

# An Roinn Oideachais agus Eolaíochta

## Department of Education and Science

### Whole School Evaluation Report

Scoil an Spioraid Naoimh (Boys),  
Bishopstown,  
Cork.

Uimhir rolla: 20077A  
Date of inspection: 27 February 2008

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#### Whole-school evaluation

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## WHOLE-SCHOOL EVALUATION

This report has been written following a whole school evaluation of Scoil an Spioraid Naoimh (B), Bishopstown, Cork. It presents the findings of an evaluation of the work of the school as a whole and makes recommendations for further development. During the evaluation, the inspectors held pre-evaluation meetings with the principal, the teachers, the school's board of management, and representatives of the parents' association. The evaluation was conducted over a number of days during which inspectors visited classrooms and observed teaching and learning. They interacted with pupils and teachers and examined pupils' work.

They reviewed school planning documentation and teachers' written preparation. Following the evaluation visit, the inspectors provided oral feedback on the outcomes of the evaluation to the staff and to the board of management. The board of management was given the 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 to this report.

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### 1. INTRODUCTION – SCHOOL CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

Scoil an Spioraid Naoimh (B) is a Roman Catholic school under the patronage of the Bishop of Cork and Ross. The school serves a wide suburban catchment area. Enrolment trends have remained stable over the last number of years. Currently there are 391 pupils on roll including an increasing number of pupils from diverse national backgrounds. This is a direct result of employment mobility within the area. The school was designated disadvantaged as part of an

amalgamation agreement in 1998. It aims to promote the full and harmonious development of all aspects of the pupil. The welcoming atmosphere and ethos of the school reflects a firm commitment to the holistic development of pupils in a positive learning environment.

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## **2. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT**

### **2.1 Board of management**

The board of management is properly constituted, functions effectively and has a clear and shared understanding of its responsibilities in the management and development of the school. Meetings are convened regularly, minutes are maintained and an account of expenditure is presented. While specific tasks have not been allocated, individual board members bring a wealth of personal expertise to the decision-making process. The board of management takes pride in providing a comfortable and safe environment for the school community. A review of minutes of meetings confirms that the board makes a very positive contribution to the successful operation of the school. It is committed to developing a climate of continuous improvement within the school.

Positive relations are in evidence between the board and teaching staff and regular consultation is engaged in with the general parent body on relevant matters. The chairperson maintains regular contact with the principal and staff. To further enhance the engagement of board with staff, it is suggested that the chair meets the in-school management team on a regular basis. The board duly complies with Department of Education and Science regulations as regards length of school year and school day, the deployment of teachers and the retention of pupils. Organisational policies and curricular plans are considered and ratified by the board. It is recommended that hard copies of all policies be signed and dated.

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### **2.2 In-school management**

The in-school management team is comprised of the principal, deputy principal, privileged assistant, three assistant principals and seven special duties teachers. The principal has a clear vision for the school. He displays effective organisational and instructional leadership. His style of leadership is collegial and inclusive. It is also characterised by a primary concern for the welfare of pupils and for all members of staff. He is ably supported by the deputy principal and other members of the in-school management team in a collaborative manner. The principal delegates effectively. Duties allocated are focused on organisational, pastoral and curricular issues. They are carried out with commitment and efficiency and contribute positively to addressing the priority needs of the school. The team meets regularly after school and staff are informed of decisions made. Subject coordinators lead working groups collaboratively in developing whole-school plans. As a means of building on these good practices, it is suggested that post-holders further develop their instructional leadership role in the process of monitoring the implementation and on-going review of curriculum delivery.

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### **2.3 Management of resources**

The teaching staff comprises the administrative principal, fifteen mainstream class teachers, two full-time and one shared learning support teacher, two full-time resource teachers, three language support teachers and one full-time resource teacher for Travellers. Under the amalgamation agreement, the newly-formed school was granted concessions on staffing and was assigned a home-school community liaison post. Six special needs assistants are employed to support pupils with special educational needs.

A full-time secretary provides valuable administrative support and she is to be commended for her dedication and commitment to the school. Two part-time cleaners and a caretaker contribute significantly to the maintenance of a clean and safe environment. The board also employs a speech and drama tutor and, occasionally, a music teacher. The teaching staff has participated in national in-service initiatives and individual staff members have availed of professional

development opportunities in response to the assessed needs of the school. The board of management is most supportive of teachers' continuous professional development.

