropriately to classes; many comprise dual-class units. However, a class allocation policy would be beneficial in order that teachers have equitable opportunities to avail of both mainstream and support teaching experiences in a systematic and cyclical manner. Additional classroom resources are needed for example, a greater store of differentiated reading materials, and enhanced library resources are recommended for Irish and English across the school. Each classroom should also have a greater store of mathematical equipment. The school needs to increase the pupils’ access to information and communications technologies (ICT). The board is in consultation with the Department of Education and Skills in its attempts to replace the considerable number of temporary rooms with permanent accommodation. In the interim, a whole-school inter-communication system is being researched by the board; this would be a worthwhile acquisition.

- The school benefits from a dedicated ancillary team which includes a secretary, a cleaner and a caretaker. The school and grounds are maintained to a high standard. The special needs assistants show considerable commitment to personal professional development. They support their assigned pupils effectively in the classrooms and during recreational periods.

- The management of relationships with the community is effective. The parents’ association supports the work of the school very well and is satisfied with how the school provides for the pupils in its care. The association welcome the opportunity, recently presented to it, to become more centrally involved in the school planning process. The majority of parents indicated, in the questionnaires distributed as part of the evaluation, that they were happy with the school. The majority also indicated that the parents’ association does not keep them informed sufficiently about its work.

- Pupils are managed very effectively. The majority of pupils, in their responses to questionnaires administered during the evaluation, indicated that that they get on well with other pupils and are aware of the school and class rules. A small number of pupils have been retained for a repeat year. All future decisions in respect of the retention of pupils should be made in full compliance with the conditions outlined in Circular 32/03.
4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- The quality of planning and self-evaluation is good. A large array of organisational policies is in place and policies have been discussed and ratified at board level. Good work has been undertaken in curriculum planning. However some curricular plans need to be revisited so that differentiated teaching approaches are promoted more appropriately at each class level. It is recommended that there be further review of the Irish plan and, in particular, the communicative approach to teaching and learning. The implementation of an e-plan should be of benefit in enhancing the use of ICT in teaching and learning in many classrooms.

- The school is beginning to engage beneficially in self-evaluation. The priorities identified by the teachers accord well with the evaluation findings regarding Irish and ICT and demonstrate the teachers’ self-awareness and willingness to improve provision.

- The quality of teachers’ individual classroom planning varies across the school. While all teachers provide both long and short-term planning, there is scope for development in relation to the quality of detail provided in several cases.

- 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

- There is satisfactory provision for Irish throughout the school and a positive attitude is cultivated towards the language. Weekly Irish phrases are introduced on a whole-school basis and Irish is regularly used in an informal manner. Language games and role-play
are used in some instances however there is scope for development in some aspects of the pupils' learning. There is a need for progressive development of communication in the language from class to class. Group and pair work and co-operative learning approaches should be used to practice the language regularly. The majority of pupils can read with fluency. Further differentiated reading materials are required so that pupils have enhanced opportunities for real reading. Writing standards overall are satisfactory. Pupils can answer simple comprehension questions based on the reading scheme satisfactorily. It is recommended that comprehension materials are augmented in the school. Functional writing is undertaken regularly and monitored carefully. It is recommended that the common errors made by pupils in their writing are recorded and reviewed regularly. Further planning for independent writing using a variety of techniques including the use of writing frames and pair-writing is recommended. Objective-based assessment checklists should be devised to evaluate pupils' progress in speaking, reading and writing in Irish.

The quality of teaching, learning and pupils' achievement in English is good overall. Pre-reading is very well attended and as pupils progress through the school they are given plentiful opportunities to read. It is recommended, however, that differentiated readers are used in all classrooms. Initiatives such as Drop Everything and Read and the reader’s chair, already utilised very successfully in some classrooms, should form part of a whole-school approach to encourage pupils to read more widely and enthusiastically. In many classrooms, there is very good work underway in developing the pupils' writing skills. However, a whole-school progressive approach to writing and the enrichment of vocabulary is needed. Some teachers give pupils regular opportunities to draft and edit their work using word-processing packages; this is good practice which should be extended throughout the school. Talk and discussion are utilised to good effect in all classrooms and most pupils articulate confidently and clearly. The quality of provision for poetry varies throughout the school. Phonics are taught effectively in the junior classes; an agreed approach for the middle and senior classes is now recommended. A review of how spellings are taught across the school is also needed. Cursive handwriting is taught well in most classrooms; however there is need for greater emphasis on accurate letter formation and appropriate presentation in some classrooms.

