WHOLE-SCHOOL EVALUATION

A whole-school evaluation of Scoil Éinde Naofa, Lisdoonvarna was undertaken in February, 2010. This report presents the findings of the evaluation and makes recommendations for improvement. The evaluation focused on the quality of teaching and learning in English, Irish, Mathematics and Social Personal and Health Education (SPHE). The board of management of the school was given an opportunity to comment on the findings and recommendations of the report; the board chose to accept the report without response.

INTRODUCTION – SCHOOL CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

Scoil Éinde Naofa is located in the town of Lisdoonvarna in north Clare. It is a five-teacher co-educational school and is one of three primary schools serving the parish of Lisdoonvarna and Kilshanny. The school was built in 1955 and extended in 1970. A prefabricated room was acquired in the summer of 2009 as accommodation for special needs teaching.

School enrolment has fluctuated somewhat in recent times but should remain close to current levels for the immediate future. While attendance levels for the majority of pupils are very good, the board of management should prepare a school attendance strategy in accordance with the Education (Welfare) Act 2000, to encourage regular school attendance for the small number of pupils whose attendance is a cause of concern.

Scoil Éinde Naofa participates actively in the Green Schools Programme and in a range of projects and competitions promoted in schools.

The following table provides an overview of the enrolment and staffing in the school at the time of the evaluation:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pupils enrolled in the school</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainstream classes in the school</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers on the school staff</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainstream class teachers</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers working in support roles</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special needs assistants</td>
<td>1</td>
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</tbody>
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1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT

1.1 Characteristic spirit, mission or vision

Scoil Éinde Naofa is under the patronage of the Catholic Bishop of Galway, Kilmacduagh and Kilfenora. The school’s stated mission espouses a commitment to the provision of the highest quality education so that pupils may maximise their potential and contribute meaningfully to society. The stakeholders are committed to the pursuit of these ideals.

1.2 Board of management

The board meets regularly and records of these meetings were made available to the evaluation team. At the time of the evaluation, questions were raised about the procedures surrounding the appointment of the board. Subsequently, confirmation has been received from the patron that the

The roles of chairperson, treasurer and secretary have been assigned. Some board members give generously of their time in helping with the maintenance of the school buildings, and in keeping board minutes and maintaining financial records.

The board discharges some of its duties effectively. Accounts are properly maintained and certified. The school is maintained and presented to a very high standard and resourced very well. The improvement of playing facilities for pupils is ongoing and the school grounds are tidy and attractive. A health and safety inspection was undertaken by the Health and Safety Authority and the board reported that it was responding constructively to the recommendations in this report. Board members agreed that educational provision in the school was good, that pupils were well treated and that significant improvements had occurred in recent years.

The work of the board of management could be further developed. The board members, at the pre-evaluation meeting, stated that they were not fully aware of their role, duties and statutory obligations. Some members of the board accessed training but were of the view that such training was insufficient and did not provide them with clarity in respect of their roles and responsibilities. Concerns were raised about adherence to proper meeting procedures and the confidentiality of board meetings and decisions. Some members of the board stated that they were unsure of the procedures relating to the investigation of complaints and the implementation of behaviour and bullying policies in the school.

At the pre-evaluation meeting, a poor working relationship was observed among a small number of board members. It is apparent that collaboration among some board members is generally poor.

To date, the board has not adequately fulfilled its role in terms of the development, consideration and ratification of whole-school policies. Some discussion has taken place on policies concerning complaints procedures and the issues of behaviour and bullying, but for the most part, policies required by statute or Department of Education and Skills guidelines have been drafted by the staff but have not been presented to the board of management for consideration and ratification. The board should become fully aware of its statutory role under section 15 of the Education Act 1998. In particular, the board’s role in overseeing the whole-school planning process (section 21(1)) should be prioritised. It is recommended that the board seeks the necessary assistance from the patron of the school and the support services to enable it to fully understand its function and obligations.

1.3 In-school management

The in-school management team consists of the principal, the deputy principal and a special duties teacher. The principal discharges many of his duties, including the day-to-day running of the school, in a satisfactory manner. He prioritises the care and maintenance of the school building and grounds, has worked hard to ensure that learning takes place in attractive and well-resourced settings and has secured extra accommodation for the special educational needs team. The principal, with the co-operation of the members of staff, has drafted policies and plans.

