An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation REPORT

Scoil Náisiúnta Naomh Iosaf
Banada, Tourlestrane, County Sligo
Uimhir rolla:19923G

Date of inspection: 18 December 2009
WHOLE-SCHOOL EVALUATION

A whole-school evaluation of SN Naomh Iosaf was undertaken in December 2009. 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, Mathematics and History. 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

SN Naomh Iosaf is a co-educational, rural primary school situated in Tourlestrane, approximately five kilometres from Tubbercurry, county Sligo. The school was originally constructed in 1968 and an extension was completed in 2009. Enrolment in the school has been steadily increasing. Attendance in the school is carefully monitored and encouraged. The school participates in Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS), an initiative of the Department of Education and Skills to address educational disadvantage.

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pupils enrolled in the school</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainstream classes in the school</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers on the school staff</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainstream class teachers</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers working in support roles</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special needs assistants</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT

1.1 Characteristic spirit, mission or vision
SN Naomh Iosaf is under the patronage of the Catholic Bishop of Achonry. The mission statement focuses on supporting the holistic development of each child. The pupils learn in a well-ordered, caring, happy and secure environment. The school community works collaboratively to promote the welfare of all of the pupils.

1.2 Board of management
The board of management is highly supportive of the work of the school. It is properly constituted and meetings are convened on a regular basis, in accordance with the rules of the Department of Education and Skills. Board members have been involved in managing the refurbishment and extension projects very effectively since 2007. The board is commended on the development of the set-down and parking area at the school. School policies are presented to the board for discussion and ratification.

1.3 In-school management
The school is led by an enthusiastic and committed principal, who was appointed to this post in 2004. He promotes a welcoming, friendly environment and engages collaboratively with the staff. He is ably supported in his role by the second member of the teaching staff who attends to all of
her duties diligently. Under his leadership, the school development planning process has been further developed in a praiseworthy manner. It is recommended that there be three formal staff meetings per year. A dedicated secretary has assisted in the systematic compilation of school records and documentation, ensuring that this material is easily accessible.

1.4 Management of resources
The standard of the school accommodation is very good. There are two mainstream classrooms, a general-purposes room, a learning-support room, a small office which is also used as a staffroom, a staff toilet and pupils’ toilets. Good use is made of the available space. Outdoors there is a tarmacadamed area and a shelter that is used by pupils during inclement weather. Improvements to the recreation area were partly funded by the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs through the CLÁR programme. The school has access to the community hall next door and the GAA grounds across the road. The school building is used by the community for various meetings.

Throughout the evaluation, there was very good use of classroom resources, including information and communications technology (ICT) to support teaching and learning.

1.5 Management of relationships and communication with the school community
The school has developed high-quality relationships with the local community and receives very good support from the parents’ association. All of the partners work in a spirit of collaboration and co-operation. There is a co-ordinated programme of after-school activities for the pupils. The school participates in the “Youth Sport West” initiative that provides pupils with training in areas such as gymnastics and dance. The parent body has been actively involved in fundraising for the school. Formal parent-teacher meetings are held annually.

1.6 Management of pupils
Interaction between staff and pupils and between the pupils themselves is respectful and relaxed. Pupils were observed to be courteous and co-operative in their play. Pupils are affirmed and praised effectively and rewarded for good behaviour. The pupils support charitable organisations such as the Shoebox Appeal and National Council for the Blind. They involve themselves enthusiastically in events such as the St Patrick’s Day parade in Aclare, in various sporting activities and in annual school performances.

2. QUALITY OF SCHOOL PLANNING

2.1 Whole-school and classroom planning
The quality of whole-school planning is good. The teachers have prepared an extensive range of organisational and curricular policies and procedures that guide school practice. The emphasis that has been placed on school planning over the years is praiseworthy. It is recommended that all policies include the date of ratification and a date for review. To date, parents have not been actively involved in policy development and discussion. Structures should be put in place to facilitate the involvement of parents in the school-planning process. Modifications and appendices need to be added to some polices as discussed at the post-evaluation meeting. The English, mathematics and history policies are very well formulated. However, the practices in handwriting, phonics and spelling need to be included in the English policy. A policy on record keeping also needs to be formulated.

The quality of individual classroom planning is good in most aspects. Both teachers use different planning templates, however. It is recommended that they adopt a common planning template for
the school. In devising a template, particular consideration should be given to the identification of
learning outcomes, provision for skills development and planning for differentiation for the class
groups within each classroom.

2.2 Child protection policy and procedures
Confirmation was 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 also 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. A designated liaison person (DLP) and a deputy DLP
have been appointed in line with the requirements of the guidelines.

3. Quality of learning and teaching

3.1 English
The standard of teaching in English is good. Commendable emphasis is placed on oral-language
development. Rhymes and poetry are taught well and pupils can recite them accurately. Pupils
can recount stories confidently. However, consideration should now be given to placing
additional emphasis on listening in the context of oral language. It is recommended that a formal
listening-skills programme be developed in the junior classes. It is also recommended that a print-
rich environment and a designated area for English be created in all classrooms. This would
provide good support to pupils when they are engaging in creative writing activities. Very good
use is made of the overhead projector, circle time, posters and games in the teaching of oral
language

In the teaching of reading, large-format books are used effectively in the junior room and they are
linked creatively with other strands of English. Grammar, spelling and phonics are well
established in the junior classes and these are developed appropriately as the pupils move through
the school. It is recommended that grammar rules be highlighted on charts to support the pupils in
their learning. Due emphasis is given to reading of suitable novels and class readers.

