Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Scoil Náisiúnta Iósef Naofa
Maigh, Lahinch
Co. Clare

Roll number: 18339P

Date of inspection: 28 Feb. 2011
1. Introduction

Scoil Náisiúnta Iósef Naofa is a rural Gaelscoil situated in the parish of Miltown-Malbay in west Clare. It is a Catholic school under the patronage of the Bishop of Killaloe. It has been recognised as a gaelscoil by the Department of Education and Skills since 1981, the year it was changed from being a school where the majority of subjects were taught through the medium of English.

There are 22 pupils on the roll now, a considerable drop since 2002, the year of the last report. The majority of the pupils reach a very good level of attendance.

This evaluation focused on the quality of teaching and learning in Irish, English, Mathematics and Drama. 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 teachers work very enthusiastically for the benefit of the pupils.
- A really positive relationship between teachers and pupils is promoted.
- The pupils are praised for their good manners and for their learning-efforts.
- An excellent building and facilities have been developed in this school.
- The board of management and the parents are commended for their support for the work of the school.
- Great attention is paid to the promotion of Irish in the school.
- An analysis of the questionnaires indicates an impressive positivity in both the parents’ and pupils’ attitude to the school.

The following main recommendations are made:

- It is recommended that a cyclic planning process be initiated in the school, a process which focuses on planning, implementation and review.
- Management is encouraged to formulate a strategic school-development plan for the future.
- In Irish it is recommended that more emphasis be placed on further development of pupils’ language awareness and that they be given extra opportunities to engage with free writing.
3. Quality of School Management

- The board of management is properly constituted and the members’ efforts to function in accordance with the rules of the Department of Education and Skills and good practice guidelines are commended. The minutes of the meetings are carefully kept and a start has been made on independent certification of the accounts. The board gives practical support to the work of the school. Particularly praiseworthy are the board’s recent efforts to provide the school with a very high quality infrastructure. Although matters of policy are regularly discussed at board meetings, it is recommended that a more complete record of this work be kept and that the board ensures that parents play a greater part in the policy-development process.

- The in-school management team comprises the principal and vice-principal. The principal works diligently for the good of the school. He keeps a beneficial focus on the welfare of the pupils and places a praiseworthy emphasis on co-operation among staff-members and stakeholders. The vice-principal supports this work in a dedicated and professional manner. It would now be worthwhile for the holders of posts of responsibility, in consultation with one another, to clarify the various responsibilities and set them on a formal basis according to the provisions of Circular 07/03.

- The school building and its environment are neat and tidy and well-maintained. Plenty of helpful resources are provided for the pupils’ education, including interactive whiteboards.

- A mutual respect is observed in the interactions between teachers and pupils. Pupil behaviour is very good. The results of the pupil questionnaires indicate that they like the school, that they enjoy the teaching they get and that they feel safe and secure at school.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- Good progress has been made in developing whole-school planning. Comprehensive policies have been formulated for every curricular subject, as well as a wide range of administrative areas. The policies are regularly reviewed. To develop this work still further, it is recommended that a cyclic planning process be initiated in the school, a process focused on planning, implementation and review. To regulate the pace of development, a strategic plan could be drawn up and agreed among the partners.

- A good start has already been made on school self-evaluation practices. A certain amount of analysis is done on the results of the standardised tests, at a whole-school level. It is recommended that these practices be put on a more formal basis and also extended, to provide more helpful information on pupils’ achievements and to identify school development targets.

- The teachers conscientiously provide long-term and short-term preparation for their work. It is recommended that more attention be paid to differentiating the teaching, to provide more comprehensively for the educational needs of individual pupils. Thorough monthly reports on the progress of the work are kept.

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 also 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

- Overall, the quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement is good throughout the school. There is a capable teaching staff in the school and a beneficial learning atmosphere can be detected in the teaching situations. The majority of the pupils reach a creditable standard, according to their various abilities, in the subjects which were assessed. The interactive whiteboard (IWB) is effectively used, especially in the presentation of lessons. Good examples of differentiation in the teaching of English were observed and subject integration has been effectively implemented. It is now recommended that these good practices be extended throughout the school. To encourage greater student participation, it is suggested that a greater variety of teaching approaches and methodologies be promoted, for example, more emphasis on co-operative learning.

- Irish is effectively taught throughout the school. The teachers succeed in promoting a very positive attitude to the language among the pupils and they succeed in effectively advancing the use of the language as the normal language of communication. In the junior classes, there is a systematic emphasis on rhymes, songs and various activities to present lessons in a lively pleasant way. In senior classes, beneficial use is made of drama to increase pupils’ confidence in their ability to speak Irish. Extra books in Irish from the library are used in both classrooms to provide a wider reading programme. It would now be worthwhile for the teachers to focus on further development of the pupils’ language awareness and on providing more opportunities for them to engage with free writing in Irish.

- The quality of learning and teaching of English is good overall. Pupils’ oral language skills are appropriately developed through class discussion as well as discrete oral language activities. Emergent literacy is encouraged effectively and early reading skills are taught systematically. Pupils are encouraged to read widely and suitable class novels provide an enjoyable focus for reading. In order to accommodate the various ability levels it is advised that a more differentiated approach to the teaching of English reading be adopted, particularly in the middle and senior classes. Written work, in various genres, is neatly presented and monitored regularly.

- Strengths in the teaching of Mathematics were observed at every level. Lessons are conducted ably and engagingly. Much of the work is appropriately based on the pupils’ own environment. There is a worthwhile emphasis on the language of Mathematics but there is a challenge in this aspect of the work because the pupils are being prepared for English medium post-primary education. It is recommended that the results of the assessment tests in Mathematics be more closely analysed and that further planning be based on that analysis.

- Drama is effectively taught in this school and the pupils demonstrate that they are experienced and self-confident in dealing with core aspects of the drama curriculum. The teachers’ efforts to develop the pupils’ imagination and creativity through the use of games, role-play, mime and co-operative tasks are commended. Drama is also used to support learning in other areas of the curriculum, especially in Irish. The school has a fine general-purpose room which is appropriately used to teach the discrete drama lessons.
6. Quality of Support for Pupils

- The quality of support for pupils who have special educational needs is good. A learning-support/resource teacher provides extra help in English, Mathematics and Irish, for pupils who have learning difficulties. This teacher’s support is shared with another school in the locality. This service is influential and relevant to the pupils involved, in developing the appropriate skills.

- In the support classes, pupils are afforded the opportunity of engaging with activity learning, concrete materials are well used and there was variety and a good pace in the learning activities observed. Individual learning programmes are prepared as appropriate and a regular progress record is kept. In these programmes, there could be a greater emphasis on the learning targets, ensuring that they are specific, clear and attainable.

- A positive, co-operative relationship between the school community and the parents is promoted. The parents participate in school life mainly through the extra-curricular activities organised, especially sports events. Parents’ replies to the questionnaires indicate a very high level of satisfaction with the school.

Published January 2012