Staff mobility is encouraged and class allocation is decided by the principal taking cognisance of the personal preferences expressed by teachers. Some team teaching is in operation. The sharing of teachers' expertise is promoted in a number of curricular areas. This good practice should be further extended throughout the school.

The school was built in 1965 and extended in 2001. The original school building accommodates twelve permanent classrooms, a resource room, parents' room and an office for the home-school community liaison co-ordinator. The new accommodation block includes four classrooms, four learning support rooms, a computer room, toilet facilities and two staff rooms, one of which is used by the neighbouring girls' school.

A large foyer, reception area and administrative offices are also provided. The hall and ancillary facilities include a kitchen, toilets and some storage space. The pupils have access to a tarmac area, shelter and hard court. The school grounds are landscaped and the board of management, as part of the maintenance plan, has invested considerable amounts of money in upgrading security around the school.

The attractive physical learning environment, in evidence in some classrooms, is most praiseworthy. A sincere effort should now be made to ensure that all classrooms and support settings are similarly attractive and organised. Visually attractive corridors are decorated with pupils' work, projects and interesting photographic records of school events and achievements. A high standard of hygiene and order is in evidence throughout the building which contributes to the creation of a pleasant working environment.

The board of management has invested in a range of resources which are available for all curriculum areas and, in the main, such resources are employed to good effect to support pupils' active engagement in learning. Teacher-designed aids used in many classrooms are praiseworthy. While a range of mathematical equipment is available in the school there is a need to improve the accessibility of these resources, particularly to the senior classes. As curriculum innovation and implementation proceeds, further resources will be required to facilitate an activity-based approach to teaching and learning.

Some classrooms also need to be re-organised to enhance teaching and learning and to create a more inclusive environment. An Information, Communication and Technology (ICT) laboratory, in which there are twenty computers, is utilised productively. Computer technology features prominently in each classroom and, in general, is employed judiciously as a learning tool.

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

The parents' association, affiliated to the National Parents Council, meets regularly to discuss current issues and to organise school events. The association makes a significant contribution to school life by fundraising for additional resources for pupils and by supporting the school in a range of events, namely, sports day, liturgical services, and notably the seasonal decoration of the school.

Close communication with the board of management is effected through the attendance of parents' representatives at the parents' association meetings and through informal meetings with the principal on a regular basis. Furthermore, the association has an effective structure in place to maintain good communication with all parents. Solid communication systems are further enhanced by the association's issuing of a newsletter which reports on school activities and provides information on forthcoming events.

The effective cultivation of positive relationships between school and home is a notable feature of this school. An induction meeting for new parents is held annually. This is complemented by the

issuing of an informative booklet for parents. Regular parent-teacher dialogue is conducted through the homework journal. Parent-teacher meetings are held annually to facilitate discussion regarding individual pupils' progress. Additional meetings are convened between teachers and parents when deemed necessary. All parents receive an annual written report on their children's progress. Informative termly newsletters are also issued by the school.

Parents are very supportive of the work of the school and are very satisfied with the level of communication that exists and with the educational provision provided. Parents welcome involvement in policy development and indicate that, to date, it has been a positive experience. Through the home-school community service, parents are also involved in the promotion of literacy and numeracy in the junior classes.

The strong links that the school has established with the community enhances the delivery of a broad and balanced curriculum. Pupils are afforded a wide range of opportunities to engage productively with a number of educational institutions and businesses located in the area. The school is to be highly commended for its work in this area.

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## **2.5 Management of pupils**

Teachers are greatly committed to the provision of a learning environment that allows pupils achieve to the best of their ability. Staff has devised a creditable range of policies that establish healthy patterns of behaviour and respectful relationships. Positive teacher-pupil relationships are fostered and, in general, classes are well managed. The "Playground Buddies" initiative fosters a positive ethos in the school and promotes a caring attitude to other pupils.

Productive study patterns are established in the formative years of the pupils' development, through the pupils' participation in the school's homework club. Teachers demonstrate a thoughtful understanding of the backgrounds and needs of pupils and have a genuine concern for their progress. Pupils are encouraged to be confident and caring individuals and, in turn, are courteous and respectful to staff.

