Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

St Vincent’s Convent Primary School
St Mary’s Road, Cork,
Co. Cork
Uimhir rolla: 13696O

Date of inspection: 25 March 2011
1. Introduction

St. Vincent’s Convent Primary School, located in the north side of Cork city, enrolls girls in all classes and boys in infant and first classes. Current enrolment stands at 291 girls and sixty-one boys. There is a strong Catholic ethos in the school, in the tradition of the Religious Sisters of Charity. The school’s mission statement places significant emphasis on the holistic education of children in a safe, happy and inclusive environment. The board of management of the school was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the report, and the response of the board will be found in the appendix of this report.

This whole-school evaluation focused on the quality of teaching and learning in Irish, English, Mathematics and Visual Arts. During the whole-school evaluation inspectors observed teaching and learning in ten mainstream class settings, four support-teaching settings and in the home-school-community-liaison setting.

2. Summary of Findings and Recommendations for Further Development

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

- The school is well managed by a dedicated and industrious board of management.
- The school is led effectively by a very committed and conscientious principal who provides positive leadership in a collaborative setting.
- A strong spirit of commitment and of generosity of time and of effort pervades the staff.
- Overall, very good standards of teaching, learning and pupil achievement were observed in mainstream and support settings during the evaluation.
- Parental involvement, in association with the Home-School-Community-Liaison programme, beneficially contributes to the life of the school.

The following main recommendations are made:

- It is recommended that the current approach to recording pupils’ progress be reviewed to facilitate ongoing school self-evaluation and to promote further continuity in pupils’ learning throughout the school.
- Increased use of information and communication technology (ICT) is recommended to enhance further the teaching and learning.
- Opportunities for pupils to engage in independent writing in English should be extended to all classes and developed in association with the language experience approach.

3. Quality of School Management

- The school is managed very effectively by a committed board of management, which successfully ensures the ongoing development and maintenance of the school. Its work is complemented by the support provided by the Religious Sisters of Charity.
• The school is led by a very dedicated and conscientious principal who provides positive leadership in a collaborative setting. She capably oversees the development, implementation and impact of a wide variety of successful initiatives throughout the school. Her work is guided by a very strong commitment to the pupils, their families and to the staff. She receives dedicated support from the in-school management team members, including the deputy principal. Members have been assigned leadership roles in discrete pastoral, curricular and organisational areas that reflect the school's priorities. Commendably, in-school management members are further supported in their duties by other teachers. Together, they demonstrate a strong spirit of commitment and display very good collaborative work practices.

• The school buildings and grounds are maintained to a very high standard. Classrooms are well furnished and equipped with a wide variety of resources to support teaching and learning. Inclusion in the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) programme provides for additional resources that are utilised to very good effect to further support pupils and their families. The school benefits greatly from the committed contribution of ancillary staff members.

• The school is supported by a very dedicated and well-functioning parents’ association. Parents are very involved in the work of the school and make significant contributions to policy development, fundraising and to a variety of school initiatives. Responses to parents’ questionnaires issued as part of the evaluation indicate that parents are very positive about the work of the school and the education provided to their children.

• Interaction between pupils is friendly and considerate, and their relationships with teachers are open and respectful. Responses to the pupils’ questionnaires indicate that almost all pupils like school, feel safe in school and enjoy their classroom work.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

• The quality of the school planning and school self-evaluation processes is very good. A comprehensive range of curricular and organisational policies have been collaboratively prepared. As part of the DEIS plan, the board, the staff and the parents association, have collaboratively prioritised pupils’ attendance as an area for improvement. Commendably, the teachers undertook a comprehensive review of the implementation and impact of the 2010 DEIS plan, the results of which have informed the formulation of the 2011 DEIS plan.

• All teachers prepare both long and short-term classroom plans and record the progress of work each month. Where classroom planning is particularly effective, it reflects whole-school plans and clearly identifies the intended learning outcomes for pupils. It is recommended that the current approach to recording pupils’ progress be reviewed to facilitate ongoing self-evaluation and to promote further continuity in pupils’ learning throughout the school.

• School authorities provided evidence that, in compliance with Primary Circular 0061/2006, the board of management has formally adopted the Department’s Child Protection Guidelines for Primary Schools. Evidence was provided to show 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.
5. Quality of Teaching, Learning and Pupil Achievement

- The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement observed during the evaluation was predominantly of a very good standard. A suitable range of teaching and learning methodologies is employed and, in most instances, strong emphasis is placed on interactive teaching with effective use of group teaching and differentiated learning. Much of the success in the teaching and learning in English and numeracy may be attributed to the very good implementation of a variety of additional initiatives and projects, many of which are provided for under the DEIS programme. The overall teaching and learning process would gainfully benefit from the further development and increased use of ICT.

