Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Naomh Tola NS, Killulagh, Delvin, Co. Westmeath
Uimhir rolla: 19205W

Date of inspection: 01 February 2012
1. Introduction

Naomh Tola NS is a mainstream, co-educational primary school located in Killulagh, Delvin. Under the patronage of the Catholic Bishop of Meath, it espouses a Catholic ethos and endeavours to provide a full and enriching education to pupils. At the time of the evaluation, there were 161 pupils on roll and attendance levels were very 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:

- The board of management is committed to the development of the school.
- The school is an attractive and stimulating learning environment for pupils.
- The principal, teachers and ancillary staff are conscientious and hard working.
- Provision in the infant classes places a strong emphasis on the centrality of language and the use of active methodologies.
- The school provides for the holistic education of pupils through a range of co-curricular and extracurricular activities.

The following main recommendations are made:

- The school should adopt an objective-led approach to short-term planning based on the curriculum and whole-school plans. Ongoing review of the implementation of existing whole-school plans is recommended.
- Moltar forbairt a dhéanamh ar scileanna teanga na ndaltaí ingach snáith den churaclam Gaeilge. Pupils’ language skills should be further developed in all strands of the Irish curriculum.
- The school should make greater use of available assessment data to inform the differentiation of teaching and learning.
- A wider range of approaches and methodologies should be implemented in some classes to provide for greater pupil activity and peer interactions.

3. Quality of School Management

- The board of management undertakes its duties effectively and members work collaboratively in the best interests of the school. The board has participated in a recent school self-review and identified priorities for its term. School finances are managed carefully. The board is commended for leading the upgrading and maintenance of the school building and recreational areas to a very high standard. The board should continue its efforts to ensure that all teaching staff employed are fully qualified.
• The principal displays a clear vision for the development of the school. She plays a leading role in the planning process and promotes the centrality of literacy and assessment within school practice. Members of the in-school management team work conscientiously to undertake their duties and these are regularly reviewed. Building on this progress, a greater focus on the sustained implementation of whole-school policies is recommended.

• School resources are managed competently. Indoor and outdoor facilities present as comfortable, stimulating and well-resourced recreational and learning environments. Special-needs assistants and ancillary staff carry out their duties diligently.

• Positive relationships and communication structures have been forged with the parent and wider community. Regular staff meetings support in-school communication. In questionnaires, almost all parents expressed satisfaction with the operation of the school and the quality of information provided on their children’s progress. Parents are very supportive of the work of the school. To develop this further and to expand the arrangements for consulting parents on school policy development, the establishment of a parents’ association should be explored.

• Pupils are managed effectively within the school. Classroom and school routines are well established and an emphasis is placed on pastoral care. Pupils are courteous and well behaved. The school is to be commended for organising a wide variety of extracurricular and co-curricular activities for pupils.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

• The quality of whole-school planning is good. Administrative policies effectively guide the school’s practice. Good quality curricular plans have been devised. The English policy is praiseworthy as it clearly identifies literacy targets for each class level. As plans are reviewed, they should include guidance on the division of content reflecting the multi-grade and split-class nature of mainstream classes.

• Recent school self-evaluation has led to the development of a short-term action plan with targets across a range of domains. This should be complemented by a medium-term action plan to guide the implementation of school priorities and the cyclical review of school policies.

• All teachers prepare plans to support their practice but there is scope to develop some aspects of the planning to improve effectiveness. Long-term plans should become more contextualised to the needs of each class and incorporate whole-school approaches. Short-term planning should include appropriate curriculum objectives and record specific provision for differentiation to inform practice.

• Confirmation was provided that the board of management has formally adopted the Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools without modification and that the school is compliant with the requirements of the Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools.

5. Quality of Teaching, Learning and Pupil Achievement

• The overall quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement is good. Very good practice was observed in some settings. Pupils in the infant classes have opportunities to explore and be creative through play and the effective use of guided discovery
methodologies and appropriate resources supports the development of pupils’ emerging concepts. Overall, there is scope to extend the use of active and participatory methodologies within the school to ensure appropriate provision for active learning, enhanced pupil engagement with learning resources and the greater use of talk and discussion as a central learning strategy. Written work is presented neatly and is consistently well monitored.