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## **3. QUALITY OF SCHOOL PLANNING**

### **3.1 School planning process and implementation**

Good structures have been put in place to facilitate the involvement of all staff members in the whole-school planning process. The middle management team have played a crucial role in guiding this work and a range of appropriate policies, both organisational and curricular, has been devised in response to relevant educational legislation and the evolving needs of the school. These policies provide a sound basis for the development of effective practice and merit high commendation.

However, there is now a need to promote greater linkage between curricular policies and classroom practice. In this context, it is recommended that the staff make more use of the data emanating from pupils' assessment tests and monthly progress records. This information should also be used to inform and guide regular whole-school review of curricular plans. It is also recommended that this process could gainfully inform the development of specific action plans regarding planning, teaching and learning, to be implemented within agreed time frames.

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.

### 3.2 Classroom planning

All teachers prepare both short-term and long-term plans of work for the pupils in their care. They also record the monthly progress of work. Commendably, an effective record system for these documents is in place in the school. It is evident that much credit is due to many teachers for the considerable time and effort they expend on classroom planning. However, a variety of approaches is in evidence and there is a lack of clarity in some plans regarding the expected learning outcomes for pupils.

It is also evident that in some classrooms there is an overemphasis on textbook content. In order to build on existing good practice, it is recommended that the staff review the range of approaches to classroom planning in evidence. Such a review should aim to further ensure that all strands of the curriculum are addressed in a manner that is relevant to the needs of pupils.

It is also suggested that the development of an agreed template for monthly progress records would greatly enhance the effectiveness of the current system and support the staff in promoting more linkage between classroom planning and whole-school plans.

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## 4. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

### 4.1 Overview of learning and teaching

Overall, teaching methodologies adopted by staff are characterised by a blend of traditional and innovative strategies with considerable emphasis on whole-class teaching. During the evaluation, some purposeful, focused and well-structured lessons were observed.

However, teaching approaches were not always varied nor well-matched to the content, learning needs and stages of development of the pupils. An over reliance on textbook activity in some classes leads to a didactic teaching style and, in these instances, a greater emphasis on interactive teaching and cooperative learning practices is recommended.

Overall, teachers create a positive learning atmosphere and high expectations of pupils' behaviour and engagement in learning are well established. Teachers motivate pupils through the use of well-judged positive feedback. However, the practice of providing pupils with opportunities to take a more active role in their learning should be extended. Greater emphasis should also be placed on the development of pupils' core skills across all curricular areas. While group teaching was in evidence in a limited number of classrooms, it is recommended that this practice be extended to all classes.

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### 4.2 Language

#### Gaeilge

I gcomhthéacs na dea-oibre atá idir lámha ó thaobh pleanála scoile de, moltar aird ar leith a dhíriú ar an gcur chuige cumarsáideach agus go mórmhór ar thréimhsí an cheachta. B'fhiú, chomh maith, athbhreithniú a dhéanamh ar an gclár don Ghaeilge atá sa phlean scoile chun go gcothófaí breis leanúnachais ó rang go rang san ionchur teanga a mhúintear. Chonacthas samplaí fóna de theagasc agus d'fhoghlaim na Gaeilge labhartha ag rangleibhéil éagsúla le linn na cigireachta.

I gcuid mhaith rangsheomraí múintear ionchur teanga maith go sciliúil agus baintear leas fóna as cluichí oiriúnacha le cur ar chumas na ndaltaí frásaí nua a fhoghlaim ar bhonn taitneamhach idirghníomhach. Moltar an aird a dhírítear ar an bhfilíocht, ar rannta agus ar amhráin agus cuirtear an scéalaíocht chun cinn ar dhóigh fíorthaitneamhach ag rangleibhéal ar leith. I gcuid de

na ranganna baintear leas éifeachtach as obair i bpéirí agus as ról-imirt chun taithí a thabhairt do na daltaí ar an teanga a bhíonn foghlamtha acu a úsáid ar bhonn fíorchumarsáide.

Tá gá anois, na dea-chleachtais seo a chur chun cinn ar bhonn uile-scoile. B'inmholta, chomh maith, gné éigin den churaclam a mhúineadh trí mheán na Gaeilge. Leagtar bunchloch na léitheoireachta agus na scríbhneoireachta go héifeachtach ag rangleibhéil ar leith. Moltar prionta a chur ar taispeáint i seomraí áirithe chun tacú le foghlaim na léitheoireachta agus na scríbhneoireachta.

