

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
Management, Leadership and Learning

REPORT

Ainm na scoile / School name	Saint Joseph's National School
Seoladh na scoile / School address	Tom Bellew Avenue Dundalk County Louth
Uimhir rolla / Roll number	19673J

Date of inspection: 16-05-2019



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agus Scileanna
Department of
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WHAT IS WHOLE-SCHOOL EVALUATION – MANAGEMENT, LEADERSHIP AND LEARNING?

Whole-School Evaluation – Management, Leadership and Learning reports on the quality of teaching and learning and on the quality of management and leadership in a school. It affirms good practice and makes recommendations, where appropriate, to aid the further development of educational provision in the school.

HOW TO READ THIS REPORT

During this inspection, the inspectors evaluated and reported under the following headings or areas of enquiry:

1. The quality of pupils' learning
2. The quality of teaching
3. The quality of support for pupils' well-being
4. The quality of leadership and management
5. The quality of school self-evaluation

Inspectors describe the quality of each of these areas using the Inspectorate's quality continuum, which is shown on the final page of this report. The quality continuum provides examples of the language used by inspectors when evaluating and describing the quality of the school's provision in each area.

The board of management was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the report; a response was not received from the board.

CHILD PROTECTION

During the inspection visit, the following checks in relation to the school's child protection procedures were conducted:

1. The name of the DLP and the Child Safeguarding Statement are prominently displayed near the main entrance to the school.
2. The Child Safeguarding Statement has been ratified by the board and includes an annual review and a risk assessment.
3. All teachers visited reported that they have read the Child Safeguarding Statement and that they are aware of their responsibilities as mandated persons.
4. The Child Safeguarding Statement meets the requirements of the Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools 2017.
5. The records of the last three board of management meetings record a child protection oversight report that meet the requirements of the Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary schools 2017.
6. The board of management has ensured that arrangements are in place to provide information to all school personnel on the Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools, 2017
7. School planning documentation indicates that the school is making full provision for the relevant aspects of the curriculum (SPHE, Stay Safe, RSE, Wellbeing).
8. Child protection records are maintained in a secure location.

The school met the requirements in relation to each of the checks above.

Whole-School Evaluation – Management, Leadership and Learning

Dates of inspection	16-05-2019
Inspection activities undertaken	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meetings with principal and in-school leadership team • Meeting with representatives of the board of management • Meeting with parent representatives • Meeting with teachers • Review of relevant documents 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analysis of parent, pupil and teacher questionnaires • Observation of teaching and learning • Examination of pupils' work • Interaction with pupils • Feedback to principal, deputy principal and teachers, and to parent and board of management representatives

SCHOOL CONTEXT

Saint Joseph's National School, Dundalk is an urban co-educational school catering for pupils from infants to sixth classes. The school also has a special class for pupils with a Specific Speech and Language Disorder (SSLD). The school operates under the patronage of the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Armagh and participates in Band 1 of Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS), the action plan of the Department of Education and Skills for educational inclusion, and the School Completion Programme (SCP). The teaching staff comprises an administrative principal and an administrative deputy principal, twenty-seven mainstream class teachers, a special class teacher, fourteen teaching posts for pupils with special educational needs (SEN), one of which is shared with another school, and a home-school-community liaison (HSCL) co-ordinator. During the evaluation, inspectors observed teaching and learning in sixteen mainstream classes, nine support-teaching settings and in the special class for pupils with an SSLD. Current enrolment is 575 pupils. Enrolment has grown notably within the past decade; the pupil population comes from diverse backgrounds. Overall patterns of pupil attendance are very good.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

FINDINGS

- The quality of pupils' learning across the curriculum is very good.
- The quality of teaching is very good across mainstream and special education settings with exemplary practice in some contexts; further augmentation of overall assessment and greater levels of detail in planning for differentiated and individualised learning outcomes are needed.
- The quality of support for pupils' well-being is very good; evidence indicates the school is very much an inclusive learning environment.
- The quality of overall leadership and management is very good; leadership capacity in the school community is being empowered very strongly and actively.
- The quality of school self-evaluation (SSE) and quality of the DEIS planning process are very good.
- An excellent learning environment has been created which both supports the process of learning and celebrates pupils' work.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- The whole-school approach to assessment should be extended to include assessment of pupils' skill development and of dispositions in learning across the curriculum.
- The quality of teachers' planning should be further enhanced through agreeing a consistent, unified approach for all subjects and ensuring consistency in planning for differentiation in short-term plans through explicit detail on personalisation of learning objectives and approaches.

DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. THE QUALITY OF PUPILS' LEARNING

- Overall, the quality of pupils' learning across the curriculum is very good.
- It was evident to the inspection team that pupils' enjoyment in learning arises from a sense of making progress and of achievement. Their engagement with learning contributes to their well-being. Pupils are motivated to learn through having a clear sense of attainable and challenging learning outcomes. Across the settings of the school visited, pupils demonstrated very high levels of interest and participation in learning experiences. Given their high levels of interest in stimulating learning experiences and suitably challenging lesson content, a greater frequency of exposure to collaborative, open-ended problem-solving experiences is advocated.
- Pupils were observed to use their mathematical knowledge and understanding competently and with very good levels of confidence during mathematics lessons. Pupils' facility with mathematics was clearly in evidence during the inspection. Attainment in Mathematics is very commendable indeed.
- Pupils are confident and expressive learners. They use their oral language abilities well. They engage in reading with enthusiasm, demonstrate very positive attitudes to reading and are exposed to a very valuable range of reading experiences up through the school; there is a particular, strong and successful development of early literacy skills. Attainment in the school in English reading is currently not on a par with achievements in Mathematics. Further and deeper annual analysis by the school of results across more bands of attainment and correlation and tracking with data from testing of general ability should now inform planning and practice going forward.
- The quality of pupils' writing is very good in its content, style and presentation with very good progression across the genres. Teachers articulate high expectations for writing throughout the school and pupils are being actively enabled to meet these.
- Sna ceachtanna Gaeilge a breathnaíodh léiríodh foghlaim ard agus tá an obair sa foriomlán le moladh. Sna ceachtanna úd bhí ar chumas na ndaltaí abairtí iomlána a láimhsiú sa chomhrá, raon briathra a úsáid le habairtí a chumadh agus eilimintí casta na gramadaí a thuiscint agus a úsáid. *In Irish lessons observed a high standard of learning was seen and overall work is to be praised. In these lessons pupils were enabled to use full sentences in discourse, use a range of verbs to create sentences and understand and use complex elements of grammar.*
- Effective skill development took place in the learning experiences in the physical education, social, environmental and scientific education, and other lessons observed. Building on this practice, assessment of pupils' skills development will be beneficial.
- On a whole-school basis, learner agency – facilitating the learner to take the initiative in learning - is promoted strongly and very successfully.
- In questionnaire responses, over half of fourth and sixth class pupils - the cohort selected to complete a questionnaire in this evaluation - were of the view they were doing well in Mathematics, a few disagreed and around a third were unsure. A majority of pupils were of the view that they were doing well at reading, a very small percentage of them disagreed and just over a quarter were unsure. It would be useful to explore, with these older pupils, their perspectives around their abilities in reading and Mathematics and in particular why they felt unsure about their abilities in these areas.
- The school is participating actively and enthusiastically in projects of the School Excellence Fund, an initiative of the Department of Education and Skills under the Programme for Government, to encourage and recognise excellence and innovation in DEIS schools.

