

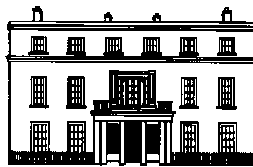
An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

**Whole School Evaluation
REPORT**

**St Joseph's Boys' National School
Terenure, Dublin 6
Uimhir rolla: 09750S**

Date of inspection: 1st March 2010



**A N R O I N N | D E P A R T M E N T O F
O I D E A C H A I S | E D U C A T I O N
A G U S S C I L E A N N A | A N D S K I L L S**

WHOLE-SCHOOL EVALUATION

A whole-school evaluation of St. Joseph's Boys' National School was undertaken in March 2010. 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, Irish, Mathematics and Physical Education. The board of management was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the evaluation, and the response of the board will be found in the appendix to this report.

INTRODUCTION – SCHOOL CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

St Joseph's Boys' National School is a Catholic primary school that caters for pupils from junior infants to sixth class. The school is under the patronage of the archbishop of Dublin. The original school building, which dates from 1866, was renovated and extended in 1972-73 and more recently in 1996. 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	480
Mainstream classes in the school	16
Teachers on the school staff	24
Mainstream class teachers	16
ICT Teacher	1
Teachers working in support roles	8
Special needs assistants	5

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT

1.1 Characteristic spirit, mission or vision

The school's stated mission is to promote the full and harmonious development of all aspects of the pupils to include their intellectual, physical, cultural, moral, social, linguistic and spiritual attributes. It also promotes their formation in the Catholic faith. The school's commitment to these stated aims is reflected in the welcoming and supportive school atmosphere and the positive interactions between staff, pupils and the wider school community.

1.2 Board of management

The board of management, which is properly constituted, meets on a monthly basis. A formal agenda is circulated in advance of these meetings and minutes are recorded. In line with good practice, financial reports are furnished at each meeting and the accounts are audited annually. Members of the board, all of whom have availed of training, are allocated specific roles and associated tasks. The chairperson maintains a visible presence by visiting the school informally on a daily basis and meeting more formally with the principal as matters arise. The board has produced a plan for the maintenance of the building and supports the school with the provision of resources as requested by staff. Of ongoing concern to the board is the oversubscription of applications for school places each year. However, due to the restrictions of the school site, the board does not regard the physical expansion of the school as a viable option. The board reviews

the school admissions policy regularly and ensures that it is implemented in a fair and transparent manner and in compliance with all relevant legislation. The board takes a pro-active role in the development of administrative policies and has ratified all school policies. In line with the board's aspiration to ensure that the school curriculum is progressing appropriately, consideration should now be given to taking a more active role in the development of curriculum policies.

1.3 In-school management

The principal has a long association with the school. His well-honed organisational skills enable him to manage the school competently and efficiently. He has successfully promoted the use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) to facilitate the smooth administration of the school, the delivery of the curriculum and enhanced communication with the wider school community. His welcoming manner promotes an atmosphere of inclusivity. Working relationships within the school are characterised by collegiality and open communication.

The principal is supported by a committed in-school management team comprising a deputy principal, three assistant principals and seven special duties teachers. To facilitate shared decision-making, these post-holders meet formally with the principal on a termly basis and more frequently, on an informal basis, to discuss issues as they arise. The post-holders all take responsibility for leading specific curriculum areas and make effective use of sub-committees to progress curriculum development. Their roles also contain some duties of an administrative and pastoral nature. It is now timely to review these responsibilities to ensure that they contain an appropriate balance of curriculum, organisational and pastoral roles in accordance with Circular 07/03.

In line with school policy, pupils' needs and teachers' choices are considered when allocating classes. As the majority of teachers have taught in specific class settings for several years, further consideration should be given to enabling them to experience the full range of positions available.

1.4 Management of relationships and communication with the school community

Clear links have been established between school and home. The board, the school staff and the parents' association indicate that the parent body is highly supportive of the school. The association also cites the approachability and accessibility of the principal and staff as key strengths of the school. The school communicates with parents through newsletters and the regularly-updated website. Appropriate procedures have been developed regarding the processing of complaints. Parent-teacher meetings are held on an annual basis and, if the need arises, parents are also enabled to meet with staff over the course of the school year.

The school has a long-established, well-supported and highly-active parents' association that is affiliated to the National Parents' Council. The association, which has representatives from each class, meets at least once a month. It liaises with the principal, via the chairperson, on a weekly basis and meets annually with the board. Communication with parents is facilitated through fliers, contributions to school letters, a parents' link on the website and the annual AGM. The association supports the work of the school by administering the voluntary contribution system, providing hospitality for school events including communion and confirmation, and organising a broad range of fundraising events to assist with the provision of school resources including computers and sports kits. The association is also consulted on the development and revision of some school policies.