- Good quality provision is made for recording pupils’ progress at a whole-school and individual teacher level. The school is commended for developing a number of tests in literacy to support assessment. Further assessment of pupils’ achievement of content objectives across the curriculum should be undertaken on an ongoing basis. The tracking of pupils’ learning progress in English and Maths and the identification of learning needs throughout the school is praiseworthy. Going forward, greater use should be made of this rich data to plan and implement differentiated learning activities for pupils.

- Cé go bhfachtas roinnt cleachtas éifeachtach i dte agasc na Gaeilge, tá scóp chun cáiliocht an teagaisc agus na foghlama sa teanga a fheabhsú. Úsáideann cuis de na hoidhí raon cuí modhanna múinte agus acmhainni le linn na gceachtanna ar a n-airead rólghlacadh, obair bheirte, póstaí agus ábhair léirithe. Ba chóir an dea-chleachtas seo a leathnú ar fud na scoile. Déantar soláthar maith de rannta, d’hihlocht agus d’amhránaiocht trasna na scoile. Sonraithear, áfach, easpa liofachtach i gcumas cainte de roinnt mhaith de na ndaltaí. Chun dul i ngleic leis seo, moltar don bhfoireann tuilleadh béime a leagan ar an gcur chuige cumarsáideach agus clár céimníthe a ullmhú thar na snáitheanna atá leagtha amach sa churaclam. Ba chóir tháithi níos leithne a sholáthar do na daltaí sna meán agus sna hardranganna sa léitheoireachta agus sa scríbhneoireachta.

- While some effective practice was evident in the teaching of Irish, there is scope to improve the quality of teaching and learning in the language. Some teachers use an appropriate variety of methodologies and resources during lessons, including role-play, pair work, posters and visual resources. This good practice should be extended throughout the school. Good provision is made for rhymes, poetry and singing throughout the school. However, many pupils lack fluency in oral competencies. To address this, teachers are advised to increase the emphasis on the communicative approach and to prepare a graded programme across the strands that are laid out in the curriculum. Greater variety in reading and writing tasks should be provided for the pupils in the middle and senior classes.

- Teaching, learning and pupil achievement in English is of a high standard. The centrality of language is emphasised in the infant classes and a structured approach to the development of emergent literacy skills is implemented. Pupils engage with a wide range of reading materials and differentiated parallel readers are used throughout the school. Pupils present as competent and confident readers. To enhance current provision for oral language, the introduction of a structured, curriculum-based oral language programme at all levels is recommended. Regular opportunities are provided for pupils to write in a suitably diverse range of genres and the standard of penmanship is good. Pupils listen to, read, learn, recite and respond to a range of age-appropriate jingles, rhymes and poems.

- The quality of teaching and learning in Mathematics is good. Effective lessons observed were characterised by an emphasis on oral mental mathematics, explicit teaching of new concepts, the creation of opportunities for all pupils to manipulate materials in order to deepen their understanding, and discussion to enable pupils to clarify their thinking. There is scope to extend this good practice and to provide for regular consolidation and revision of learning. As identified by the recent school self-review, greater emphasis should be placed on developing pupils’ estimation and problem-solving skills.
• Provision for Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) is good. The inclusive school atmosphere provides an appropriate context for discrete lessons and for a cross-curricular approach to learning in SPHE. Positive results emerged from the pupils’ questionnaires, with almost all pupils feeling safe in the school and understanding they can talk to teachers if they are upset about something. Teachers use an array of programmes and resources in the implementation of the SPHE programme and pupils’ values, attitudes, understanding and skills are developing appropriately. Teachers are advised to plan for the full and incremental implementation of the SPHE curriculum on a two-year cycle as provided for in the whole-school plan.

6. Quality of Support for Pupils

• The overall quality of support for pupils with special educational needs is good. A good balance of withdrawal and in-class support is achieved. Interactions observed between teachers and pupils were encouraging of pupils’ self-esteem. Short-term planning to guide practice for pupils attending learning-support should be prepared as per the Learning-Support Guidelines and pupils’ progress should be recorded more systematically. Teachers employ a good range of tests to determine pupils’ learning needs and the views of parents, pupils and external professionals are incorporated. Provision for pupils with low-incidence learning needs is of a very high quality. A more formal and structured implementation of the staged approach is recommended, placing a greater emphasis on ensuring appropriate provision for pupils at stage one and stage two of the continuum.

• The school is sensitive to instances of disadvantage and supports pupils to ensure they participate fully in school life.

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