A number of aspects of the leadership of the school require development. Instructional leadership with a focus on curriculum delivery and whole-school approaches to teaching, learning and assessment, school self-evaluation and school development planning have not been prioritised sufficiently.
The in-school management team communicates frequently on an informal basis. Post holders fulfil their respective duties conscientiously and contribute diligently to the efficient running of the school. At the time of the evaluation the board of management had sanctioned the duties attached to one post of responsibility. While post holders have responsibility for curricular areas, these duties deal mainly with resource and organisational issues rather than instructional leadership. The board should conduct a regular review of the duties attached to each post. Such a review would ensure that the posts would reflect the emerging priorities of the school. Formal meetings of the in-school management team should be a feature of the work of the school. It is opportune also for the senior management of the school to engage with training provided by the Leadership Development for Schools (LDS) programme in order to maximise the school’s capacity for improvement.

1.4 Management of relationships and communication with the school community
The parents’ association (PA), which is affiliated to the National Parents’ Council, has an active role in school life. Parents support the school through fundraising events and have recently funded the purchase of two interactive white boards (IWBs). They organise social activities such as an annual barbecue and other events associated with religious ceremonies. Individual parents tutor pupils in music and contribute generously to whole-school events such as school concerts and performances. Parents assist with the maintenance of the school and gardens and help with transport to matches and other events.

Annual parent-teacher meetings are organised and written pupil progress reports are issued at the end of the academic year. The association has not been asked to consider policy issues to any significant extent and has yet to access training.

1.5 Management of pupils
During the evaluation the vast majority of pupils were well behaved and they interacted with their teachers and visitors in a respectful manner. The pupils engaged actively in their learning and were eager to participate. Pupils with special educational needs and those with English as an additional language were well motivated and well included in school life. Many of the pupils engage in a range of extra-curricular activities, and commendable displays of pupils’ work were on display in the classrooms and in the hallways. The school cultivates close links with the local secondary school and these links contribute to pupils’ transition from primary to second level schooling.

Arising from the pupil-teacher interaction in one classroom setting, it is recommended that the pupils in the senior class are provided with additional opportunities to take turns and develop listening skills. It was noted during the evaluation that one class grouping was organised according to gender. A review of the school’s policy on the organisation of pupils should be undertaken and criteria for organising classes, which are in keeping with the promotion of an inclusive school, should be agreed at whole-school level.

2. Quality of School Planning

2.1 Whole-school and classroom planning
Whole-school planning practices require significant development. School plans have been devised by the staff but have not been developed in consultation with the board of management and parents. Further school planning should be initiated without delay through a collaborative approach involving all staff in consultation with the board of management and parents, where appropriate. It is recommended, therefore, that the board would engage immediately in a process
of whole-school review, aimed at devising a three year development plan. This development plan, in accordance with Circular 0018/1999 and section 21 of the Education Act (1998), should outline a timeframe within which the required plans and polices should be developed and implemented.

While curriculum policies have been devised for all subject areas, it was apparent during the evaluation that these policies do not fully inform practice in all classrooms, particularly in SPHE and Gaeilge. The school should engage the support of the Primary Professional Development Service (PPDS) in effecting a review of its whole-school planning practices, including implementing policies on a whole-school basis.

All teachers devise satisfactory long-term and short-term planning. Monthly progress records are maintained and many of these records provide clear evidence of the work completed in each curricular area. Templates have been adopted to assist the planning process. It is recommended that greater attention be paid in teachers’ planning to assessing pupils’ progress and to the differentiation of learning outcomes and activities for pupils with learning difficulties.

2.2 Child protection policy and procedures
Confirmation was not provided that, in compliance with Department of Education and Science Primary Circular 0061/2006, the board of management has formally adopted the Child Protection Guidelines for Primary Schools (Department of Education and Science, September 2001). Confirmation was not provided 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. It was reported by the principal that a designated liaison person (DLP) and a deputy DLP had been appointed in line with the requirements of the guidelines. It is recommended, therefore, that the draft policy on child protection be ratified as a matter of urgency.

3. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

3.1 Language

Gaeilge
Cuireadh an plean scoile don Ghaeilge le chéile i 2003. Cé go bhfuil cleachtas an-mhaith le sonrú i mionlach na ranganna agus samplaí de chleachtas maith le sonrú sna suímh go léir, is léir nach bhfuil ag éiri lena gcuaid iarraítaí chun an fhíorchumarsáid a tharlaí ar bhonn scoile uile. I measc na samplaí dea-chleachtais a sonraíodh bhí éagsúlacht sa chur i láthair agus tugadh deiseanna do dhaltaí an teanga a úsáid trí rian, amhráin, cluiche teanga agus rólghlacadh. D’aithris daltaí i roinnt beag ranganna riar maith dánta agus cantar amhrán Ghaeilge go binn sna hardranganna. B’fhiú b éin mó a chur ar na nithe seo agus úsáid bheireise a bhaint as an scéalaíocht chomh maith i múineadh na teanga. Úsáidtear clár báin idirghníomhach i rangsheomra amhain chun foclóir na ndaltaí a leathnú. Cothaitear scileanna léitheoireachta na ndaltaí go cuí tríd an scóil trí úsáid a bhaint as na táísealbhair agus na leabhair saothair. Moltar cnasach breise fiorleabhar a aimsiú chun eispéiris léitheoireachta níos leithne a chur ar fáil do dhaltaí. Bunaítear cleachtá scribhneoireachta, atá néata agus dea-eagraithe, den chuid is mó ar na leabhraí saothair. B’fhiú deiseanna níos rialta a chur ar fáil do dhaltaí chun scribhneoireachta
The school plan for Irish was formulated in 2003. While there are instances of very good practice in a minority of classes and samples of good practice in all teaching situations it is evident that pupils are not benefiting from the teachers’ efforts to develop their communicative skills on a whole-school basis. Among the instances of good practice noted was a variety of presentation methods, and pupils were given opportunities to use language through rhymes, songs, language games and role-play. Pupils in a small number of classes recited a good selection of poems and rhymes and pupils in the senior classes sing Irish songs sweetly. It is recommended that these aspects are emphasised to a greater extent and that greater use is made of story also in the teaching of the language. Reading skills are appropriately developed throughout the school through the use of textbooks and workbooks. A greater selection of real books could be acquired to provide a wider variety of reading experiences for pupils. Writing exercises, which are neat and well ordered, are based for the most part on the workbooks. Pupils could be afforded more regular opportunities to engage in personal writing in different genres. A review of the policy for Irish is appropriate at this point and such a review should consider the issues raised in this evaluation.

The quality of teaching in English is good. Oral-language development is appropriately emphasised. The majority of pupils can speak about themselves, their interests and a variety of other topics. In some classes the teachers use resources such as the interactive white board to good effect as a way of engaging and stimulating the pupils to engage in oral language activities. Whole-class teaching is the predominant methodology used and in the junior and middle classes pupils were observed to have good opportunities to engage in pair work and to practise new vocabulary in a variety of contexts. Poetry is studied and pupils are encouraged to write their own poems. Oral language skills are also developed through other areas of the curriculum. It is recommended that teachers place a greater emphasis on implementing the oral language objectives of the curriculum throughout the school.

The school promotes a culture of reading among the pupils and different strategies such as reading for pleasure, reading class novels and listening to the teacher modelling the reading process are promoted. Shared reading takes place and records of the books read each year are maintained. There is a good supply of books for pupils at all levels of age and ability. The school works in close co-operation with the local library on various initiatives such as workshops with authors and the provision of sets of novels for school use.

The reading lessons observed were well-structured. An appropriate emphasis is placed on the development of phonological awareness in the junior classes as part of the foundation of basic reading skills. The Newell Phonics Scheme is undertaken at each class level. An early intervention programme is in place for pupils in senior infants and this practice is commendable. In the junior and middle classes a broad range of reading materials is provided. At some class levels greater emphasis should be placed on teaching a broader range of reading strategies. The majority of pupils are making appropriate progress in English and reading skills are satisfactory. All teachers maintain records of standardised test results in English. During the evaluation, very good records of individual pupils’ skills development in English were presented for review in one class.
The quality of pupils’ writing is good. During the evaluation, the pupils in the junior and middle classes discussed the wide range of writing genres they had explored and samples of work in these settings are particularly praiseworthy. In general, written work is carefully monitored by class teachers. Process writing is promoted and this practice is commendable. There are good displays of pupils’ writing in the school and this practice should be extended. The writing and grammar exercises completed by the pupils in the senior class during the evaluation were satisfactory. It is recommended that pupils, at all class levels, are given greater opportunities to write for a range of purposes and for a variety of audiences.