Is léir go léann a lán daltaí na téacsanna ranga le líofacht chreidiúnach. Moltar, anois, réimse níos leithne téacsanna a chur ar fáil do na daltaí chun eispéiris leathan léitheoireachta a thabhairt dóibh. Chonacthas roinnt samplaí fóna de scríbhneoireacht na ndaltaí, bunaithe go cuí ar na ceachtanna comhrá. B'fhiú, anois, tógaint ar na dea-chleachtais seo agus scileanna saorscríbhneoireachta na ndaltaí a chothú a thuilleadh fós.

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### **Irish**

*In the context of the praiseworthy school planning work in progress, it is recommended that particular attention be given to the communicative approach, especially the phases of the lesson. It would be worthwhile to review the language programme included in the school plan in order to promote more continuity in the language input taught from one class level to the next. During the evaluation examples of good practice in the teaching and learning of Irish were noted at a variety of class levels.*

In many classrooms good language input is taught skilfully and worthwhile use is made of appropriate games to enable pupils learn new phrases in an enjoyable interactive manner. Appropriate emphasis is placed on poetry, rhyme and song and at a particular class level, storytelling is developed in a most enjoyable manner. In some classes effective use is made of pair work and role-play to enable pupils use the language learned in a communicative context.

However, there is a need to extend these examples of good practice on a whole-school basis in order to greatly improve many pupils' communicative skills. It is also advised to teach some aspect of the curriculum through the medium of Irish. The basic skills of reading and writing are taught effectively at particular class levels. In some classes print is productively used to support the development of pupils' reading and writing skills.

Many pupils read the class texts with a reasonable degree of fluency. However, it is recommended that more opportunities be provided for pupils to read a variety of texts so as to provide them with a wider reading experience. Some praiseworthy samples of pupils' writing, based appropriately on their oral work, were noted. It is also recommended that existing good practice in the teaching of writing be extended in order to further develop pupils' independent writing skills.

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### **English**

A whole-school plan for English has been documented and some aspects of this plan are praiseworthy. Further delineation of content objectives across all strands for each class grouping is necessary in order to provide guidance and direction that will inform teacher planning. This plan should be reviewed and thereafter greater emphasis should be placed on the implementation of all aspects of the agreed programme of work. Ongoing monitoring of its implementation is also recommended.

Appropriate attention is paid to the development of pupils' oral language skills which are taught through discrete oral language lessons and through integration across curricular areas. A structured oral language programme is used prudently in some classes. Appropriate use is made of story, poetry, large format books, textbooks, workbooks and worksheets to engage pupils in discussion in the infant classes.

In some middle and senior classes, pupils are provided with opportunities to engage in debate, interviews, reporting and storytelling. Greater emphasis on the development of specific oral

language skills is advised. It is recommended that a common approach to oral language development be adopted in all classes and this should be linked closely to the content objectives for oral language as outlined in curriculum documents.

Pupils in junior classes, display age-appropriate phonological and phonemic awareness, a good knowledge of frequently used words and proficiency in word identification strategies. Teachers use good visual examples in supporting the development of pupils' phonological awareness. A repertoire of poems and rhymes is taught and pupils are encouraged to respond in different ways through dramatising, writing and comparing poems. A commendable emphasis is placed on learning poetry in most classrooms and pupils recite a range of suitable poems with clarity and expression.

In general, pupils read with accuracy and with a good degree of fluency. However, a more systematic development of reading skills throughout the school would greatly augment the reading culture. At the emergent reading stage, it is suggested that more structured informal reading activity precede the introduction of a formal reading programme. Focused attention on the development of specific reading skills should be a salient feature of every reading lesson. It is recommended that differentiated reading programmes be put in place throughout the school to accommodate the wide range of reading abilities in classes.

To this end, reading materials, appropriate to the various levels of competencies, should be provided. A whole-school approach to the use of the novel would impact positively on the development of pupils' reading ability. A shared reading buddy system is in place and regular promotion of library books is a feature of most classrooms.

