Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Scoil Abáin Naofa
Baile Bhuirne, Co. Cork
Roll Number: 15346U

Date of inspection: 1 October 2010
1. **Introduction**

Scoil Abán Naofa is a co-educational primary school situated in the Muskerry Gaeltacht and the Catholic Bishop of the Diocese of Cloyne is its patron. There are six mainstream classes in the school at present and Irish is the principal medium of instruction. 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.

The pupils have very high levels of attendance.

2. **Summary of Findings and Recommendations for Further Development**

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

- A good working atmosphere is evident in the school and a happy environment is created for its pupils.
- Strong links are maintained between the school and the local community. The parents’ council provides commendable support to the teaching staff and it is apparent that they have an interest in educational matters and in the school’s status as a Gaeltacht school.
- The efforts of the principal to foster a united school community of all the relevant partners are commended.
- The good practice observed in the work of the teachers in general is commended. The majority of lessons are presented in a stimulating manner and frequently the teaching methods used are both effective and varied. Accordingly, it is clear that the students are making significant progress.

The following main recommendations are made:

- With a view to solving the accommodation needs of the school, it is recommended that a short-term action plan should be drawn up as soon as possible. This aspect of the work of the school from the point of view of health and safety was discussed during the evaluation. Specific advice was given at the post-evaluation meeting on the provision of suitable settings for learning support, resource and language teaching. In addition, advice was given on the importance of refurbishing the school hall and playground, as well as providing a staff room and an office for the principal.

- It is recommended that there would be greater contact between the school and the local Naíonra (nursery school), with a view to developing further the pupils’ language abilities at the junior levels. It would also be worthwhile setting up training courses for parents, in order to provide a better understanding of what basic learning objectives for infants should be in this Gaeltacht setting.

- While financial matters are very well managed, it is recommended that the board would officially sign-off on the accounts on an annual basis.
3. Quality of School Management

- The board of management functions in accordance with the rules of the Department of Education and Skills. Board meetings are regularly convened and detailed minutes are kept. Financial matters are effectively managed and a praiseworthy approach is adopted in relation to the development of school policies. The greatest challenge which now faces the board is to identify the accommodation and resource needs of the school and to draw up an action plan in respect of these.

- The duties of the in-school management team are clearly agreed and recorded and are being fulfilled. It is recommended that, in future, the school’s priorities would be reviewed at the end of each school year and that a short report would be prepared for the board on the work which had been completed.

- An admirable range of suitable teaching resources and books has been made available in all classrooms and productive use is made of them. Commendable use is made of information and communication technology (ICT), including interactive white boards, to stimulate the pupils’ learning. It is recommended that more extensive use would be made of the school corridors to display pupils’ work and to celebrate local achievements.

- Advice was given on the merits of co-operative teaching, so as to exploit fully the different talents of staff members. It is also recommended that a plan would be drawn up for the professional development of the teachers.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- The school planning process is implemented appropriately and there is an appropriate focus on the needs of the school in the various policies. These policies provide general guidelines for staff, it is recommended that these policies should now be reviewed so that that they might contribute greater influence on the continuity of the work. It is recommended that a three-year plan would be prepared in respect of curriculum, administration and resources, so that all the relevant partners are offered once again an opportunity of participating in the process.

- Each teacher draws up written preparation for teaching, and lessons are based on the basic principles of Curaclam na Bunscoile. The scope and balance of the work throughout is commended. The teaching methods and the resources utilised are described accurately, and appropriate records of the progress of the work are kept in the monthly reports. Integration receives satisfactory attention in the planning for each class and seasonal themes are commendably exploited. It would now be worthwhile making a more detailed analysis of the outcomes of standardised tests, in order to contribute further to the effectiveness of the teaching. Advice was offered on how a greater emphasis might be placed in the planning process on active learning and on learning through play for particular pupils. This would be of assistance in consolidating basic concepts in an enjoyable manner and in encouraging the pupils further in true communication.

- 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

- Irish is the everyday language of communication in the school, thereby creating a communicative, productive context for the majority of pupils where Irish can be used naturally. A positive atmosphere was noted in the school and the pupils demonstrate a regard for the language and for the local culture. It is apparent from the pupils’ work and from speaking to them in class that they are making definite progress.

