1. Introduction

Newtown National School is an eight-teacher, co-educational primary school under the patronage of the Catholic Archbishop of Tuam. This is a new school, formed as a result of the amalgamation of the former boys’ and girls’ schools. There are 72 pupils enrolled. The junior classes are taught in the former boys’ school building. The senior classes are taught in the former girls’ school building. These two buildings are separated by the N63 Galway-to-Roscommon road. The present division of the school in this manner is not satisfactory as a long-term solution. The board of management of the school was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the report, and the response of the board will be found in the appendix of this report.

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 very committed to consolidating the work done following the amalgamation and to further enhancing the services and facilities available in the school.
- The principal displays effective leadership skills. He is committed to improving the school.
- Staff members are committed to enhancing the education provided in the school.
- Pupil achievement in Irish is good.
- The quality of teaching and learning in English writing is good.
- Interesting active-learning experiences are provided in Mathematics.
- A variety of effective approaches and strategies is used in Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE).

The following main recommendations are made:

- As part of the ongoing school planning process, pupils’ test results should be reviewed on a whole-school basis to identify and target specific areas for development.
- Some mainstream classrooms should be reorganised to create a more stimulating learning environment. Further investment in school furniture and teaching aids, including information and communication technologies (ICT) should be made to enhance teaching and learning.
- More attention should be given to the teaching of English reading. This should include the introduction of a more structured school-wide reading programme and the reorganisation and replenishment of class libraries.
- The school should engage formally with Galway County Council to implement more effective traffic-calming measures during school hours.
3. Quality of School Management

- The board of management is properly constituted. Regular communication is maintained between the board of management and the school staff. The board meets at least once a term, more often when necessary. The treasurer gives a financial report at each meeting. It is recommended that school accounts be certified or audited annually in accordance with section 18 (1) of the Education Act, 1998. The board’s current priorities include the purchase of a site for a new school building. The board has also prioritised addressing the health and safety concerns that arise from the current separation of the school into two sections on opposite sides of a major road. It is recommended that the school liaise with Galway County Council to ensure that improved traffic calming measures are put in place to ameliorate these concerns.

- The school principal was appointed in 2009. He displays effective leadership skills. He is committed to developing and improving the school. His vision for the school is to provide a cohesive unit that provides a broad and balanced education for each pupil. As part of the realisation of this vision, it is recommended that a deputy principal be appointed as soon as possible to assist the principal in the day-to-day management of the school. There is currently one special-duties teacher in the school. The work attached to this post is carried out well. There is a need, however, to review the responsibilities of each post of responsibility on a regular basis.

- Each teacher is committed to making the changes necessary to improve the quality of education offered in the school. Regular staff meetings are held. These provide an opportunity for staff members to discuss school issues and to contribute to policy development. The work of the two special-needs assistants (SNAs) and the school secretary contribute to the smooth running of the school.

- The parents’ association meets at least once a term. Parents’ questionnaires indicate an overwhelmingly positive attitude towards the school. Effective communication is maintained to ensure that parents are kept well informed of school developments.

- The pupils in this school are very well behaved. Pupil questionnaires indicate their satisfaction with the school.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- A good start has been made in devising and implementing a school plan based on the specific needs of this school. The school planning process should focus on providing a broad and balanced programme of work across the curriculum, and should include appropriate emphasis on self-evaluation. It is recommended, as part of this work, that pupils’ test results be reviewed on a whole-school basis to identify and target specific areas for development.

- Most teachers plan very effectively for their work. The quality of information included in teachers’ classroom planning is variable, however. There is a need to adopt a school-wide approach to classroom planning and record keeping.

- 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

- The overall quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in this school is good. There is scope for improvement in some aspects of provision, however. There is a need for greater provision and use of ICT to enhance the teaching and learning process. In many classrooms, greater differentiation of teaching and learning activities to cater for the range of pupil abilities is recommended, particularly between class groups. Some of the mainstream classrooms should be reorganised to provide a more attractive and stimulating learning environment. The variety of teaching aids available in these classrooms needs to be improved. New furniture should be acquired where necessary.

- Tá caighdeán an teagaisc agus na foghlama sa Ghaeilge go maith. Tá scileanna labhartha na ndaltaí le moladh. Baineann cuid de na hoidí úsáid as raon leathan de chluichí, scéalta, rainn agus dánta chun tuiscint teanga a chothú. Labhraionn na daltaí na ndaltaí sna hardranganna fúthú féin agus faoi abhair éagsúla go soléir, muinínreach. Ó rang a dó ar aghaidh, tugtar deiseanna rialta léitheoireachta do dhaltá. Déanann oídí maoirseacht rianúil ar chleachtai scribhneoireachta inmholta na ndaltaí.

