Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

St. Joseph’s NS,
Killasser, Co. Mayo
Uimhir rolla: 16269K

Date of inspection: 2 March 2010
WHOLE-SCHOOL EVALUATION

A whole-school evaluation of St. Joseph’s NS 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 Science. 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.

INTRODUCTION – SCHOOL CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

St. Joseph’s NS is a rural, two-teacher school in the parish of Killasser. It caters for boys and girls from infants to sixth class. Pupils come from a range of socio-economic backgrounds. The current school building dates to 1992. The school has availed of funding from the CLAR programme under the Department of Rural, Social and Family Affairs, and from the Summer Works Scheme from the Department of Education and Science to develop the school building and environs in recent years. The school is under the patronage of the Catholic Bishop of Achonry.

The following table provides an overview of the enrolment and staffing in the school at the time of the evaluation:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pupils enrolled in the school</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainstream classes in the school</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers on the school staff</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainstream class teachers</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers working in support roles</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special needs assistants</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT

1.1 Characteristic spirit, mission or vision

The school has a very clear, concise mission statement which is displayed in the staff room and published in the school plan. Through this statement the staff shows a commitment to “providing a caring and supportive environment for all pupils through positive affirmation, clear communication and a genuine partnership between the school, the home and the community”. There is evidence that such a mission statement forms the cornerstone of school activities through teacher-pupil interaction, through very positive staff relations and through the mutual respect of parents and teachers.

1.2 Board of management

The quality of management provided by the board of management is very good. The chairperson is newly appointed. He visits the school on a regular basis. Board members have clearly defined roles and responsibilities. Individual members have availed of training to ensure a clear understanding of their duties. Meetings are held regularly and detailed minutes are recorded. The school is maintained to a very high standard. The school’s finances are ably managed and are
certified annually. The board displays a commitment to supporting the work of the staff, both in curricular endeavours and in the area of whole-school planning.

1.3 In-school management

The quality of in-school management is very good. The principal is very effective in leading and managing the school community. She has established a very positive school climate which is characterised by positive working relations. She promotes a culture of teamwork and collaborative decision-making. She leads and manages the school planning process and ensures an exemplary level of continual school improvement. The principal is very effective in leading curricular developments. She is assisted and supported by a hard-working and committed deputy principal.

1.4 Management of relationships and communication with the school community

The quality of management of relationships and communication with the school community is very good. The school has established a number of channels of communication to ensure the parent body is kept informed of school activities. Annual parent-teacher meetings are the main forum for discussion of pupil progress. Parents are aware of the appropriate procedures for dealing with concerns. A number of initiatives have been established to engage parents in curricular projects which is highly commendable. The induction of new pupils is praiseworthy. The staff has also devised a very comprehensive welcome pack for new pupils to the school. This gives parents plans and policies from the school plan, tips for supporting their child’s learning and resources for the child to use before entry to school.

1.5 Management of pupils

The quality of pupil management is very good. Pupils are eager and motivated in their learning. The pastoral needs of the pupils, including those with specific learning, emotional or social needs, are managed sensitively and effectively. Pupils are well behaved and interact appropriately with their teachers and peers.

2. QUALITY OF SCHOOL PLANNING

2.1 Whole-school and classroom planning

The quality of whole-school planning is very good. The staff has a coherent planning process in place. The structure and presentation of the plan contributes to its accessibility by the school community. Exemplary use is made of a long-term plan in which organisational, curricular, structural and community priorities are identified for each school year. Based on such priorities a planning diary sets out the specific targets to be achieved in the current school year. Action planning is used to ensure continual improvement of specific areas of school life. The staff and board show a very clear understanding of legislation and department circulars through their organisational planning. Curricular plans give very clear guidelines to teachers on how each subject is addressed in the multi-grade classes of the school.

The quality of classroom planning is very good. Teachers present comprehensive plans for all areas of the curriculum. These plans comprise clear learning outcomes for pupils in terms of knowledge, skills and understanding. Teachers plan for a broad range of learning activities. They ensure a wide range of strategies and resources are used to enhance teaching and learning.
2.2 Child protection policy and procedures

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. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

3.1 Language

_Gaeilge_


_Irish_

Irish is taught competently. A very relevant emphasis is placed on different activities to promote listening skills. Pupils' comprehension is very good. In the senior classes, pupils listen to different Irish dialects. The standard of oral Irish is good across the school. An effective emphasis is placed on the informal use of Irish to revise the ten themes of the Irish curriculum. Lessons are characterised by a definite structure and good pacing. The communicative approach is promoted effectively to give opportunities to pupils to use new vocabulary. Teachers use rhymes, songs, language games, stories, and visual material during oral lessons which greatly help pupils' learning. It is recommended that teachers now broaden pupils' oral skills by getting them to talk in different tenses on an ongoing basis.