- San iomlan, déantar soláthar maith do mhúineadh agus d’fhoghlaim na Gaeilge. Diríonn na hoidí aird cheart ar theanga chumarsáide chinnte a theagasc le linn na gceachtanna. Léirionn roinnt mhaith daltaí cumas maith chun bunchumarsáid a dhéanamh sa Ghaeilge agus is le fonn a ghlacann siad páirt ghnomhach sna himeachtaí a eagraítear dóibh. Tugtar taithí an-fhónta dóibh dánta agus drámaí a leiriú. Ag rangleibhéil éagsúla déantar forbairt bhreá ar scileanna léitheoireachta agus scríbhneoireachta na ndaltaí agus eiríonn leo caighdeán maith dá n’aosígréupa a bhaínt amach. Moltar don bhfoireann an deachleachtas seo a fháil a thuilleadh ar bhonn na scóile ina hiomláine.

- In general, teaching and learning in Irish is of a high standard. Teachers place strong emphasis on teaching discrete oral language during lessons. Many pupils demonstrate good ability in basic conversational Irish and they participate enthusiastically in the prepared activities. Commendable opportunities are provided to pupils to engage in poetry and drama. At certain levels, pupils’ reading and writing abilities are well developed and they have successfully achieved age-appropriate standards. It is recommended that this good practice be extended further on a whole-school level.

- Overall, very good standards of teaching were observed in English. Print-rich classrooms, graded-reading schemes, class libraries and a well-appointed school library all contribute significantly to a successful reading programme. In many classrooms, pupils are afforded the opportunity to engage in good quality independent-writing activities and to write in a variety of genres, which are often linked to other curricular areas. This work should be extended to all classes and developed in association with the further implementation of the language experience approach. Discrete oral language classes are in evidence and pupils are exposed to a varied range of poems.

- The quality of teaching and learning in Mathematics is very good. A broad range of methodologies has been beneficially adopted by class teachers. Lessons are well structured and incorporate engaging activities for the pupils. Mathematical language is addressed consistently and pupils’ problem-solving skills are developed effectively, assisted by the school’s ‘problem of the week’ initiative.

- The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in the Visual Arts is of a high standard. The pupils follow a broad and balanced programme and impressive displays of their work are arranged. The pupils are given very good opportunities to express themselves in a creative way and to engage in good quality discussion on works of art.

- Teachers employ a variety of formal and informal assessment techniques to monitor and record pupils’ progress. Standardised tests in Mathematics and reading are administered annually to pupils in all classes form first to sixth. These results, combined with the good
formative assessment data maintained by some teachers, are carefully analysed to identify trends in pupils' achievement and to inform differentiated teaching and learning approaches. A number of teachers utilise pupil-learning profiles for literacy and numeracy. This good practice could be beneficially extended to the support settings and to other areas of the curriculum in mainstream classes. Information on pupils’ achievement is communicated clearly to parents.

6. Quality of Support for Pupils

- Supplementary support is conscientiously provided to appropriately selected pupils by an English as an addition language (EAL) teacher and learning-support/resource teachers (LS/RTs). These teachers approach their work in a professional manner and have developed caring relationships with the pupils. Commendably, many staff members have upskilled in aspects of special education and they have gained valuable knowledge and insights. Programmes of work are outlined in individual education plans and individual profile and learning programmes, which have been prepared in collaboration with class teachers. Emphasis is placed on enhancement of classroom-based learning that is supplemented by a variety of prevention and early intervention programmes. Pupils for whom English is an additional language are provided with valuable integration support as well as discrete language instruction using a cross-curricular approach. In all cases, the progress of pupils in receipt of supplementary support is appropriately assessed and recorded.

- The contribution of parents in the life of the school is significant. Their involvement is well supported by the effective work of the Home-School-Community-Liaison (HSCL) teacher. Home-school links are developed and strengthened through a wide range of activities involving parents, community agencies and post-primary schools. In addition to a variety of accredited courses provided for parents, their participation in a range of class-based initiatives is commendable. The HSCL teacher plans carefully for her work and maintains clear records of progress. It is evident that this work is having a very positive and beneficial impact on parents and pupils.

- Additional support is provided to selected pupils targeted by the School Completion Programme. The programme’s co-ordinator works closely with the principal, the HSCL teacher and class teachers. In addition to its focus on attendance, other praiseworthy aspects of this programme are the homework club, after-school activities and the transition programme for sixth-class pupils.

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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 of St. Vincent's Primary School wishes to acknowledge the courtesy and professionalism of the Inspectorate during our recent Whole School Evaluation. The Board is pleased that the report affirms the collaborative work of the school community in providing a holistic education for our pupils in a safe, happy and inclusive environment.

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 of Management and staff welcome the recommendations which will help us to build on current good practice and which will inform present and future school planning.