

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**

**Department of Education and Skills**

**Whole School Evaluation  
REPORT**

**Scoil Naomh Pádraig (Measctha)  
Caherleaheen, Tralee  
Co. Kerry  
Uimhir rolla:16917T**

**Date of inspection: 20 November 2009**



**AN ROINN | DEPARTMENT  
OIDEACHAIS | OF EDUCATION  
AGUS SCILEANNA | AND SKILLS**

## WHOLE-SCHOOL EVALUATION

A whole-school evaluation of Scoil Naomh Pádraig was undertaken in November 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 Geography. 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.

## INTRODUCTION – SCHOOL CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

Scoil Naomh Pádraig is a mainstream, co-educational school situated in the townland of Caherleaheen on the outskirts of Tralee. Over the last 15 years, growing pupil enrolments necessitated the extension of the school and two building projects have been completed, one in 1998 and the other in 2009. The board of management and parents are highly commended for their commitment to the provision of a school premises which is well proportioned and suited to purpose. Pupil attendance is of a very high standard.

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

	Number
Pupils enrolled in the school	215
Mainstream classes in the school	8
Teachers on the school staff	12
Mainstream class teachers	8
Teachers working in support roles	3
Special needs assistants	4

### 1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT

#### 1.1 Characteristic spirit, mission or vision

Scoil Naomh Pádraig is a Roman Catholic school and its patron is the Bishop of Kerry. The school, in its mission statement, gives “*due recognition for all other religions and creeds*” and strives to “*provide a well-ordered, caring, happy and secure atmosphere where the intellectual, spiritual, physical, moral and cultural needs of the pupils are identified and addressed*”. The school has articulated a school motto “*Bua tré iarracht*”. The school’s mission, ethos and aims are clearly expressed in the whole-school plan which is published on the school’s website.

#### 1.2 Board of management

The roles and responsibilities of the board of management are very clearly defined and board members undertake these responsibilities very effectively. Board meetings are convened regularly, detailed minutes are maintained and school finances are audited annually. Individual board members have availed of training opportunities to prepare them for their role in managing the school. The board is committed to the development of whole-school policies. These are reviewed regularly and updated. The views and opinions of parents are sought in the drafting and reviewing of organisational policies. The whole-school plan is effectively disseminated to the school community through the school’s website. During the evaluation period the benefits of establishing procedures whereby parents and the school community might be updated on the operation and performance of the school on an annual basis were discussed and viewed

favourably by the board. Given that the board has expended considerable time and energy on the completion of the latest school extension, it is now recommended that it gives consideration to a means through which it might “*evaluate the effectiveness of its operations, including the quality and effectiveness of teaching in the school and the attainment levels and academic standards of students*” as outlined in the Education Act (1999) (9) (k).

### **1.3 In-school management**

The in-school management team comprises the principal, deputy principal and four special duties post holders. The principal models a wide range of effective leadership skills and he is highly conscientious in the discharging of his duties. He ensures that the quality of provision and standards are maintained at a high level and as a result there is a very strong sense of direction and purpose to the work of the school. He has established positive working relationships with the school community and he promotes a culture of team work and collaborative decision making. The principal is ably supported in his work by an effective in-school management team to whom a clear and purposeful range of duties have been assigned. It is evident that the team’s commitment to the school has an energising and motivating effect on all staff. The good practice whereby individual members of the team prepare a yearly plan to assist in the discharging of their duties and whereby they present an annual report detailing their progress in relation to the targets set is highly commended. To ensure optimal development of the school in the future, the in-school management team needs to place increased emphasis on the leadership of teaching and learning in the school by monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of the school’s provision for its pupils, by the examination of the quality of pupils’ learning outcomes and by the setting of targets for improvement and development for the school as a whole.

### **1.4 Management of resources**

The school is very effective in the management of its resources. Teachers are given the opportunity to experience a variety of classes and teaching contexts. A range of classroom resources is provided and is successfully employed to support teaching and learning. Significant investment has been made by the board in the development of information and communication technology (ICT) in the school to the benefit of parents, staff and pupils. Interactive whiteboards feature in many of the classrooms and a dedicated computer room is very well utilised. The school web-site is very well developed and it provides an effective means of communicating with parents. Displays of pupils’ work in the classrooms and corridors contribute to the creation of a stimulating learning environment which celebrates the pupils’ work and achievement. These good practices are highly commended. It is now recommended that future priorities for development of the school’s resources focus on the provision of a more suitable external play area for the pupils and on the development of the classroom libraries.