The school engages in a broad range of initiatives within the local community. These include annual participation in the local drama festival, the credit union quiz and the spring-cleaning project in Terenure village in addition to attending literary events at the local library. The school has also established pro-active links with several local sport clubs.

1.5 Management of pupils

The overall management of pupils is very good. The school cultivates a caring and mutually-respectful atmosphere. In the majority of classes, the management of pupils is further enhanced by well-facilitated opportunities for talk and discussion, collaborative group activities and supportive, affirmative feedback. In consultation with the parent body, the school has produced a code of discipline and an anti-bullying policy both of which contain clear rules and procedures. The pupils are polite, courteous and very well behaved. They engage positively in their learning and participate confidently in discussion. The school's green team provides an appropriate forum for these articulate pupils to engage in relevant decision-making and assume responsibility. To complement this good work, consideration should now be given to the establishment of a pupils' council.

2. QUALITY OF SCHOOL PLANNING

2.1 Whole-school and classroom planning

The quality of whole-school planning is good. The school provides a comprehensive school plan that encompasses relevant curriculum, organisational and administrative policies. These policies are available in the school office and all staff have access to them on the school intranet. In designing the school plan, the school availed of the services of the support services. Policies are reviewed as the need arises and the school has also established a cyclical review system.

The overall quality of teachers individual planning is good. To facilitate breadth and balance in the delivery of the curriculum and maximise the use of resources, the staff agree a curriculum grid at each staff meeting that outlines the particular curriculum strands to be covered by individual year groups. Each teacher produces long-term and short-term schemes of work. In the best instances, these plans are informed by explicit learning objectives, identify specific methodologies and approaches, reflect the agreed curriculum grid and make provision for differentiation. Consideration should now be given to the extension of this commendable practice across the school. All teachers produce monthly progress reports on an agreed, whole-school proforma.

2.2 Child protection policy and procedures

Confirmation was provided that, in compliance with Department of Education and Skills Primary Circular 0061/2006, the board of management has formally adopted the *Child Protection Guidelines for Primary Schools* (Department of Education and Skills, 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 Language

Gaeilge

I múineadh agus foghlaim na Gaeilge, baintear amach caighdeán an-mhaith i gcoitinne. Le linn na meastóireachta, tugadh faoi deara roinnt samplaí de chleachtas sármhaith. Is í an Ghaeilge an teanga teagaisc sna ranganna ar fad, agus tarlaíonn sé in an-chuid ranganna go n-úsáideann na múinteoirí an Ghaeilge mar theanga cumarsáide ar bhonn teagmhasach i rith an lae. Ins na ranganna uile, baineann formhór na múinteoirí sárúsáid as iliomad áiseanna, meáin cumarsáide digiteach san áireamh, chun suim na bpáistí a mhúscailt agus a choinneáil, agus chun iad a spreagadh chun an Ghaeilge a úsáid.

Ins na bunranganna, déanann na múinteoirí forbairt ar scileanna éisteachta agus ar scileanna cainte na ndaltaí trí úsáid a bhaint as amhraín, rannta agus cluichí, agus dírtear aird ar leith ar mhúineadh frásaí agus foclóra. I gcuid de na ranganna seo, is léir go bhfuil caighdeán an-ard tuiscena agus líofachta bainte amach ag na daltaí. De réir mar a théann na páistí ar aghaidh ó rang go rang, leantar ar aghaidh ag tabhairt deiseanna dóibh na scileanna sin a fhorbairt. Sna meánranganna, déantar taifeadadh físteipe de na drámaí ranga agus glacann na daltaí páirt go fonnmhar ins an obair seo. Is cumasach agus is muiníneach iad na daltaí sna ranganna sinsearacha agus iad i mbun díospóireachta. I ranganna áirithe, tugadh faoi deara nár cuireadh dóthain béime ar an gcur chuige cumarsáide agus bhí luas na gceachtanna cineáilín mall. Moltar go mbunófaí cur chuige scoile ar an sárchleachtas a tugadh faoi deara in an-chuid de na ranganna agus go gcuirfí é seo i bhfeidhm go seasta sa scoil ar fad. Tá an caighdeán léitheoireachta sa scoil go han-mhaith agus maidir le líofacht, tuiscint agus cur in iúl baineann cuid mhaith de na daltaí caighdeán maith amach. Leagann na múinteoirí béim chuí ar fhoghlaim na gramadaí agus, i gcásanna áirithe, bíonn an obair seo fite fuaite le gnáth-chomhthéacs na hoibre.