Pupils engage in both functional and creative writing. From an early age pupils are enabled to compose simple sentences independently and engage in a variety of workbook exercises. Daily news, book review, poetry and story are evident. A greater balance between functional and creative writing is advised. In some classrooms pupils are given the opportunity to write for a variety of purposes and in a range of genre using an age-appropriate register of language. Process writing features in some of the middle and senior classes.

Greater opportunity should be provided to engage in creative writing and to develop the skill of drafting and editing. A designated writing area is a commendable feature of some junior classrooms. Letter formation and handwriting skills are keenly developed. Pupils, in general, observe the conventions of grammar, punctuation and spelling in their writing. Good penmanship is a positive feature of all classrooms and the school is to be commended for the high standard of presentation of written work evident throughout the school. ICT is used effectively in some classrooms to enable pupils publish their work.

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### **Modern Languages in Primary Schools Initiative**

The school is commended for its participation in the "Modern Languages in Primary Schools Initiative." Suitable themes are collaboratively agreed as the context for the lessons. During the evaluation, pupils were involved in compiling their own stories as part of World Book Day. However, in the interest of developing best practice, management is urged to review current planning processes and methodologies. The importance of the communicative phases of the language lesson were highlighted and discussed.

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### **4.3 Mathematics**

Well-structured whole class teaching of Mathematics was observed during the evaluation. Commendably, exercises in the memorisation of number facts feature prominently. The work follows the content and sequence outlined in a commercially produced scheme and this facilitates a systematic treatment of the various strands prescribed in the curriculum. This is further supplemented by a range of worksheets produced by staff.

Teachers give clear explanation to pupils and address content through detailed questioning. Early mathematical activities are carefully taught in the infant classes and much of the learning is effectively underpinned by a purposeful use of rhyme and hands-on approaches. Teachers monitor pupils' written work carefully and test results testify to a good standard of achievement in Mathematics. However, in addressing pupils' diverse learning needs within the mainstream classrooms, it is recommended that the use of hands-on approaches be greatly extended.

The further development of pupils' problem solving skills and their use of mathematical language might be addressed by the school when standards in Mathematics are being reviewed. A further emphasis on regularly linking the work in progress to pupils' own experiences and to real-life situations will greatly enrich pupils' learning. The provision of mathematics-rich environment throughout the school and the use of mathematical games are to be encouraged in order to facilitate the reinforcement of key skills in an integrated manner.

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#### **4.4 Social, Environmental and Scientific Education**

##### **History**

Good practice in the teaching of history is noted. Praiseworthy work on the history of the school is ongoing. There is much good evidence of storytelling as a means of promoting pupils' understanding of history. Project work features prominently in the programme at a variety of class levels. Good use is made of ICT to enable pupils access information and to present lesson content in a stimulating manner. The work is integrated effectively with other curricular areas, notably the Visual Arts programme. Well-structured lessons with good opportunities for pupils to work in groups as historians, as well as at whole-class level, were observed.

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##### **Geography**

The whole-school plan in Geography delineates general aims, content and resources for the subject. While the content of individual class programmes in this curricular area tends to be determined by class textbooks, some teachers judiciously plan a variety of learning experiences across all strands. Topics are introduced and developed through discussion that is relevant to pupils' lives and experiences. Appropriate use is made of visual aids and maps in communicating geographical knowledge. Map reading skills are keenly developed and interest in the locality of the school is appropriately emphasised.

Field trips, nature walks and educational trips are organised regularly. Integration of Geography with other subject areas, particularly with Science, is promoted. Commendable use is made of ICT to research topics of interest. Project work is used to considerable effect to widen perspectives and to develop research skills. Further emphasis should be placed on pupils' recording of work undertaken. Greater use of investigative and skilled based approaches to developing pupils' knowledge and understanding of natural and human environments is recommended.

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##### **Science**

The school plan in Science is characterised by a detailed degree of practicality and clarity and provides a most valuable guide to classroom planning and practice. The school's programme in Science is covered over a two-year period. ICT is recognised by staff as a valuable resource in the teaching of Science. The core elements of Science lessons are based on a commercial text and on seasonal events. Charts and other illustrative materials are productively used to support lessons. Nature and investigation tables feature in some classrooms. The school's involvement in the Green Schools Programme is acknowledged.