### **1.5 Management of relationships and communication with the school community**

The management of relationships and communication with the school community is of a very high standard. Very good relationships have been established with the parents’ association and the board. The staff and the parents’ association work together in the best interests of the school, the community and the pupils. Meetings of the parents’ association are convened regularly and are well attended. Individually and collectively the parents play an active and very supportive role in the daily life of the school. A very wide range of co-curricular, extra-curricular and social events are organised by the parents’ association. These contribute significantly to enabling the pupils to derive maximum benefit from their education and to the building and sustaining of a collaborative and mutually supportive school community. Representatives of the parents’ association are high in their praise of the school and the provision it makes for their children.

### **1.6 Management of pupils**

The school makes very good provision for the pupils' personal development and consequently the pupils have very good attitudes to their school and their work. Teacher-pupil and pupil-pupil relationships are of a very high quality at all levels within the school. Pupils are eager and motivated in their learning and they demonstrate high levels of confidence and self-esteem. It is evident that the school manages the pastoral needs of the pupils very effectively and that it is committed to the general welfare of all its pupils. Opportunities for the pupils to engage in decision-making are enabled through their engagement in the *Green School* project. It is recommended that this good work now be further developed through the formation of a students' council. This would provide pupils with further opportunities to articulate their views, to debate relevant issues and to develop leadership and team working skills.

## **2. QUALITY OF SCHOOL PLANNING**

### **2.1 Whole-school and classroom planning**

The principal and teaching staff, together with the board of management and parents where appropriate, have co-operated in the development and review of the whole-school plan. A wide range of very comprehensive organisational policies have been drafted and ratified by the board and these are published on the school web site. Curriculum plans, in each subject area, have been drafted and these are of a high quality. These good practices are highly praised. The school has outlined a development plan in which priorities for development over the coming school year are outlined. This aspect of the whole-school planning might now be further developed. This will necessitate the identification of systems whereby the implementation of the whole-school plan, particularly in relation to the delivery of the curriculum, might be monitored and evaluated. It is therefore recommended that the quality of school self-evaluation and development planning be enhanced by ensuring that school self-review is securely based on the systematic evaluation of all areas of the school's work, including the standards of achievement. This process should lead to the identification of clear priorities for development within a longer-term strategic plan which will have the explicit purpose of improving the quality of pupils' experiences and standards of attainment.

All teachers complete satisfactory long-term and short-term planning in preparation for their work with some very good practice being observed. These plans are closely aligned to the strands and strand units of the curriculum thereby facilitating the delivery of a broad and balanced curriculum to the pupils. The very good practice observed in many teachers' planning where whole-school curriculum plans and specific curriculum objectives are utilised should be extended to all teachers planning. Differentiated levels of work are offered in most lessons, but there is limited evidence of formal planning to meet the learning needs of individual pupils or to meet the specific targets outlined in individual pupils' education plans in mainstream classes. It is therefore recommended that all teachers make provision within their planning to meet the identified learning needs of pupils in need of support. All teachers maintain progress records outlining the content addressed with the pupils each month. The potential of a standardised school template for the planning and recording of work to assist in the process of school self-evaluation was discussed with staff.

### **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 quality of teaching and learning in English is of a good to a very good standard. Pupils present, in general, as able communicators. They listen attentively to their teachers and their contributions to the learning process are skilfully encouraged and valued. Word games, story, poetry and drama are used very effectively to enhance the pupils' experiences of language. Strong emphasis is placed on the development of pupils' listening skills and some good examples of the creative use of large format books were observed in the infant and junior classes. Some teachers utilise specific oral language objectives in their teaching and the majority of teachers plan for discrete oral language lessons. This good practice should be extended to all classroom contexts. The purchasing and use of a greater number of large format books would significantly enhance the teaching of oral language skills. Furthermore, the organisation of a wider range of opportunities for pupils to use the language they have acquired across the curriculum areas should be considered in order to enable the pupils to engage more frequently in talk, discussion and debate and to develop their cognitive skills. It is therefore recommended that the school's current provision for the development of pupils' oral language be reviewed and that the school's whole-school approach to learning and teaching in oral language be further developed.