Irish

The overall standard of teaching and learning in Irish is very good with some exemplars of excellent practice observed during the course of the evaluation. In all classes, Irish is used as the medium of instruction and, in several instances, teachers communicate incidentally through the language over the course of the school day. Most teachers make highly effective use of a wide range of resources, including digital media, to stimulate and maintain the pupils' interest and promote their language usage.

In the infant classes, the pupils' listening and oracy skills are developed through the use of songs, rhymes and games in addition to the specific teaching of vocabulary and phrases. In some of these classes, the pupils display very high levels of linguistic understanding and fluency. As they progress through the school, continued opportunities are provided for the development of these skills. In the middle classes, the pupils participate enthusiastically in video recordings of class plays. The pupils in the senior classes present as competent oral communicators who engage confidently in sustained discussion. In some classes, the pace of lessons observed was rather slow and did not place sufficient emphasis on the communicative approach. It is recommended that the excellent practice observed in many classes form the basis of a whole-school approach that is implemented consistently. The overall standard of reading is very good with many pupils attaining good levels of fluency, comprehension and expression. Appropriate emphasis is placed on the acquisition of grammar, which in some cases, is context based.

English

The overall standard of teaching and learning in English is good. In some classes, commendable practice is underway. In the infant and junior classes, a general approach to the teaching of oral language skills is undertaken with talk and discussion a feature of lessons across most curriculum areas. In the senior classes, more formal provision is made for the specific development of the pupils' oral language skills and these pupils demonstrate high levels of linguistic competence. It is recommended that discrete oral language lessons, based on explicit learning objectives, be provided at each class level. Across the school, the pupils are encouraged to engage in regular and sustained reading. The school reports that the pupils have responded enthusiastically to a recently-introduced, computerised reading programme that promotes independent reading and helps to ensure that they are reading at a level commensurate with their ability. A solid foundation in reading skills is laid in the infant classes where pupils are taught a basic sight vocabulary and the use of phonic cues. To complement this good practice, it is recommended that further provision be made for the emergent reading process. Phonological awareness is further developed in the junior classes. Pupils in the middle and senior classes engage effectively with a variety of texts including class novels. As they progress through the school, their attainment in this strand unit is excellent.

The approach to writing is not uniform across the school. In the infant classes, the pupils engage in standard pre-writing activities and approaches to conventional writing include transcription exercises and the writing of sentences using words that are displayed in the environment. To further enhance these pupils' early-writing experiences, it is recommended that they be afforded additional opportunities to write independently. In most classes, pupils are provided with regular opportunities to produce writing in a variety of genres. Appropriate provision is made for the teaching of grammar and pupils are enabled to edit their work before publication. By the time they reach the senior classes, the pupils are producing commendable essays. All pupils in the school participate in the write-a-book project and are justly proud of their published material which is of a high standard. To further enhance all pupils' writing experiences, it is recommended that a cohesive whole-school approach be taken to the teaching of genres and to enabling the pupils to redraft their work in the light of formative feedback.

3.2 Mathematics

The overall standard in mathematics is very good. Many pupils display high levels of attainment, particularly in the strand of number. All classrooms host a good range of displays and prompts to which the pupils refer appropriately. Lessons are generally well structured and make good provision for both continuity and progression in the pupils' learning, and the application of mathematics to real-life situations. Many teachers make judicious use of ICT, concrete apparatus and games to enhance and consolidate their pupils' learning. In a small number of instances, an overly-didactic approach is used and the level of pupil participation in active learning in these classes should be raised. Best practice encompasses the use of a broad range of pedagogies including activity-based learning, focussed talk-and-discussion, higher-order questioning, and problem solving. It is recommended that the school review its approach to the teaching of mathematics to ensure that the best practices observed form the basis of a whole-school approach. In the senior classes, the pupils present their written work in an organised and structured manner and there is evidence of regular teacher monitoring in these and in many other classes. Across the school, the predominant pedagogy in mathematics is whole-class teaching. To ensure that all pupils are challenged at a level commensurate with their abilities, consideration should now be given to enhancing the provision for differentiated teaching and learning particularly in relation to the strand of number.

3.3 Physical Education

The teaching of physical education is varied with some very good lessons observed in the course of the evaluation. In the best instances, lessons are well structured around explicit, shared learning outcomes, facilitate the acquisition and application of specific skills, enable the pupils to work co-operatively and incorporate assessment-for-learning. In these lessons, the pupils engage purposefully in their learning and make good progress. All teachers make appropriate provision for warm-up and cool-down sessions and pay due regard to safety matters. The teaching of ball-handling skills and games is a particular strength across the school with continuity and progression facilitated in the pupils' learning. To complement the teachers' work in this strand, the school avails of the services of external coaches in Gaelic football, hurling and tag rugby. The school has attained a significant record of achievement in Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) competitions.