The school engages in initiatives such as Knex Challenge and Junior Achievement Awards in the development of pupils' skills. Project work is of a very high standard. Field trips are organised and experts to the school are regularly welcomed. Pupils are afforded opportunities to engage in scientific enquiry in a number of classrooms and further engagement with hands-on activities is advised to develop scientific skill. In the further development of Science, staff is encouraged to identify a variety of habitats in the immediate environment of the school and beyond that will facilitate hands-on investigative work.

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## 4.5 Arts Education

### Visual Arts

The visual arts programme is accorded an important status within the school and this is evidenced in the stimulating and creative displays around the school. The entrance hallway is used effectively in creating a gallery type display of the work of artists. Classrooms and corridors celebrate the work of pupils and senior classes have decorated the playground shed with a colourful mural. Pupils are exposed to a wide range of stimuli, media, technique and skill and they are afforded opportunities to explore and experiment in 2D and in 3D dimensions. Opportunities for integrating the Visual Arts with other areas of the curriculum are regularly exploited. A suitable balance is achieved between making art and looking and responding to art. Equally, teachers place appropriate emphasis on the process of Art. Pupils are afforded regular opportunities to respond to the work of their peers and to the work of artists. Assessment, in the main, is through teacher observation and in some cases through teacher designed tasks. Portfolios of pupils' work are also maintained in a number of classrooms.

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### Music

A particular strength in this school is the positive musical environment which is fostered. A varied programme is provided throughout the school. It is particularly praiseworthy that tin whistle is taught in some classes. Many teachers have a special interest and expertise in the area of Music and share their talents generously with pupils and colleagues. Pupils are provided with valuable opportunities to perform in annual concerts, in the school band, school choir and at local events such as Cor Fhéile na Scol. The high quality of the performances from the band and choir, observed during the evaluation, merit much praise. Teachers are to be highly commended for their dedication and commitment to this valuable work.

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### Drama

There is much good practice in the area of Drama. A worthwhile whole-school plan which draws attention to many of the key messages in the curriculum is in place. Discrete time is allocated and in many classes the work is integrated effectively with other areas. A good range of work is undertaken. Appropriately, the work observed in most classes was closely linked to the objectives of the Drama curriculum and teachers used a good variety of appropriate methodologies. In most classes pupils demonstrate commendable levels of confidence, enthusiasm and engagement with the activities.

This school has a long established tradition of participating in Féile Drámaíochta na Scol and has achieved success at both local and national competitions. The work in this area is highly commended and the school is encouraged to continue promoting Irish through drama as it provides an additional enjoyable context for pupils to use the language. The school enjoys the services of an external drama teacher and it is evident that she works in close collaboration with the teaching staff. The success of the school in Feis Maitiú is acknowledged and commended.

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## 4.6 Physical Education

The school has designed a well-planned and comprehensive programme of work in Physical Education (PE). The local GAA sporting facilities are used regularly and a wide range of suitable equipment is available in the school.

Clear and precise direction is a salient feature of lessons which are well organised and are carefully structured to include appropriate warm-up and cool-down activities. Specific skill development is promoted and pupils are provided with opportunities to further develop these skills through a range of collaborative activities. Partner work, group activities and games are capably managed to promote full participation. Some of the lessons observed provided opportunities for pupils to discuss and reflect on the skill or activity in hand. The teachers' use of Irish is a further commendable feature of the PE lesson.

Pupils' successful participation in competitions and sports days augments the school's provision for physical education. Aquatic lessons are also organised in the nearby swimming pool. Visiting coaches supplement the games programme provided which include hurling, football, basketball and cricket. Staff are to be commended for their commitment to the provision of an extensive after-school sports programme especially in the area of Gaelic games. The school is also noted for its successes in chess.

As a developmental feature, greater opportunities should be provided to pupils to explore and experiment with various pieces of equipment during the lesson. To ensure that pupils experience a balance of strands in the physical education programme, it is recommended that greater attention be given to the strands of dance, outdoor and adventure activities and gymnastics.

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#### **4.7 Social, Personal and Health Education**

Throughout the school, teachers provide many opportunities to foster the personal development, health and well-being of pupils. Teachers are committed to the creation of positive relationships between themselves and pupils. They endeavour to imbue pupils with respect for people and encourage responsibility. A wide and successful range of opportunities are provided for the development of pupils' sense of self-worth, personal growth and safety.