- The quality of teaching and learning in Irish is good. Pupils’ oral-language skills are commendable. Some teachers use a wide variety of games, stories, rhymes and poems to enhance pupils’ understanding of the language. Pupils in the senior classes talk about themselves and about a variety of topics clearly and confidently. From second class onwards, pupils are given regular reading opportunities. Pupils’ commendable writing activities are regularly monitored by teachers.

- The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in English is good overall. Each teacher places appropriate emphasis on developing pupils’ oral-language skills. There is scope for development in some aspects of the teaching of English, however. In some classrooms, there is a need to review the structure of reading lessons. This should include more differentiation of reading activities in the junior classes. A more varied reading programme should be developed on a whole-school basis. More effective use should be made of class libraries. This will require reorganising and replenishing the stock of books available in some classrooms. Due attention is given to developing pupils’ writing skills. Copybooks and the work samples on display indicate a highly commendable standard of written work in a variety of genres. Good practice is evident in the neatness and presentation of this work, although it is recommended that a school-wide approach to handwriting be adopted and implemented.

- The quality of learning and teaching in Mathematics is good at almost all class levels. The quality of pupil achievement in the senior classes is particularly praiseworthy. Active learning is facilitated and concrete materials are used to good effect at most class levels. Pupils are provided with a variety of interesting activities and lessons in most classrooms. There is a need, however, to increase the use of mathematical resources to enhance the learning process in some classrooms.

- The quality of teaching and learning in Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) is good. Pupils’ self-confidence is fostered through a variety of structured group activities including role play and circle time. Pupils in the senior classes engage in worthwhile decision-making activities, during which they engage in constructive dialogue and discussion. It is recommended that there be more emphasis on road safety in the school’s SPHE programme.
6. **Quality of Supports for Pupils**

- The quality of teaching and interventions for pupils with special educational needs and for Traveller pupils is good overall. The level of support provided in Mathematics should be increased. A mixture of withdrawal and in-class support is provided. It is recommended that consideration be given to how the quality of in-class support can be improved. The accommodation available for learning-support and resource teaching is attractively decorated and well-stocked with appropriate teaching aids.

- Individual education plans (IEPs) are provided for each pupil who receives additional support. It is recommended that parents be included in a more meaningful way in the IEP process.

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Appendix

School response to the report

Submitted by the Board of Management
Area 1 Observations on the content of the inspection report

The Board and staff of Newtown NS wish to extend their thanks to the inspectors for their thorough, professional and courteous manner during their time in the school. The Board would also like to acknowledge the dedication and hard work of the staff which has been recognised and affirmed in this report. The Board is very pleased with this report and welcomes its findings and recommendations.

Area 2 Follow-up actions planned or undertaken since the completion of the inspection activity to implement the findings and recommendations of the inspection.

We appreciate the recommendations of the report and are currently engaged in implementing them. The Board also wishes to make the following points:

1. Pupil assessment results will be reviewed annually at the beginning of the school year to highlight both individual and class progress. The Board and staff continue to develop their policy on the recording and use of assessment data for the benefit of the pupils.
2. The Board have invested, and will continue to invest, and update, the furniture, teaching aids and ICT resources in all classrooms. This has included, with the help of parents and the local community, the development of a green play area in the past number of months. A programme of development has been set in place to further enhance the school buildings and their surroundings.
3. Our reading programme is currently being reviewed and all class libraries have been replenished. The Board has set aside further funds to continue this work in the short- to medium-term.
4. On the recommendation of the inspectors and in agreement with staff, we have altered the timetabling of our set lunch breaks.
5. Subsequent to this inspection, a deputy principal has been appointed to carry out assigned duties in conjunction with the school management team.
6. We welcome the observations made by the inspectors, especially with regard to the difficulties and dangers presented by the location of our two buildings. As a newly amalgamated school it is our desire to accommodate all the children on one site. As a result of the recommendation of the inspectors, we expect the Department of Education to fully support us in our quest to provide the very best possible education to the children of the area. We feel that the only way of achieving this is to provide accommodation on one site. We hope to be funded by the Department in this endeavour.