Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Scoil Naomh Barra
Wilkinstown, Navan, Co. Meath
Uimhir rolla: 19253K

Date of inspection: 24 November 2010
1. Introduction

Scoil Naomh Barra, Wilkinstown is an eight teacher co-educational national school under the patronage of the Catholic Bishop of Meath. The school's mission statement espouses the holistic development of each individual pupil. 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 principal is instrumental in creating a well-ordered learning environment in the school and in fostering a spirit of professional reflection among staff.
- Teachers' enthusiasm and collegiality is commended and many examples of very good teaching approaches are in evidence in the school.
- A positive learning atmosphere exists in the school and pupils undertake their independent and collaborative learning activities with confidence.
- The attainment levels of many pupils in English reading are very good.
- The development of pupils' conceptual and procedural knowledge in Science is good.

The following main recommendations are made:

- A whole-school approach to improving pupils’ writing and presentation skills should be implemented.
- Differentiation strategies should be devised to meet the needs of pupils of varying abilities in Mathematics.
- The reorganisation of the timetable in the support settings should be undertaken to maximise teaching time and facilitate the provision of further targeted support in Mathematics.
- The duties of the in-school management team should be reviewed to ensure a greater focus on teaching and learning.

3. Quality of School Management

- The board of management is properly constituted and meetings are convened appropriately. Members have generously given of their time and individual skills to the ongoing management of the building of a school extension. The board should ensure that accounts are audited or certified on an annual basis. It is recommended that policies be signed by the chairperson following their ratification.
• The in-school management team comprises a principal, a deputy principal and one special duties teacher. The principal, who has full-time teaching duties, is commended for his long-standing commitment to the school. A spirit of professional reflection is promoted by the principal in a well-managed and orderly learning environment where there is openness to new approaches in teaching and learning. Post-holders undertake their existing duties diligently and with enthusiasm. These duties should be reviewed to ensure a greater focus on teaching and learning priorities.

• An appropriate range of effective communication strategies is in evidence. Parents’ representatives and the results of questionnaires administered during the evaluation indicated high levels of satisfaction with the education provision in the school and with communication regarding their children’s progress. Parents’ representatives participate actively in the life of the school and are very supportive of school activities.

• Pupil management is very good and teachers demonstrate a keen understanding of their learning needs. The results of questionnaires indicate that the majority of pupils feel secure in their school environment.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

• The quality of whole-school planning is good. Some administrative and curricular policies require review. The role of parents in the planning process should be developed.

• Many teachers devise appropriate and content-rich classroom planning. This good practice should be adopted by all teachers. There is scope to develop monthly progress records to facilitate the monitoring of curriculum implementation and review.

• Some aspects of school-self review are in evidence. The results of standardised tests are carefully documented and tracked sequentially. There is potential to analyse this data further to facilitate differentiated provision for some pupils. Pupils’ written work is frequently monitored by many teachers. This good practice should now be emulated in all settings.

• 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

• Tugtar faoi mhúineadh na Gaeilge go diograiseach agus go scilíúil agus léiríonn cuid mhaith de na daltaí liofacht áirithe agus cinnteachta sa mhéid atá foghlamtha acu. Tá sé ar a gcumas briathra cuí a úsáid, raon leathan d'aíinmhocail a lámhséal agus abairtí a struchtúrú i gceart. Moltar athbhreithniú a dhéanamh ar an bplean scoile sa Ghaeilge agus na híseamaláirí teanga a chlárú go soiléir do gach rang chun cumas cumarsáide na ndaltaí a fhhorbairt agus a theisíú ó rang go rang. Eagraítear gníomhaíochtaí éisteachta agus cumarsáide oiriúnaacha do na daltaí ach b'fhéidir an Ghaeilge a úsáid mar theanga cumarsáide taobh amuigh den cheacht foirmiúil. Is inmholta mar a leagtar béim ar
The teaching of Irish is undertaken diligently and skilfully and many pupils demonstrate a certain fluency and surety with regard to what they have learned. Pupils are able to use suitable verbs, manipulate a wide range of nouns and structure sentences correctly. A review of the school plan for Irish is recommended in order to clarify language exemplars for every class to ensure the systematic progression and enrichment of pupils’ communication skills from class to class. The pupils are presented with suitable listening and speaking activities but it would be beneficial to use Irish as a medium of communication outside the formal language lesson. The emphasis on committing a range of poetry, rhymes and songs to memory is praiseworthy and it is clear that pupils enjoy the sound and rhythm of the language. This good practice should be extended. Pupils have regular opportunities to practise their reading and writing skills. Reading skills are developed systematically and many pupils can read with understanding, pace and good pronunciation. Functional writing activities are undertaken for the most part. A wider range of writing activities should be provided for the pupils in a systematic manner.

- Good practice is in evidence with regard to the teaching of many aspects of English. Throughout the school, pupils’ oral competencies are carefully developed. In particular, many senior pupils are enabled to become confident communicators. A good emphasis is placed on the exploration of poetry. Some pupils commit suitable poetry to memory. This good practice should be extended. Pupils’ attainment in reading is very good. They demonstrate a good ability to write independently and with imagination. To improve pupils’ penmanship and presentation, the consistent implementation and frequent monitoring of the school’s writing policy is recommended.

- The quality of teaching and learning in Mathematics is good for the most part. In some instances, however, better provision needs to be made for more able pupils in terms of setting more challenging learning objectives. Pupils should be encouraged to do more mathematical work in copy books in order to develop their independent recording skills. The analysis of standardised test results indicates that there are a number of pupils whose rates of progress from year to year do not correlate sufficiently with their ability levels. This information needs to better inform teachers’ planning and provision both in the mainstream and support settings.

- In general the quality of teaching and learning in Science is good and pupils demonstrate a suitable understanding of what they have learnt. To enhance progression in pupils’ learning from class to class, the school plan for Science could usefully delineate the key concepts to be taught to each class with regard to recurring themes. A strong emphasis is placed on experimentation and encouraging pupils to both think and discuss concepts scientifically. Group work in most classroom settings is purposeful and organised effectively, thereby enabling pupils to work collaboratively. The consolidation of pupils’ learning at the conclusion of lessons is undertaken very skillfully by many teachers.

- Overall, the quality of teaching and learning is good with some very good examples of practice noted in many classrooms. Aspects of this very good practice include a clear focus on appropriate, enthusiastic and well-paced whole-class teaching, and carefully managed and purposeful group work with effective consolidation of learning outcomes for
pupils. On a whole-school basis, there is a need to place further emphasis on pupils’ presentation of work.

6. Quality of Supports for Pupils
   • Effective aspects of provision for pupils with special educational needs are the clear identification of their needs and the stimulating, affirming and organised learning environments that have been created. While lessons in the support setting are structured clearly, pupils’ progress should be regularly and consistently recorded. Incorporating the literacy demands of other curriculum areas into the support provision for older pupils is worthwhile and should be developed further. Literacy provision for more able pupils is proving beneficial. However more challenging reading materials would enhance this endeavour. Lessons focusing on the development of social skills would be enriched by enabling the target pupils to practise these skills with their peers. The re-organisation of the timetable in the support settings should be undertaken to maximise teaching time and facilitate the provision of further targeted support in Mathematics. The work of the special needs assistants (SNAs) is purposeful and appropriate to pupils’ needs.

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