- It is clear that the work in the Infant classes is very challenging, as the majority of pupils have little Irish when they start school. Nevertheless, they gradually attain a creditable standard. The programme Séideán Sí is now in use throughout the school with a view to systematically developing the pupils’ listening, speaking, reading and writing skills. This programme brings continuity and structure to the work. Accordingly, good practice was observed in the learning and teaching of Irish throughout the school during the evaluation. Particular praise goes to the pace and structure of lessons, as well as to the use made of a wide range of teaching resources. Very good use was made of white interactive boards in different classes, and varied aspects of the curriculum were integrated very appropriately. It is recommended that a new plan for Irish would now be drawn up, as the complete programme of Séidean Sí is now available.

- The teaching of English is effective in the school and very good progress is achieved in the development of oral, listening and writing skills. The richness of the print environment provided in the different classrooms is praised. It would now be worthwhile displaying and celebrating pupils’ work further on corridors. Good practice was observed frequently in the lessons visited in the course of the evaluation. Pupils are encouraged to express their opinions with confidence and pupils’ linguistic competence is enhanced through discussion in the middle and senior classes and through the use of storytelling in the junior classes. Most of the pupils read with assurance and their interest in reading is supported through the provision of a broad range of books. Pupils’ writing ability is being carefully developed and very good variety in the writing tasks was noted. Due care and attention is given to basic writing skills and penmanship.

- A very good standard in the teaching of Mathematics was noted in various classes. The teachers implement a methodical approach to oral work, to sample work, to the interactive white board and to effective questioning. They organise appropriate learning activities and make use of worthwhile and useful resources, in order to develop and reinforce pupils’ understanding. Pupils are given precise instructions, the learning objectives are clear and the pupils are active participants in the work. The work is carefully sequenced and an admirable emphasis is placed on solving practical problems in the middle and senior classes. The attention given to individual pupil needs at various levels is commended.
• In social, personal and health education (SPHE), the pupils’ self-esteem and self-confidence are fostered by means of valuable discussion during lessons. Suitable topics relating to the personal development and health of pupils are explored and they are well educated in matters relating to safety, feelings, friendships, politeness and behaviour.

• An enjoyable learning atmosphere is evident in the school and the teachers adopt a understanding approach to their pupils. The work is interesting, and stimulating teaching methods are regularly employed. Whole class teaching is main method employed but productive activities are initiated with groups and individual pupils, so as to enhance the teaching indifferent classes. Regular and judicious use is made of a wide range of appropriate resources in order to stimulate interest in the work and to encourage the pupils to participate. On the whole, the teaching is effective and the lessons are very competently structured.

6. Quality of Supports for Pupils

• It is clear that satisfactory provision is made for the special educational needs of pupils. There is a full-time learning support teacher on staff, as well as a part-time resource teacher. These teachers provide commendable assistance to all the pupils in their care.

• There is an emphasis on assessment in the teaching and learning and a wide range of assessment instruments is deployed to identify the needs of pupils. Stimulating teaching methods are employed and the pupils are afforded suitable learning opportunities. The school’s policies underpin this work and the collaboration of staff in providing support is praised. In addition, the way in which records are kept of the work, and the manner in which information is shared with the parents, are both commended. It would now be worthwhile placing a greater emphasis on in-class support, where appropriate.

• While the work of the school is commendable, and good practice is to be observed during the various lessons, it is obvious that the rooms being used are not suitable and that there is an urgent need for the provision of a more effective learning environment for the pupils.

• In addition to what has been written above, there is a part-time language assistant, funded by Údarás na Gaeltachta, functioning in the school. The efforts to develop the linguistic ability of the pupils are commended. The fostering of further links between school management, the language assistant and the authorities of the the local Naíonra would be worthwhile and is therefore recommended.

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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

We fully accept the main recommendations of the report. We have been trying to solve the matter of the accommodation needs of the school building since 1997. This will be addressed soon, even without the help of the Department. We are putting new windows into the school in the summer.

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

The Parents’ Association is very active in the school and organises courses for themselves with the help of the school.
The in-school management will prepare a short report for the board of management on the work completed.
There is cooperative teaching of Music, Physical Education and Art from time to time.

(This is a translation of the School Response submitted by the board of management.)