1. Introduction

Scoil Tighearnach Naofa, is a rural, five-teacher school situated in the village of Cullohill, county Laois, under the patronage of the Catholic Bishop of Ossory. The school has four mainstream class teachers and a learning support/resource teacher. There are 108 pupils enrolled and attendance rates are generally high. The school building and grounds are well maintained. 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.

2. Summary of Findings and Recommendations for Further Development

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

- The principal provides good leadership for the school in both organisational and curricular matters.
- The overall quality of teaching and learning is good.
- The quality of support for pupils with special educational needs is good.
- The board of management is proactive in developing the school and its resources.
- The quality of communication with parents and the wider community is very good.

The following main recommendations are made:

- The school should continue to improve its short-term planning documents and monthly records of progress, with a view to recording existing good practice and ensuring continuity in the pupils' learning.
- The school should develop a structured approach to oral language development in English and Irish and include an agreed repertoire of songs and poems.
- Official records should be maintained in line with Department guidelines.

3. Quality of School Management

- The board of management is properly constituted and operates in accordance with relevant legislation and the rules of the Department of Education and Skills. The board members are proactive in the development of the school and its resources. Financial accounts are certified annually. The board plays an ongoing role in the development and ratification of organisational policies and curriculum plans. Further strategies to communicate its activities with the wider community and greater involvement of parents in the policy development process should be explored.

- The principal provides good leadership for the school in both organisational and curricular matters. She has availed of relevant professional-development opportunities that have enhanced her capacity to lead and manage the school. She competently combines her principal’s duties with her teaching duties.
There is evidence of an effective working relationship between the principal and the deputy principal. The responsibilities of the deputy principal are recorded clearly in a contract. There is an appropriate balance of curricular, organisational and pastoral responsibilities and it is evident that these are fulfilled efficiently. Official records are maintained conscientiously but it is recommended that they be kept in line with Department guidelines. It is recommended that the duties be reviewed on an incremental basis in order to respond to the evolving needs of the school. Staff meetings are held regularly and detailed minutes are maintained and contain some evidence of school self-evaluation.

The quality of relations and communication within the school community is very good. Parents are very active in the work of the school. They assist with fundraising and with the organisation and management of the school’s extra-curricular programme. Parent representatives and the responses to parent questionnaires indicate overall satisfaction with the operation of the school.

There is an annual parent-teacher meeting and an end-of-year written report, which includes relevant information on the pupil’s achievement in standardised attainment tests. Incidental notes in the homework journal and a text-messaging service are among the ways in which parents are kept informed of developments in the school.

The staff is committed to promoting the personal development and well-being of pupils. The school partakes in a range of co-curricular and extra-curricular activities. There is a positive atmosphere in classrooms and pupils are generally well behaved. In questionnaires, the majority of pupils report that they feel safe in school and know the school and class rules.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

The whole-school planning process is managed in a professional manner and in accordance with Department guidelines. There is evidence of collaboration in the process and plans and policies are ratified by the board of management. The school has prioritised policies and curricular aspects for development and review.

The school’s organisational policies are generally very good. The curricular policies which have been revised recently are good. It is recommended, therefore, that the school continues to improve its short-term planning documents and monthly progress records, with a view to recording existing good practice and ensuring continuity in the pupils’ learning throughout the school.

Pupils report in questionnaires that they do not have opportunities to use computers. It is recommended that the school set simple, measurable targets for the development of the pupils’ knowledge, skills and attitudes in the area of information and communications technology (ICT), with a view to ensuring progression and continuity. The school may find the ICT framework available at www.ncca.ie useful.

Child protection policy and procedures

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. At present the role of deputy DLP is assigned to a person who is not a staff member. It is recommended that the school nominate a member of staff as deputy DLP, in accordance with the Guidelines.

5. Quality of Teaching, Learning and Pupil Achievement

- The overall quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement is good. There is evidence of a high level of commitment and professionalism from all of the teachers observed. The class teachers show great skill in the differentiation of programmes and lessons for the different class groups in each classroom. There is scope for the further development of active learning approaches and methodologies to ensure that all pupils are challenged to their full potential. Some opportunities are provided for pupils to work in small groups.

- The overall quality of assessment of learning is good. Standardised tests in Mathematics and English are administered annually and results are tracked. Assessment-for-learning records include work samples, checklists and teacher-designed tests.

- The quality of teaching and learning in Irish is good. The development of a very good range of reading material, the use of shared reading and DEAR time are among the initiatives undertaken to promote the habit of reading for pleasure among the pupils. There is effective development of phonological awareness and word-recognition skills. Good use is made of the class novel. The quality of provision for English writing is good but there is scope for the development of a whole-school approach to penmanship. A more structured approach to the development of pupils’ oral language skills and the inclusion of a good repertoire of songs and poems would enhance the implementation of the English curriculum in the school.

- The standard of teaching and learning in Irish is good. The teachers elicit talk from the pupils skilfully. There is effective development of the pupils’ fluency, accuracy and vocabulary in most classes. The teachers made creative use of a range of illustrative materials and other resources. It was evident that pupils had an extensive passive vocabulary in Irish. They spoke with confidence and competence during the lessons. Pupils in some classes could recite a lovely repertoire of poetry and verse. It is recommended that this be extended to all classes. Reading and writing activities are linked effectively to the subject of conversation classes.

- The quality of the teaching and learning in Mathematics is good. This is reflected in pupils’ achievement in standardised attainment tests. There is an appropriate emphasis on mental arithmetic and on the language of mathematics. Very good practice was observed in some classes where there was effective use of mathematical equipment and materials to develop relevant concepts and skills. Problem-solving skills were well developed in some classes.
• The quality of teaching and learning in Geography is good. There is effective development of the pupils’ sense of place and space, their ability to use maps and globes. The school also does very good work in the strand *Environmental awareness and care*. It is recommended that the school places a greater emphasis on the development of geographical investigation skills. There is evidence of very good use of resources, including interactive whiteboards, in Geography.

6. **Quality of Support for Pupils**

• The overall quality of support for pupils is very good. Teachers have availed of continuing professional development in this area to cater for the needs of pupils. There is very good differentiation of programmes and lessons by mainstream class teachers to cater for the learning needs of individual pupils.

• The individual learning programmes prepared for pupils are in accordance with pupils’ needs as identified in relevant assessments. Programmes and activities are tailored to accommodate the pupils’ interests and to address their personal and social needs. The programmes generally contain clear learning targets as well as useful descriptions of the strategies that will be used to achieve them.

• There is effective use of early intervention strategies in the school. The school should keep its overall provision for pupils with special educational needs under review to cater for the evolving needs of pupils. It is recommended that the school agrees and implements a policy regarding the provision for in-class support, setting out the rationale for in-class support, the criteria for identifying situations in which in-class support would be appropriate and guidance on the format that such support might take.

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