There is evidence of good work in relation to writing. Pupils practise writing in a variety of
genres. The pupils make their own books, which are displayed in the class library. There is
evidence of good activities to develop pupils’ understanding of the writing process. The junior
classes are compiling a book that is taken home by each pupil. Each pupil draws and writes in the
book about his/her experiences at home. The senior pupils engage in the process of drafting,
redrafting and editing their work. There is scope for further work in the areas of vocabulary
development, structure and punctuation. In some cases, pupils would also benefit from further
direction and monitoring with regard to the presentation of their work. The teaching of joined
handwriting commences in third class. Consideration should be given to starting this in second
class.

3.2 Mathematics
Evidence from standardised test results, observation of teaching and learning, and interaction with
the pupils indicates that the quality of teaching in Mathematics is good. During the lessons
observed there was an appropriate emphasis on class discussion, skills development and
mathematical language. In general, teachers employ whole-class teaching methods when
conducting lessons. There is a need to differentiate the programme of work to cater for the needs
of the different class groups within each classroom. This should be reflected in classroom planning. There is evidence that concrete materials are used during lessons and that there is some focus on problem solving. However, there is a need for further work on problem solving in senior classes. There is an appropriate emphasis on the learning of number facts and tables. It is recommended that the written work of pupils in all classes be monitored regularly. Consideration should also be given to the development of mathematical trails and to making links more effectively between the different strands and strand units of the mathematics curriculum.

3.3 History
The quality of the pupils’ overall experience in History is very good. The school plan sets out a broad, balanced programme in History. There is good use of resources. The teachers use the digital camera, overhead projector and historical websites very effectively. They also use reference materials, artefacts, timelines, stories, pictures and photos judiciously to stimulate interest in topics. History is integrated creatively with work in other subjects. For example, pupils’ learning about their grandparents’ lives was integrated effectively with oral-language development in English. An in-depth study of the western rail corridor completed by senior pupils was dramatised as part of the St Patrick’s Day parade. Projects are undertaken successfully by the pupils in the senior classes, with some use of ICT as a research tool.

The emphasis placed on local history is very good. Pupils painted a mural in the nearby Peace Garden to commemorate those who died during the Great Famine. Tours of places of historical interest are organised.

3.4 Assessment
A range of assessment modes is used to monitor and record progress on a regular basis. These include teacher observation, teacher-designed tasks and tests and project work. The quality of the assessment data is very good. Standardised tests in English and Mathematics have been carried out annually for many years. Results are readily accessible and are used to assist in the identification of pupils for supplementary teaching. Pupils in the junior room are assessed using the Middle Infant Screening Test (MIST).

4. Quality of Support for Pupils

4.1 Pupils with special educational needs
The experienced special-education teacher is shared with a cluster of three schools. She provides dedicated support to pupils with learning needs. Agreed approaches to language development and to the teaching of English and Mathematics are clearly stated in the school’s comprehensive learning-support policy. Early intervention is managed very effectively with good co-operation between the special-education teacher and the class teacher. Support is provided in a caring, affirming manner. An appropriate array of resources and activities is used. The lessons observed were very well structured and paced.

Pupils are withdrawn in groups or individually according to their needs. Detailed individual plans are in place for all pupils receiving support. Targets are realistic. Diagnostic testing is used effectively to monitor progress and to assess pupils’ needs. Assessment results are recorded methodically. It is recommended that a paired-reading programme be implemented.

4.2 Other supports for pupils: disadvantaged, minority and other groups
The quality of support for pupils in SN Naomh Iosaf is very good. The grants received under DEIS are used to give pupils access to drama and music projects. There is a wide range of after-
school activities. The parent body gives whole-hearted support to such activities. Súgradh le Chéile (Maths for Fun) workshops have been organised over six weeks with parents of infant pupils and they have proved very useful.

5. CONCLUSION

The school has strengths in the following areas:

- The school’s strong spirit of community is reflected in the good working relations that exist between the board of management, the parents’ association and the staff of the school.
- The principal and staff work hard to create a welcoming, happy environment for the pupils.
- The pupils are achieving good standards in the curricular areas evaluated.
- The school participates with enthusiasm in many projects and initiatives and it provides the pupils with a broad and balanced programme of work.
- The quality of the collaboration between the special-education teacher and class teachers is very good.

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

- It is recommended that there be three formal staff meetings per year.
- It is recommended that a common planning template be devised and used by all teachers.
- It is recommended that a listening-skills programme be developed for junior classes as part of the oral-language programme.
- It is recommended that there be a greater emphasis on the differentiation of teaching in Mathematics for the different classes within each classroom and on enabling pupils to make links between different topics in Mathematics.
- It is recommended that a paired-reading programme be implemented.

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.

Published November 2010