A brief plan for Social, Personal and Health Education has been developed. Many of the objectives are approached in a cross-curricular manner drawing on a range of specific programmes. While this plan delineates the proposed yearly plan, it is necessary to outline the content objectives to be taught at the different class levels. Teachers facilitate discussion rooted in pupils' experiences to promote pupil engagement. Circle time and story is used to good effect to elicit listening skills and to enable pupils explore and discuss feelings. It is recommended that a wider range of teaching approaches and active learning strategies be employed to further enhance the discrete SPHE lesson.

In the further development of the SPHE programme emphasis should now be placed on ensuring that all classes allocate the appropriate time to the delivery of the SPHE programme in line with curriculum guidelines. It is also recommended that the strand Myself and the wider world might be given greater attention so that aspects such as developing citizenship and media education might be further developed. With regard to Relationship and Sexuality Education, Walk Tall and Stay Safe programmes, there is a clear need to delineate the content to be taught at each class level to ensure continuity and progression in learning. The school might consider establishing a school council to further develop pupils' leadership, decision-making and communication skills.

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#### **4.8 Assessment**

The school has a good quality assessment policy in place. Appropriately, this document highlights clearly that all pupils should experience success at school. Teachers use a variety of assessment modes to assess pupil progress. In keeping with good practice, standardised tests are administered annually and the results are recorded carefully. The results are discussed with parents and all teachers retain copies for the pupils in their care. A good range of diagnostic and screening tests, administered individually or on a whole class basis, is utilized. All records are maintained centrally and are updated regularly.

In some classes, teacher-designed tests, portfolios and checklists were noted during the evaluation. These greatly support pupils' learning and enable teachers monitor individual pupils' acquisition of key concepts and skills. It is recommended that these assessment approaches be more systematically developed on a whole-school basis. It is also recommended that the data arising from assessment be used to track individual pupil progress from one class level to the next and to inform appropriate modifications of mainstream classroom programmes.

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

## 5.1 Pupils with special educational needs

A comprehensive whole-school policy on the provision of support for pupils with special educational needs is prepared and is in accordance with the school's caring ethos. The school employs three learning support teachers who are committed to addressing the learning needs of pupils in a conscientious and professional manner. Support is offered to pupils in literacy and numeracy and commendably extends to addressing the needs of a child in the "gifted" category. Results from standardised and diagnostic testing are used purposefully in the identification of learning difficulties and in the setting of learning targets.

These plans are practical in nature and a timeframe for review in consultation with class teachers is set. Progress of pupils is systematically recorded by all teachers and is productively used in the review of targets. Focused programmes of work that incorporate the use of ICT are prepared. Support for children in the main is through withdrawal. Staff is encouraged to make provision for more in-class support. The school employs six special needs assistants and they make an important contribution to pupil learning under the careful guidance of class teachers.

The practice of SNA's withdrawing pupils from the classroom to engage in individual work should be reviewed immediately. Within the context of the evolving school plan, formal time to meet and discuss special education needs as a team should be identified. In the consolidation of learning in numeracy, consideration could usefully be given to the greater use of manipulative and mathematical games. Increased level of coordination between class teachers and support teachers in programme delivery is a further area to be considered.

Two full time resource teachers offer focused tuition on a withdrawal basis to a number of pupils. Careful individual education plans are prepared and programmes of work are organized in consultation with parents and with class teachers. A systematic approach to detailing and recording pupil progress and the achievement of targets is employed. Stimulating learning environments are created and judicious use is made of a range of suitable resources to consolidate learning.

The interaction between teacher and pupil is positive and affirming. While learning targets are identified, it is now necessary to ensure that learning programmes are closely linked to the prioritised needs of the pupil. This may merit the use a more varied range of teaching and learning approaches to include activity-based learning strategies. In formulating and reviewing learning programmes, a greater level of consultation should take place to ensure that classroom practice provides a differentiated curriculum. In-class support might be considered as a means of enhancing current provision and ensuring the inclusion of pupils with special educational needs in all classroom activities.