2. THE QUALITY OF TEACHING

- The quality of teaching is very good across mainstream and special education settings.
- In the school as a whole an excellent learning environment has been created which both supports the process of learning and celebrates pupils' work. Displays are print-rich, colourful, stimulating, reflecting the breadth of the curriculum and pupils' interests very well.
- Teachers very much model enthusiasm and enjoyment in learning, creating learning environments where pupils are self-motivated to engage in, extend and enjoy their learning. A range of learner-centred methodologies is used effectively throughout the school. Collective practice in the use of sophisticated visual material, specifically the use of available projectors and interactive whiteboards in classrooms, needs to feature consistently in more lessons in support of the explanation of lesson content.
- The quality of feedback on pupils' work is very good. Teachers regularly provide pupils with constructive, developmental feedback enabling pupils to implement clear strategies for improvement. In questionnaire responses, most pupils reported that their teacher talks to them about how to improve their work. Almost all were of the view that their teacher explained things clearly.
- Teachers use a range of questioning techniques effectively to stimulate substantial response, facilitate deep engagement with lesson content and extend learning beyond the individual lesson.
- The assessment of written work and the very effective constructive feedback for improvement provided are highly commendable. In lessons observed, pupils understood the purpose of learning tasks and could connect new learning with previous learning. Extensive whole-school and grade-level assessment is taking place; this is particularly evident in literacy and numeracy. Assessment overall is commendable. There is scope for the whole-school approach to be extended to include assessment of skills development and assessment of dispositions in learning in other areas of the curriculum; this is not occurring on a whole-school basis. The school's implementation of assessment for learning through systematic analysis of performance data and tracking of achievement is thorough; further augmentation should focus on more formative assessment during the learning event.
- Commendably, as part of its overall DEIS planning process, the school has established mechanisms to specifically support progression in learning among higher-achieving pupils. The process of selecting higher-achieving pupils for additional support requires absolute consistency going forward to ensure that selection is premised upon the consideration of information which always assesses discrepancy between tests of general ability and any standardised or school-devised tests of attainment.
- There is very comprehensive whole-school planning for literacy and language development.
- Lessons for pupils with SEN were purposeful, specifically aligned to targets identified in support plans and strongly reflected the design of programmes in place, such as *Reading Recovery*; interaction with pupils was consistently purposeful, supported well-being and affirming of their abilities as learners. In-class interventions are operating very successfully. Reflective questioning was strongly evident. The development of individualised support plans in the special class for pupils with an SSLD is premised upon a comprehensive assessment profile of each learner. Provision for pupils with an SSLD is highly commendable. While planning is conducted comprehensively across the support settings, not all planning aligns with best practice and there was some variation in the quality of detail. In some plans targets need more detail and to be set more fully in line with individual needs.
- Overall, long-term and short-term classroom plans are comprehensive. Long-term planning for some subjects was insufficient, however, consisting in some instances of the content of

commercial schemes rather than curricular documents. Planning quality should be enhanced through sharing best practice models and agreeing a consistent unified approach for all subjects. Planning for differentiation in a significant minority of short-term plans remains generic; in this planning there is need for more personalisation of learning objectives and approaches. A number of whole-school curriculum plans require review, development and updating.

3. THE QUALITY OF SUPPORT FOR PUPILS' WELL-BEING

- The quality of support for pupils' well-being is very good. During the evaluation it was clear the school is very much an inclusive learning environment. In observed instances teachers and other staff members demonstrated that they are responsive to pupils' needs and that well-embedded formal and informal structures aid them in supporting pupils. Almost all parents in questionnaire responses reported their child enjoys school and that the school is helping their child's social and personal development. In questionnaire responses all teachers were of the view that there are good pupil support systems in the school.
- All pupils in questionnaire responses reported they felt safe in class; almost all reported they understood there are rules in the school to guard against hurting others, they have learned about different kinds of bullying and, if they experienced bullying, they were confident they would be helped by an adult in the school community. Almost all parents reported that they were aware of the school's anti-bullying policy, who to approach in school were their child to experience bullying and discipline is good in the school.
- Those in leadership and management roles recognise pupils as stakeholders and ensure their involvement in the operation of the school. While, in questionnaire responses, most pupils felt their teacher listens to them and pays attention to what they say, perceptions surrounding their involvement in decision making and the operation of the school are slightly less certain. A significant minority of fourth and sixth class pupils, in their questionnaire responses, recorded that they did not know if they had a say in how things are done in the school. Through the self-evaluation process these perceptions should be explored with the pupil council.
- The school's team of special needs assistants (SNAs) fulfils an important role in supporting the pupils to develop independence. Teachers and SNAs work collaboratively, demonstrating respect and care for the pupils.
- Overall, the school has very positive home-school links which are facilitated by the school leaders, actively through the work of the HSCL and also by a very active and insightful parent association.