The quality of teaching, learning and pupils’ achievement in Mathematics is commendable overall. Early mathematical activities are effective in the infant classrooms; pupils engage actively and there is good use of concrete materials. Across the school there is consistent emphasis on oral maths and tables. The compilation of a mathematics dictionary, as is occurring in one senior class, is good practice and might be extended to other classes. In some classrooms, there was satisfactory use of ICT in the teaching of Mathematics but this is an area that could be developed across the school. In-class support for Mathematics by the special needs team has positive impact. Further development of maths trails and whole-school problem-solving approaches are recommended.

The quality of teaching, learning and pupils’ achievement in Science is very good. The school has made very good provision for all strands of the curriculum particularly for the strand unit Forces and Materials and for Designing and Making activities. Teachers adopt a number of approaches to assess pupils’ progress including observation and teacher-designed tests. The local park is used in an effective manner, particularly in relation to the curriculum strands dealing with Living Things and Environmental Awareness and Care. The school is involved in a collaborative garden project with the local organic centre and in Discover Primary Science and many laudable science experiments and projects are displayed in the general purpose area and shared with the wider school community through the school website.

The quality of overall teaching, learning and pupil achievement is good. A commendable range of teaching methodologies is employed at each class level and pupils engage in
active learning, particularly in Science. Further differentiation and, where possible, team-teaching approaches should be implemented throughout the school. More challenging experiences should be planned for the more able pupils. Pupils’ responses to questionnaires administered during the evaluation indicate a lack of self-awareness as to how well they are doing in reading and Mathematics. It is advised that self-assessment strategies should be promoted further with pupils.

- The quality of assessment is good in most aspects. Most teachers keep suitable records and checklists of progress and monitor written work diligently. Some teachers maintain useful individual pupil profiles and test copies and others give fortnightly cross-curriculum tests. A whole-school approach to the creation of pupil files would be beneficial. Standardised tests are given in reading and Mathematics and the pupils’ attainment in these tests is good overall. Results are shared with parents. The data from such assessment are garnered competently by the special education team. However, there should be systematic, ongoing use of the assessment evidence to inform teaching and learning in the classrooms, particularly in differentiating for pupils’ learning needs. A user-friendly whole-school tracking system would also be useful. Literacy screening tests are administered at the senior-infant level. However, these tests might be administered earlier in the year and consideration should be given to extending the use of screening tests to the junior-infant level. The use of non-reading intelligence tests might also be considered throughout the school. Diagnostic tests are administered appropriately by the special needs team; in a number of cases, however, the test findings do not sufficiently inform target setting. The range of diagnostic and standardised tests available in the school should be augmented.

6. Quality of Support for Pupils

- The quality of learning-support and resource teaching is good overall. School policy has been updated and test results and pupils files are maintained carefully. Agreed use of common templates for individual education plans (IEPs) and individual plans and learning programmes would be beneficial as well as ongoing team discussion on appropriate target setting. The pupils’ learning targets should be shared with parents, and support teachers and mainstream teachers should meet formally and regularly to discuss pupils’ progress. The involvement of special needs assistants should be outlined clearly in the pupils’ IEPs. The support team has augmented its teaching skills to good effect attending various training courses. A member of the team might now consider acquiring further expertise in the area of dyslexia. The special education team employs a suitable mix of in-class support and withdrawal approaches in providing for literacy and numeracy. Further teaching, learning and assessment resources should be acquired and additional reference materials for both teachers and parents would be useful.

- Three pupils receive English-language support. Work is relevant and purposeful. Planning is generally effective and records of learning are maintained. Further use of Up and Away (Integrate Ireland Language and Training, 2006) is recommended.

- The teachers are sensitive to any instances of disadvantage which manifest and endeavour to be as supportive as possible of pupils who may need additional support.

- The school participates in the Department’s Modern Languages Programme and an external tutor provides tuition in French twice weekly to fifth and sixth-class pupils. Planning and teaching are focused on learning outcomes and lessons are active and highly participatory. The pupils clearly enjoy their learning and are making good progress.

- The school involves pupils in many worthwhile extracurricular and co-curricular initiatives. For example the school is currently working towards achieving its fifth Green Flag in the
Greens-Schools’ Initiative. The school has been involved in the mentoring programme for newly qualified teachers and in initiatives such as the Heritage in Schools Project and Youth Sports West. It also engages in Cumann na mBunscoil activities and in Ag Súgradh le Chéile; a Health Service Executive programme for parents and infant pupils. A highly successful school musical was organised in the last school year and teachers, parents and pupils are commended for their work in promoting the arts. External tutors provide coaching to pupils in sports and football during school time.
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 and staff of Scoil Naomh Molaise wish to acknowledge the professional and courteous manner in which the inspectors carried out the W.S.E. in our school.

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 staff is currently working to implement the recommendations of the report and we continue to build on the strengths of the school.