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

A welcoming environment has been created in the school for newcomer pupils. Many attractive displays of pupils' work and print-rich materials are organised carefully. Most pupils are withdrawn for language support. Some in-class support is also provided. The language support teachers work conscientiously in close collaboration with mainstream teachers. They have undertaken professional development training in this area and make worthwhile use of the Integrate Ireland Language and Training materials. Good templates are in use for ongoing assessment of pupils' language needs and the planning of work to be undertaken.

The lessons observed were well-structured and effective use was made of a variety of appropriate methodologies. It is recommended that, in order to meet the varying needs of pupils, the range of reading materials available to these pupils should be greatly extended. A review of pupils' IEPs in order to further co-ordinate the input between mainstream and support contexts will greatly enhance pupils' learning. It is also recommended that greater emphasis be placed on in-class support and that a whole-school plan for language support be devised in order to further develop existing good practice.

The work of the resource teacher for travellers, recently appointed to this position, is praiseworthy. Support is provided in the area of literacy and numeracy whereby pupils are taken either individually or in small groups for focused tuition. While some in-class support is also undertaken, further opportunities for team-teaching should be explored. Lessons are delivered in a very caring manner, providing pupils with encouragement and a sense of achievement. Suitable teaching aids are deployed to assist in the delivery of the curriculum.

However, greater accessibility of resources coupled with a more organised and attractive environment would greatly enhance teaching and learning. Individual learning programmes have been devised. A commendable feature of these programmes is pupils' involvement in project work based on topics that are specifically related to their culture. However, such learning programmes should include specific time-bound learning targets. It is therefore recommended that pupils' learning targets and progress be reviewed and documented at suitable intervals.

The home-school community liaison service facilitates the promotion of a positive partnership through encouraging active co-operation between school, home and relevant community agencies. A wide range of programmes is capably organised to address the various needs of parents. They are offered a wide range of courses including computing and art and craft. They are also trained in the promotion of literacy through their involvement with the Story Sack initiative.

Parents working closely with teacher and pupils in the classroom has proven to be a most positive experience. Also of significance are the English language classes offered to those parents whose first language is not English. Through the Home School Community Liaison Services parents have been productively involved in policy development and in school life in general. The work in this area is commendable.

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## **6. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT**

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- The school is characterised by a welcoming, caring and well-ordered school environment where pupils enjoy learning.
- The principal provides effective leadership.
- The spirit of collaborative leadership leads to a very positive working environment within the school.
- Staff are committed to providing positive educational experiences for pupils.
- The school community gains positively from the excellent support of the board of management and the parents' association.
- Pupils display mannerly behaviour and demonstrate positive attitudes to learning.
- A wide range of extra curricular activities contributes positively to the holistic development of pupils.
- Strong links established with the wider community support the delivery of a broad and balanced curriculum.

As a means of building on these strengths and to address areas for development, the following key recommendations are made:

- It is recommended that the use of active learning methodologies be extended throughout the school, particularly in the teaching of English, Irish and Mathematics, with greater emphasis being placed on the development of pupils' skills.
- It is recommended that more use be made of the data emanating from assessment tests to inform planning, teaching and learning and that more differentiated learning programmes be devised to match pupils' level of ability.
- It is advised that curricular plans be further developed, systematically monitored and reviewed.
- I dteagasc na Gaeilge, b'fhiú na scileanna teanga a fhorbairt go córasach, breis béime a chur ar an nGaeilge labhartha agus plean cinnte a leagan amach don léitheoireacht agus don

scribhneoireacht. (In the teaching of Irish, it is recommended that language skills be developed further, that greater emphasis be placed on spoken Irish and that a plan be devised for the systematic development of reading and writing).

- In reviewing present practice in the provision for pupils with special educational needs greater co-ordination between class teachers and support teachers is required and a greater balance between withdrawal and in-class support should be established.
- It is recommended that pupils' learning experiences in the area of SPHE be extended to reflect a broad and more balanced curriculum.

Post-evaluation meetings were held with the staff and board of management where the draft findings and recommendations of the evaluation were presented and discussed.

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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 of Management welcomes the report and its affirmation of the school and its stakeholders.

The Board would also like to acknowledge the courtesy shown by the inspection team during the evaluation and the professional manner in which the inspection was conducted.

##### **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 acknowledges the recommendations of the report which will be integral to the school's programme planning for the future.