4. THE QUALITY OF LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

- The quality of overall leadership and management is very good.
- The board of management meets frequently in line with the guidance to all boards of management and takes an active role in the school. Its financial accounts are being audited externally. The board, principal and other leaders in the school maximise opportunities to develop teachers' capacity and competence to improve teaching and learning. The board and principal foster pupils' holistic development by providing a very broad range of curricular, co-curricular and extra-curricular learning opportunities. School leadership supports the school community to continuously strive for excellence by setting high expectations for pupils. A culture has been fostered in which learning is flourishing.

- The principal has empowered teachers to take on leadership roles and to lead learning through the effective use of distributed leadership models. Systems are well-embedded and functioning well. The principal and deputy principal create and motivate staff teams and working groups to lead developments in key areas, building leadership capacity in the school community. The distributed leadership of learning is having an observable, very positive impact on the school's operational culture. The leadership of the principal strongly encompasses in particular the skill of identifying leadership potential in staff and empowering it. Teachers confirm that teamwork and collaboration in all aspects of school life are actively encouraged. In questionnaire responses, a very high percentage of teachers expressed the view that teachers collaborate well and share good practice with one another.
- All teachers in their questionnaire responses agreed that the school is well-run, the in-school management system of the school is effective and teachers' views are valued in the school's decision-making processes. Almost all parents in questionnaire responses were of the opinion the school is well-run and has a good atmosphere; a very high percentage report they feel welcome in the school. Such sentiments were echoed very strongly in the meeting held with the representatives of the parents' association.
- The school facilitates the placement of student teachers from initial teacher education (ITE) school placement programmes.

5. THE QUALITY OF SCHOOL SELF-EVALUATION

- The quality of school self-evaluation (SSE) is very good overall. Within the school community there is very evident commitment to reflection on practice and to setting targets for improvement through the DEIS planning process. As part of the ongoing SSE process comprehensive data sources have been considered and improvement goals and actions well delineated.
- It is indicated that the school has responded carefully to the recommendations of previous inspection reports in the context of its overall DEIS planning process and has implemented mechanisms and strategies to develop its effectiveness further.
- Parental involvement in SSE is commendable but the knowledge of parents' representatives about this aspect of school operation is unclear. There is need to re-examine how the summary outcomes of SSE are conveyed to the parent body.

THE INSPECTORATE'S QUALITY CONTINUUM

Inspectors describe the quality of provision in the school using the Inspectorate's quality continuum, which is shown below. The quality continuum provides examples of the language used by inspectors when evaluating and describing the of quality the school's provision of each area.

Level	Description	Example of descriptive terms
Very Good	Very good applies where the quality of the areas evaluated is of a very high standard. The very few areas for improvement that exist do not significantly impact on the overall quality of provision. For some schools in this category the quality of what is evaluated is outstanding and provides an example for other schools of exceptionally high standards of provision.	Very good; of a very high quality; very effective practice; highly commendable; very successful; few areas for improvement; notable; of a very high standard. Excellent; outstanding; exceptionally high standard, with very significant strengths; exemplary
Good	Good applies where the strengths in the areas evaluated clearly outweigh the areas in need of improvement. The areas requiring improvement impact on the quality of pupils' learning. The school needs to build on its strengths and take action to address the areas identified as requiring improvement in order to achieve a <i>very good</i> standard.	Good; good quality; valuable; effective practice; competent; useful; commendable; good standard; some areas for improvement
Satisfactory	Satisfactory applies where the quality of provision is adequate. The strengths in what is being evaluated just outweigh the shortcomings. While the shortcomings do not have a significant negative impact they constrain the quality of the learning experiences and should be addressed in order to achieve a better standard.	Satisfactory; adequate; appropriate provision although some possibilities for improvement exist; acceptable level of quality; improvement needed in some areas
Fair	Fair applies where, although there are some strengths in the areas evaluated, deficiencies or shortcomings that outweigh those strengths also exist. The school will have to address certain deficiencies without delay in order to ensure that provision is satisfactory or better.	Fair; evident weaknesses that are impacting on pupils' learning; less than satisfactory; experiencing difficulty; must improve in specified areas; action required to improve
Weak	Weak applies where there are serious deficiencies in the areas evaluated. Immediate and coordinated whole-school action is required to address the areas of concern. In some cases, the intervention of other agencies may be required to support improvements.	Weak; unsatisfactory; insufficient; ineffective; poor; requiring significant change, development or improvement; experiencing significant difficulties;