3.2 Mathematics
The teaching of Mathematics is effective in the majority of classrooms. Opportunities to engage in activity-based learning are provided for pupils and a good range of concrete materials facilitate the learning of new concepts. Teachers engage in discussion with pupils but the greater use of a range of questioning strategies should be promoted. In some classes good attention is given to the development of mathematical language. Mental mathematics is a feature of the work in most classrooms but needs to be developed consistently throughout the school.

Standardised test results in Mathematics indicate that overall achievement is in line with national norms. During the evaluation, pupils engaged in tasks with varying levels of competency. While pupils in some classes demonstrated satisfactory understanding of number and number operations, it is recommended that numeracy be prioritised as an area of the curriculum in need of development. In particular, additional attention needs to be given to mental mathematics, the revision and consolidation of concepts at some class levels and the creation of mathematics-rich environments. A range of problem-solving strategies should be taught and pupils should be encouraged to suggest different approaches to solving number problems. The ongoing assessment of pupils’ work in Mathematics, for formative purposes, is recommended so that differentiated supports can be provided in the classroom. The provision of in-class supports for pupils experiencing difficulties in Mathematics should also be considered.

3.3 Social Personal and Health Education (SPHE)
The school policy for SPHE was drafted in 2003 and revised recently. The policy is based on the structure and principles of the curriculum and draws on a number of appropriate resource materials. Prior to full implementation of the policy it is advised that all the partners are consulted on its key provisions. It is recommended that the school re-engages with parents on aspects such as discipline, bullying, relationships and sexuality education, and issues surrounding the Stay Safe and Walk Tall programmes. All teachers need to have copies of the policy and need to ensure that objectives from all strand units are adequately covered over a two-year period. An action plan for the full implementation of the policy and the evaluation of outcomes would be helpful at this point.

SPHE lessons observed were well taught throughout the school. Discussion and debate feature regularly in lessons, in which pupils are encouraged to express their opinions and to listen to and respect the opinions of others. Opportunities are availed of to cover topics through integration with other curricular areas. During the evaluation classes were observed in which a range of topics were covered in a positive and enthusiastic fashion. These topics included family, friendship, bullying, care of self and substance abuse. Pupils engaged enthusiastically with the evaluation team in discussions on various other topics and displayed good awareness of key issues. A range of active-learning methodologies was employed by teachers in the course of lessons. These included drama, circle-time, games and the use of story and poetry to explore topics. As pupils become more practised in these methodologies they should derive greater benefit from their use.
3.4 Assessment
A concise statement of school policy on assessment is included in the school’s planning documentation. Teachers monitor pupils’ work mainly through observation, teacher designed tasks and tests, and the use of standardised tests. Consideration should be given to expanding the variety of assessment approaches in use, in line with recommendations contained in the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) guidelines. The differentiation of teaching approaches and learning activities for pupils should be considered at whole-school level. Monthly progress records should be used to record pupils’ learning outcomes and this information should contribute to the evaluation of the curriculum implementation and teaching and learning in the school.

A range of standardised tests is administered in the school and records indicate that this practice is well established. A system for tracking the progress of individual pupils is in place. Tests administered include the Middle Infant Screening Test (MIST), the MICRA-T, the Sigma-T and the Drumcondra Primary Spelling Test (DPST). The Forward Together Programme is implemented by the learning-support teacher with some pupils who present with learning difficulties. The Drumcondra Primary Reading Test (DPRT) and the Drumcondra Primary Mathematics Test (DPMT) are also administered. The results of these tests are carefully tabulated and tracked, and used mainly to establish entitlement of pupils to extra teaching support. Greater value could be derived from the outcomes of testing by more stringent analysis which could form a basis for the provision of enhanced teaching and learning experiences.

The members of the special educational needs team use a range of diagnostic tests including the New Diagnostic Spelling Test, the Non-Reading Intelligence Test (NRIT) and the QUEST to provide additional information on pupils’ performance.