In the absence of either a general purpose room or hall, the school has been provided with access to the parish hall in addition to the use of the church car-park when vacant. This facilitates the delivery of many strands of the physical education programme. However, challenges arise regarding the storage and use of appropriate gymnastics equipment including mats. In the interest of health and safety in addition to facilitating the full implementation of the gymnastics curriculum, a review of the access to, and storage of, gymnastics equipment is recommended. Due regard is paid to the teaching of dance with lessons ranging from Irish dancing lessons to creative dance. Best practice observed in this strand promotes the pupils' creativity and their co-operative skills and it is recommended that this approach be extended. In the senior classes, good provision is made for the delivery of the athletics strand. As the school has been unable to gain access to the local swimming pools during the school day, they have facilitated the delivery of the aquatics strand for the last nineteen years through a weekend swimming club open to all pupils.

3.4 Assessment

In line with the school policy, individual teachers use of a variety of assessment modes, including teacher-designed tests, checklists, pupil observation, and questioning and discussion. Effective use is also made of ICT to monitor and track pupils' progress in reading, and to share records with parents. Standardised tests are administered annually to record pupils' attainment in both numeracy and literacy whilst a screening test is administered to pupils in senior infants. The results of these tests, which are carefully recorded and shared amongst relevant teachers, are primarily used to identify pupils who are likely to benefit from supplementary teaching. It is now recommended that the formative use of these data be extended to greater facilitate differentiated teaching and learning within classroom settings. The marking of pupils' work is varied and, in the best instances, is conducted on a regular basis and provides constructive feedback to pupils. In reviewing the school plan, consideration should be given to the further promotion of formative assessment procedures so that they become an established part of practice.

4. QUALITY OF SUPPORT FOR PUPILS

4.1 Pupils with special educational needs

The special education team (SET) comprises three learning support teachers, three resource teachers and one shared EAL teacher. In line with school policy, the team facilitates early intervention and provides support based on the results of diagnostic tests and class teachers' observations. All members of the SEN team present as highly-committed and caring teachers who exhibit a very good knowledge of their pupils' individual needs and strengths. These teachers

present well-structured lessons that are informed by comprehensive individual education plans or individual pupil learning profiles as appropriate. They all produce records of progress and consideration should now be given to adopting a more common approach across the team. They consult regularly on an informal basis with the mainstream teachers and at least once annually with parents and more frequently as appropriate. Most learning support classrooms are print-rich and attractive environments. Considerable expertise exists within the team and team members engage in ongoing professional development through attendance at a broad range of courses including those provided by the Special Education Support Service (SESS). To enable the special needs teachers to share their expertise and work more cohesively as a team, it is recommended that formal meetings be held on a more regular basis. The current model of intervention primarily comprises withdrawal and consideration should now be given to extending the provision for in-class support where feasible.

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

The school has an open and inclusive enrolment policy. Appropriate provision is made to ensure that all pupils are enabled to participate in all activities. The school does not receive additional supports from the Department of Education and Skills for pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds.

5. CONCLUSION

The school has strengths in the following areas:

- The board members are commended for their commitment to the school.
- The dedicated and conscientious staff work together in a climate of co-operation and mutual respect.
- The parents' association and parent body provide a high level of support to the school.
- Under the guidance of the principal, the school has been innovative in its use of ICT to facilitate the smooth administration of the school, enhance curriculum delivery and extend communication with the wider school community.
- On completion of their primary education, the pupils have attained high standards in all strands of the English curriculum.
- Pupils overall attainment in Mathematics is very good.
- The pupils, who are well-behaved and courteous, exhibit good application to learning.

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

- The results of standardised tests should be used to enhance the provision for differentiated teaching and learning.
- The school policy on assessment should be revised to incorporate both formative assessment and pupil self-assessment.
- The school should adopt a more cohesive, consistent approach to individual teacher planning that takes due account of whole-school curriculum plans.
- A review of the access to, and storage of, gymnastics equipment should be undertaken to facilitate the full implementation of the gymnastics curriculum.

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.

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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

Saint Joseph's school community expresses gratitude to the Inspectorate of the Department of Education and Skills for the professional courtesy extended to the school community during the Whole School Evaluation and is committed to implementing the recommendations outlined in the report.