1. **Introduction**

Gaelscoil Dhún Dealgan is an all-Irish co-education school which is under the patronage of the Catholic Archbishop of Armagh. It was founded twenty-five years ago. The school serves pupils from the area and pupils from the wider environs of Dundalk whose parents seek education through Irish. The building and the surrounds of the school are of a very good standard. There are excellent relations between the school’s co-partners. The school participates in the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) support programme and in the School Completion Programme (SCP). There are additional resources available to the school under these projects. The low level of attendance of a number of pupils is a significant matter and the staff recognises that such challenges need to be addressed by them when providing education.

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 school community works enthusiastically and steadfastly for the benefit of the pupils, Irish, education and education through Irish.
- The care that is paid to the pupils and the respectful manner in which they are treated are greatly commended; the leadership of the principal has a large part to play in this.
- A high standard pertained to the teaching skills of the teachers in the subjects that were observed during the evaluation.
- The teachers of this school teach Irish with exceptional ability, employing excellent use of the *Séideán Sí* programme.
- A high standard applies to the teaching of English.
- The standard of teaching in Mathematics during the evaluation was very good.
- The teaching in Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) was of a high standard.
- A very fine home-school partnership was displayed.
- The positive physical environment of the school cultivates the pupils’ interest in education and their respect for learning.

The following **main recommendations** are made:

- It is recommended that the problem identified with attendance be confronted by means of implementing the short-term, medium-term and long-term strategies that were recommended during the evaluation. It is recommended that targets for attendance be devised in the DEIS plan and that they be monitored keenly.
3. Quality of School Management

- The board displays a keen commitment in its administration of the school. The quality of communication between the chairperson of the board and the staff is good. It is recommended that the board devises priorities that are in keeping with the needs of the school as identified in this evaluation; especially insofar as they apply to attendance matters and to raising standards. At present, the school morning is too long for the infants. It is recommended that an internal restructuring of the school day be carried out.

- A keen commitment is displayed by the principal in his work. He has a very good understanding of the school context and of the strengths of his staff and pupils and he operates reflectively on that basis. The in-school management team works according to the terms of reference of their posts and they display flexibility in relation to addressing the school’s priorities. It is opportune now for the review responsibilities of the team to be directed towards the priorities of the school, regarding curricular matters and special education.

- A progressive plan is in place for the development of the school’s resources; the board and the school community deserve great praise for developing the building and the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) resources especially. There is great management of material resources throughout the school. The classrooms are developed as rich learning areas, a fact that helps to maintain a good atmosphere. In order to maximise the school’s human resources, it is recommended that in-class teaching be expanded.

- Great relations were displayed between the pupils and teachers and discipline matters were excellent during the evaluation. The teachers have a great respect for the pupils whom they teach. There is still, however, a problem with the attendance of a significant number of pupils in the school. A range of strategies will have to be implemented and precise aims for attendance matters devised in the DEIS plan in order to address this.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- Most of the statutory and administrative policies are of a very satisfactory standard and school planning is conducted on a co-operative basis. There are not sufficient challenges in the targets in the current DEIS plan and targets are not set for every area. It is recommended that this be addressed. A start is being made on good efforts at self-evaluation. An analysis has been done on the results of the standardised tests and satisfactory efforts are being made by the school to address the recommendations of the last evaluation report.
• It was confirmed during the evaluation that much more is happening in the classes than is recorded in the School Plan. It is not fully in line with current needs, with the DEIS plan and the context of the school as an all-Irish school is not taken into account sufficiently. It is recommended that aspects of the plan be updated and to ensure that it is in keeping with appropriate DEIS targets. The class planning is structured and graded well; in certain cases a high standard was displayed. In general, there is need to do planning for differentiation. The standard in assessment was good generally. Great work has been done to date by certain teachers on creating profiles on pupils. A good standard applied to formative assessment which was to be seen in particular situations. These good practices should be disseminated and discussed.

• 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 teachers of this school teach Irish with exceptional ability. They understand the importance that attaches to language acquisition and they teach according to the good principles of immersion education. Wonderful use is being made of Séideán Sí in the school and the number of fluent pupils indicates that the teaching of this programme is having a positive effect. The teaching of the language is very good on a cross-curricular basis. Most of the pupils read accurately and with understanding. Irish phonology is taught capably. The teachers recognise that a difficulty applies to the pupils’ compositional ability and writing skills. It is recommended that these be given priority in the review of the Irish plan.

• A high standard applied to the teaching of English. Rhymes are taught capably and are well known by the infants. A fine use has been made of story-telling and the pupils relate stories well. Very good use was made of big books and of real books. A satisfactory standard pertained to oral reading during the evaluation but the standard of reading across the school is inconsistent. The teachers recognise that there is a need to improve the writing standards of the pupils and they are very willing to undertake this. Group-teaching should be consolidated to address the priorities in English.

• The standard of teaching in Mathematics was very good. The teachers made very good use of stimulating methodologies, including ICT. The teachers focus carefully on developing the cognitive language of mathematics. A fine foundation for understanding is laid through the use of resources and clear demonstration throughout the school. It is a source of disappointment for the staff that the attainment profiles of the pupils are not higher through the school. The staff recognises that there is a challenge for the school in relation to raising the standards of some pupils. It is recommended that an analysis of the various strands be used to identify gaps in the pupils’ learning and to plan the next teaching step.

• The teaching in Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) was of a high standard. It was carefully based, during the evaluation, on a very definite programme which recognised the environment and the interest levels of the pupils. Very effective use was made of circle time and a wide range of resources. The teachers focused on content that is very important in the lives of pupils and a wide discussion was conducted on topics,
including water safety and healthy lifestyles. The pupils displayed a very good understanding of the topics which were taught.

- The teachers undertake their teaching with keen commitment and understanding. Almost all of the pupils who completed a questionnaire confirmed that teachers displayed care towards them, for example, in how to improve their work. During the evaluation, effective use was made of the interactive whiteboard as an aid. It would be worthwhile to make further use of ICT, in particular for consolidating learning in literacy and in Mathematics.

6. Quality of Supports for Pupils

- Pupils with additional needs participate fully in the life of the school and care is taken of them. Every teacher provided planning in this regard. In some of this planning, the specific needs of individual pupils were focused on definitely and accurately. Individual learning targets which were precise and which could be measured with certainty were indicated. There was a link between this planning and the recording of progress. There is a need now to share this good practice and to choose a common structure. To assist this, it is recommended that support for pupils should be a particular responsibility for a member of the in-school management team.

- In general a good standard applied to the approach which was evaluated. The teaching was structured for the most part. Suitable resources, including ICT were used to advantage and lesson steps were explained clearly. In places there were deficiencies in the approach which could be improved. It is strongly recommended that in-class teaching be implemented on a progressive basis and that it be adhered to steadfastly. The principles of Maths Recovery and First Steps were adhered to carefully. Care was taken with the structured process that applies to them.

- Great emphasis was placed on the clarification of understanding during a good number of lessons. Pupils were questioned well and the pupils were learning. The after-school activities under SCP, the home-school club and the music lessons are beneficial. The special needs assistants worked diligently.

- An excellent home-school partnership was displayed and a great number of fine activities have been established by the Home School Community Liaison Co-ordinator. The experience of the co-ordinator and the participation in SCP are very useful resources and will be of greatly assistance in dealing with the current attendance problem. It is significant and a source of much hope for the school that all of the parents who completed a questionnaire agreed or agreed strongly that they were happy with the school.