4. QUALITY OF SUPPORT FOR PUPILS

4.1 Pupils with special educational needs
The school has the services of a full-time learning support teacher, a shared post for pupils with special education needs, a part-time resource/language support teacher and a special needs’ assistant. A comprehensive whole-school learning support policy is in place and this policy is reviewed regularly to reflect the emerging needs of the pupils. The members of the special educational needs team provide supports to pupils individually, in groups and in whole-class groups. The teaching in the special education settings is well structured and is provided in an affirming, supportive and positive atmosphere. In the context of future developments in this area, consideration should be given to the further exploration and development of the in-class support model.

The learning support/resource rooms are well-resourced with a range of teacher-devised and commercial materials. The teachers use a range of materials to support teaching and learning. The support team is commended on the emphasis placed on developing pupil confidence and on nurturing an inclusive environment in the school. The members of the support team communicate effectively with parents and provide support and guidance to pupils on their transition to post-primary school. This is commendable practice.

Pupils are identified for referral to special education support as a result of their scores on standardised tests, teacher observation, consultation with parents, having English as an additional language and recommendations contained in psychological reports. In the context of learning
support, a range of diagnostic tests is employed and the results inform the development of specific programmes to target the pupils’ needs. The teachers maintain close links with other professionals, including psychologists and speech and language therapists, and the recommendations of their assessments inform the programmes of work devised.

All teachers in special education settings prepare appropriately for their work, and individual education plans and programmes contain learning objectives for pupils. Daily and monthly records of the work completed in each support setting are maintained. In certain contexts however, the identification of more focused learning objectives and clearly identifiable learning targets in short-term plans are advised in order to facilitate and guide planning and provision.

4.2 Other supports for pupils: disadvantaged, minority and other groups
The support teaching for pupils with English as an additional language (EAL) is effective. The Primary School Assessment Kit is used to evaluate pupils’ listening, oral, reading and writing skills. A programme of work has been devised that is informed by the Integrate Ireland Language Teaching materials and the European Language portfolio. The pupils are highly motivated in their learning and they work in small groups with the teacher. Good attention is given to the development of receptive and social language. Reading skills and comprehension strategies receive appropriate emphasis. The majority of EAL pupils are making good progress. However, language acquisition is presenting a challenge for a minority of pupils. Additional emphasis should be placed on the teaching of cognitive language which the pupils require to access all areas of the curriculum. The fostering of closer links with mainstream class teachers is recommended to ensure collaborative planning.

5. Conclusion
The school has strengths in the following areas:

- The teachers are conscientious and diligent in their work.
- The school’s provision for the teaching of English is effective.
- Support for pupils in special education settings is well structured and is provided in an affirming and positive atmosphere.
- Pupils are educated in an attractive and well-maintained learning environment.
- The pupils participate with enthusiasm and interest in the learning activities.
- Parents support the work of the school through a range of commendable activities and initiatives.
- Scoil Éinde Naofa participates actively in the Green Schools Programme and has had successful involvement in a range of projects and competitions promoted in schools.
- The school is central to the life of the community and has developed fruitful relationships with many local institutions and organisations.

The following key recommendations are made in order to further improve the quality of education provided by the school:

- As a matter of priority, the board should familiarise itself with the contents of Board of Management of National Schools: Constitution of Board and Rules of Procedure (Department of Education and Science, 2007). The board should access further training opportunities to enable it to discharge its duties and responsibilities in accordance with the Education Act (1998).
• Communication and collaboration among members of the board of management should be improved.
• The board should arrange for the development of a strategic plan to address identified prioritised areas in organisational and curriculum planning, as a matter of priority.
• The ratification of the draft Child Protection Policy should be addressed immediately.
• Leadership practices in the school community should be further developed.
• Consultation with the stake holders is advised to clarify the implementation of key aspects of the school’s SPHE policy.
• Moltar go ndéanfar forbairt bhreise ar ghnáthchumarsáid, liofacht, agus muinín na ndaltaí sa Ghaeilge. It is recommended that general communication, fluency and confidence of pupils, in Irish, be further developed

Post-evaluation meetings were held with the staff and the board of management where the draft findings and recommendations of the evaluation were presented and discussed.