An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

St Joseph’s National School
Valleymount, Co. Wicklow
Uimhir rolla: 10131U

Date of inspection: 2 May 2012
1. **Introduction**

St Joseph’s National School is a rural, co-educational, vertical primary school under the patronage of the Catholic Archbishop of Dublin. The 101 pupils enrolled are drawn from a wide geographic area and attendance levels are good. The board of management was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the report, and the response of the board will be found in the appendix of this report.

2. **Summary of Findings and Recommendations for Further Development**

The following are the **main strengths** of the work of the school:

- The board of management displays commitment to supporting the work of the school.
- The principal fulfills her role in a dedicated manner.
- The work of the parents’ council is highly commendable.
- The pupils are well behaved and engage with interest in their learning.
- Teaching, learning and pupil achievement is of a good standard overall.

The following **main recommendations** are made:

- The board of management should increase its involvement in policy development and review to ensure that its obligations under pertinent legislation and national guidelines are met.
- The school’s child protection policy should be updated immediately in accordance with the *Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools* (September 2011) and be communicated appropriately to management, school staff and parents.
- Sa Ghaeilge, ba chóir scileanna léitheoireachta a mhúineadh ar bhonn níos córasáí tríd an scolí. *In Irish, reading skills should be taught on a more systematic basis through the school.*
- It is recommended that the pupils engage with the range of English writing genres more regularly and that a process approach to writing is implemented consistently.
- The school should ensure that the pupils have access to a broad and balanced drama curriculum.

3. **Quality of School Management**

- The board of management displays commitment to supporting the work of the school. The introduction of a formal schedule of and agenda for meetings is welcomed and will assist the board in addressing its full range of responsibilities. In particular, it is recommended that the board increases its involvement in policy development and review to ensure that its obligations under pertinent legislation and national guidelines are met. Positive relations between the board and the parents’ council are in evidence. The board
is praised for its review of pupil performance data and a further strengthening of its consideration of teaching, learning and pupil achievement matters would be beneficial. In order to increase parental understanding, it is advised that the board issue an annual report on the operation of the school.

- The principal fulfils her role in a dedicated manner and the responses to the parent questionnaire confirm that almost all parents consider that the school is well run. She is praised for the guidance she provides on teaching and learning matters to the school’s newly qualified and appointed teachers. The recently appointed acting deputy principal completes her assigned responsibilities competently.

- The school buildings and grounds are maintained to a good standard and the work of the board of management and parents’ council in this regard is praised. A wide range of resources is used well to support teaching and learning, including interactive whiteboard technology. The provision of increased opportunities for the pupils to access and use ICT would be beneficial.

- In the parent questionnaires, almost all parents agree that the school is welcoming of them and that overall they are happy with the school. Parents are kept well informed regarding their child’s progress and school events through a variety of effective ways. The work of the parents’ council in supporting the provision of school resources and the organisation of school activities is highly commendable. The more recent involvement of the parents’ council in the consideration of relevant policy areas is welcomed and is worthy of continued development.

- The pupils are well behaved and engage with interest in their learning. The school’s encouragement of them to take responsibility and to engage in age-appropriate decision making, for example through the pupil council and Green Schools committee, is praised. In the pupil questionnaires, a majority of pupils confirmed that they like school with almost all reporting that they get on well with the other children.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- In the main, school planning is of a competent standard and provides useful guidance for teachers and assists in the smooth operation of the school. Further attention to writing policies in a manner that makes them accessible to the education partners is advised and all school planning should be formally considered and ratified by the board of management. Progress is being made in the implementation of school self-evaluation, most particularly in the analysis of standardised assessment results in English and Mathematics. The continued development of the school’s action planning approaches to address identified priorities is recommended.

- While the board of management ratified the school’s child protection policy in October 2011, this policy has not been updated to ensure that it is accordance with the Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools (September 2011). The board has also not formally adopted, without modification, the Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools. A designated liaison person (DLP) and a deputy DLP have been appointed and provision has been made for the delivery of the full Stay Safe programme / SPHE curriculum. It is recommended that the board immediately update the school’s child protection policy as required and ensure that it is communicated appropriately to management, school staff and parents.
5. Quality of Teaching, Learning and Pupil Achievement

- Teaching, learning and pupil achievement is of a good standard overall. The teachers use a variety of suitable teaching approaches that generate pupil interest and active participation in their learning. A further increase in the opportunities provided for pupils to work collaboratively is advised. In the questionnaires, a majority of pupils confirmed that they enjoy their lessons and learning, while almost all parents expressed the view that teaching is good in the school and stated that their child is doing well. Pupil progress, most particularly in English and Mathematics, is monitored closely and the outcomes are used well. It is now opportune to extend the use of such assessment approaches to other subject areas.

- In general, teaching and learning in Irish is of a satisfactory standard. The teachers make a genuine effort to cultivate a positive attitude to Irish through the use of active teaching approaches including games, puppets, role play and drama. Many pupils possess an appropriate vocabulary and succeed in composing simple sentences and asking and answering questions based on the themes being addressed. While some pupils read the textbooks with confidence and appropriate accuracy, reading skills should be taught on a more systematic basis through the school. It is also advised that the pupils be provided with a greater variety of writing opportunities.

- Teaching, learning and pupil achievement in English is commendable. The pupils express their views with confidence and with a suitable richness of language. They experience a wide range of poetry and their responsiveness is encouraged. Praiseworthy reading standards are in evidence and in the questionnaires, most pupils report that they think they are doing well at reading. While some fine examples of the pupils' personal writing are in evidence, it is recommended that their engagement with the range of writing genres is increased significantly. In so doing, a process approach to writing should be implemented consistently.

- Teaching and learning in Mathematics is of a good quality and a majority of pupils surveyed report that they believe they are achieving well. Laudable features of provision include the clear explanation of new concepts, skilful teacher questioning and the effective use of resources and hands-on learning tasks. The pupils' interest in Mathematics is generated successfully through relating the concepts being explored to real-life situations. Levels of pupil achievement are commendable overall. The school's current emphasis on improving problem-solving skills is welcomed and would benefit from being accompanied by a renewed focus on mental computation skills.

- The pupils display a keen enthusiasm for Drama and a good ability in the main to cooperate and communicate in making drama. In order to facilitate them to participate more effectively in process drama and to develop their capacity to improvise, lessons need to incorporate the elements of Drama more effectively, most particularly belief and tension. The school currently employs an external tutor to assist in the delivery of drama curriculum. It is advised that provision for Drama be reviewed and that the implementation of a broad and balanced drama curriculum be realised.
6. Quality of Support for Pupils

- The quality of support for pupils with additional learning needs is good. Lessons are well structured, resourced and implemented. The quality of teacher/pupil interactions is commendable and positive pupil participation and progress are in evidence. In order to improve the quality of provision further, it is recommended that individual learning targets are specific in all instances, that pupil progress is monitored and recorded systematically, and that such records are maintained appropriately. It is also advised that consideration be given to expanding the use of in-class team-teaching approaches.

*Published March 2013.*
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 would like to express its thanks to all the members of the school community who cooperated in this Whole School Evaluation (WSE). In particular, we would like to express our thanks and appreciation to those teachers who were employed in this school in either a fixed-term or substitute capacity during the course of the WSE. Their commitment and dedication assisted in making this evaluation such a positive experience.

We would also like to acknowledge wholeheartedly the work of the ancillary staff: the school cleaner/caretaker, the special needs assistant and the school secretary. They work so diligently in the school on a daily basis. Although their invaluable contribution to the school is not mentioned in this report, we appreciate that they work above and beyond the call of duty in making our school such a pleasant place for our pupils.