All pupils are making discernible progress in reading. In the infant and junior classes due emphasis is placed on the systematic development of pupils' phonological and phonemic awareness, on the provision of a print-rich environment and on the development of a basic sight vocabulary. Concepts of print are well developed through teacher modelling of the reading process and through the engagement of the pupils in collaborative and experiential reading activities. These good practices are highly commended. The pupils' reading skills are developed further in a structured manner in the middle and senior classes. At these levels, commercial reading schemes are utilised and supplemented by parallel readers. Class novels, brochures, catalogues and newspapers are effectively utilised to complement the formal reading scheme and this good practice is highly praised. It is recommended that the school now give serious consideration to the provision of differentiated reading material for pupils at these levels so as to ensure that all pupils engage in meaningful reading activities commensurate with their abilities and attainment levels.

Writing skills are conscientiously and carefully developed in all classes and pupils are provided with frequent opportunities to write for a variety of purposes. All pupils display a very good knowledge of the conventions of grammar, punctuation and spelling and their written work is, in general, neatly presented and regularly monitored. In the infant classes emergent writing skills are carefully attended to and print rich environments and the display of pupils' written work effectively support pupil learning in this area. In the junior and middle standards pupils are afforded opportunities to write for an increasingly diverse range of audiences in a wide variety of genres. There are good examples of creative writing, dialogues, letters and poetry writing at these levels. In the senior levels webbing and brainstorming are among the strategies utilised to assist pupils to address the writing tasks assigned. It is recommended that a whole-school approach to creative writing be drafted in which an increased emphasis is placed on the writing process and on the standardisation of presentation formats, specifically on paragraph work.

### **3.2 Mathematics**

The teaching of Mathematics is undertaken conscientiously at all class levels. The majority of pupils display commendable knowledge of mathematical concepts across a range of strands and strand units. Standardised test results from first class upwards also provide evidence of the very high standards reached in Mathematics by most pupils. Well structured lessons ensure that a balance is maintained between oral and written work and that an effective equilibrium exists between the time pupils spend engaging with the teacher and working independently. In the infant classes pupils enthusiastically engage in early mathematical activities, graph work, shape and space tasks, and number work. Pupils in junior and middle standards demonstrate very good computation skills. In the senior classes, there is clear evidence that linkage between strands is effectively used in order to ensure greater conceptual understanding among the children. A good standard of presentation of written work is evident in all classes with pupils recording their work accurately and neatly. An increased emphasis should now be placed on the use of diagrams, graphs and illustrations in pupils' recording of mathematical processes. Paired work and group work are used effectively in some classes to consolidate mathematical concepts. In a number of classes, pupils are encouraged to hypothesise and question particular concepts. Such practice also involves discussion, collaborative learning and the creation of problems based on the environment and experiences of the pupils. It is recommended that the school builds on such commendable approaches by considering greater possibilities for such practices on a school-wide basis. This should enable the pupils to further develop their ability to communicate and express mathematical ideas, processes and results in oral form. In many of the classrooms, supportive mathematics' environments have been created incorporating the use of posters, investigative areas and displays of pupils' work. It is recommended that this good practice should feature in all classrooms.

### **3.3 Geography**

The quality of teaching and learning in Geography is of a very high standard. A commendable balance is struck between the development of each strand of the geography curriculum and skills and concept development. In developing the skills of the geographer the pupils are encouraged to develop knowledge and understanding of local, regional and wider environments and to develop a sense of place and spatial awareness. The school's engagement in a very successful *Comenius Project*, in which teachers from six European countries collaborated in an environmental project, contributed highly to raising pupils' awareness of natural and environmental issues at local and international level. The very effective use of information and communications technology (ICT), including *Skype* projects with pupils in schools in Wales and Greece, facilitates the development of pupils' understanding of wider human and natural environments. This year, the school is engaging in the Green Flag project. A highly effective committee meet on a regular basis to plan and monitor the school's progress in its effort to procure its first Green Flag. Together with parents, the school has developed an impressive organic garden which features regularly in geography lessons for pupils throughout the school. Fieldwork is a commendable feature of the programme of work presented to the pupils with regular visits to Ballyseede woods, to the Kerry Earth Education centre in Gortbrack, fieldtrips to the local beach, dairy, and farm and an annual mountain climb for those pupils in the middle standards. These good practices are highly commended and contribute significantly to the standards of learning achieved by the pupils and to the interest and curiosity they display in geographical matters. Very good use is being made of pictures, photographs and maps to assist the pupils in their learning and there is good use being made of ICT in facilitating the pupils to develop appropriate skills in the areas of analysing, observing and questioning. The provision of an increased number of opportunities for pupil to engage in collaborative and project work along with further development of pupils' recording of work in their copybooks would further enhance the already commendable provision being made for pupils in Geography.

### **3.4 Assessment**

The school utilises many effective modes of assessment. Teacher observation, teacher-designed tests and the regular monitoring of pupils' written work are all employed in mainstream classes and are complemented by the judicious use of standardised tests in English and Mathematics – the *Drumcondra Reading Tests* and *Sigma-T* respectively. The results of these formal tests are subjected to comprehensive analysis, which is good practice. Within the learning-support department a comprehensive range of diagnostic tests is employed. It is now recommended that the school consider broadening the range of assessment strategies in use in mainstream classes to include the maintenance of portfolios, curriculum profiles and checklists as appropriate. Consideration should also be given to improving the standards of assessment in all subjects to match the best practice found in the school and to ensuring that the analysis and interpretation of the outcomes of assessment are systematically used in planning to improve standards of attainment.

## **4. QUALITY OF SUPPORT FOR PUPILS**

### **4.1 Pupils with special educational needs**

Provision for pupils with special educational needs is comprehensive, systematic, and flexible and it operates to a very good standard. The learning-support team consists of three teachers, two of whom work full time in the school and one who is shared with another school in the locality. Formal meetings among these teachers are conducted on a regular basis. They adopt a collective approach to the administration and analysis of test results and to the provision of support. This team approach to learning support is very commendable. Lessons observed during the evaluation period were well structured and teachers employed a range of teaching methodologies to ensure pupils' active participation in the learning process. Pupil-teacher interactions are sensitive, affirming and encouraging. Within the learning-support team there are some very good examples of planning and record keeping, including daily planning sheets, weekly planning records and details of learning targets achieved by pupils. Due to this diligent planning and record-keeping, learning-support teachers have a comprehensive file on each pupil as well as carefully developed individual profile and learning programmes (IPLPs) and individual education plans (IEPs). All pupils are making good progress in their learning in accordance with their own competencies and abilities. At present, one teacher provides support in literacy, another for numeracy and the third teacher focuses solely on the provision of support for pupils with special educational needs. Provision for pupils is organised through a combination of withdrawal and in-class support. Early identification of pupils with learning difficulties is addressed through the organisation of team-teaching at junior infant level. It is now recommended that this current organisation of provision be reviewed and that assessment data be scrutinised to identify where the focus of support should be placed. It is further recommended that where team-teaching is practised that teachers collaborate in the devising of a programme of work in order to enhance the benefits of this practice on pupil learning outcomes.

### **4.2 Other supports for pupils: disadvantaged, minority and other groups**

The principles of inclusiveness, equality of access and participation are effectively promoted in the school. The board is sensitive to isolated instances of disadvantage among the pupils and it provides resources to ensure that all pupils have access to the full range of school activities.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

The school has strengths in the following areas:

- The school has a committed, supportive and enthusiastic board of management.
- The parents' association is very supportive of the work of teachers and strong home school links have been established.
- A bright, stimulating and attractive learning environment has been created for the pupils and attention to detail is obvious throughout the school, particularly in the high standards of displays in corridors and in the development of the school's organic garden.
- The conscientious, committed staff members contribute to the high quality of teaching and learning in the school.
- There is effective use of information and communication technology (ICT) to support teaching and learning in the school.
- The school benefits from the dedicated leadership provided by the principal and the in-school management team.
- Pupil behaviour is managed successfully. Pupils are enthusiastic in their approach to school and are cooperative and attentive.
- Pupils with special needs are offered focused support and they are afforded full inclusion in mainstream settings.

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

- It is recommended that the quality of school self-evaluation and development planning be enhanced by ensuring that school self-review is securely based on the systematic evaluation of all areas of the school's work, including the standards of pupil achievement.
- As part of its future development the in-school management team should focus on the role of post-holders in leading curriculum review and planning, with particular reference to its impact on teaching and learning.
- It is recommended that the school's current provision for the development of pupils' oral language skills be reviewed and a whole-school approach to learning and teaching in oral language be developed.
- It is recommended that the school expand upon the range of assessment strategies in use in mainstream classes to include the maintenance of portfolios, curriculum profiles and checklists as appropriate.

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.



# **Appendix**

**SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT**

**Submitted by the Board of Management**

**Area 1 Observations on the content of the inspection report**

The Board of Management wishes to record its appreciation of the courtesy, professionalism and encouragement shown to all members of the school community by the Inspection Team. The strengths identified and the recognition of the high standards affirm the diligent efforts of our staff and parents.

**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 Board are happy to accept the recommendations in the report and will use them for review and continuous school development. Indeed, we have implemented most of the recommendations at the time of writing.