The standard of reading is quite good. There is a development noted from class to class. A range of texts and activities are used to inspire the pupils. It is recommended that accuracy in reading is emphasised through the use of discrete lessons. It is further recommended that additional use is
made of poetry and singing to promote the phonology of the Irish language. The standard of writing is good. A commendable emphasis is placed on the regular writing of pupils’ personal news. Pupils can express themselves effectively. However, it is recommended that a variety of written tasks are assigned to develop a variety of writing skills.

**English**

A variety of approaches for the teaching of English is employed. Clear explanations are given and new content builds on previous learning. Teachers question the pupils skilfully and classroom routines are organised very efficiently. The quality of teaching and learning in oral language is very good. Teachers effectively promote oral language development through the selection of appropriate topics, genres and contexts for skill development. Pupils are proficient in their oral presentations. They recite poetry with energy and feeling. In the junior classes a very good emphasis is placed on the learning of nursery rhymes.

Pupil achievement in English reading shows consistent development. The teachers are commended for the emphasis placed on reading for pleasure through use of big books, class novels and supplementary reading books. Pupils display a very good knowledge of the conventions of books. They have developed appropriate word-attack skills. Teachers also plan for a variety of reading skills such as skimming and scanning for information. While a phonological awareness programme is in place in the school it is recommended that it is reviewed to ensure learning is maximised. An individual reading programme is in place for pupils in the junior classes which maximises their progress and facilitates their needs, a practice which could be extended across the school. It is recommended that teachers consider the introduction of a shared-reading programme in conjunction with parents.

The quality of pupils’ written work is good. Early-writing skills are developed to good effect in the junior classes. Pupils develop writing skills through a variety of genres, although each genre could be developed further to ensure pupils have mastered the conventions of each style. The publication of a school magazine by the senior pupils and the publication of story books by the junior pupils facilitate the different stages of the writing process. Spellings are taught systematically throughout the school. The presentation of pupils’ work shows some scope for development. It is recommended that the staff discuss a whole-school approach to the presentation of work.

**3.2 Mathematics**

The quality of teaching in Mathematics is good. Teachers promote an effective variety of activities across all strands with very good use of concrete materials, including calculators. Activities are linked appropriately to pupils’ lives, experiences and prior knowledge. Pupils display competence across all strands. Pupils are interested in mathematical enquiry and their questions are welcomed. Teachers place a very good emphasis on number facts and mathematical skills. Due to the significant differences in ability in each classroom it is recommended that pupils are grouped for instruction and that the school initiates a ‘Maths for Fun’ project in conjunction with parents.

**3.3 Science**

The quality of teaching and learning in Science is very good. Teachers use pupils’ ideas as the starting point of lessons and often document these ideas on the board. Lessons emphasise skill development as well as content. There are opportunities for designing and making things on a regular basis. Pupils contributions are always welcome. They are presented with real-life tasks to
be solved scientifically. There is very good integration with other subject areas, particularly literacy. There is some use made of the local environment and the school is currently engaging in the Green Schools initiative to further this aspect of the curriculum. The school participates in the Discovery Primary Science award which has promoted great interest in scientific activity among the pupils. They have hosted a very successful science workshop for parents.

3.4 Assessment

The quality of assessment is very good. Teachers maintain individual profiles for each child and document their monthly progress. Such practice is highly commendable. Teachers use a comprehensive range of assessment tools in literacy and Mathematics which include standardised tests, diagnostic tests, teacher-designed tests and tasks and teacher observation. The staff has begun to graph the results of standardised tests from each year.

4. Quality of Support for Pupils

4.1 Pupils with special educational needs

The quality of supports for pupils with special educational needs is very good. The special education team comprises a part-time learning-support teacher and a part-time resource teacher. Both teachers plan meticulously for their classes. Each child has an Individual Education Plan (IEP) which is shared with parents. A wide range of methodologies and resources is used to meet the needs of individual pupils. In-class support is used very effectively to address the wide range of ability in Mathematics across the school. Both teachers have established very positive relationships with their pupils. They ensure pupils experience success and fun in their learning. It is recommended that the staff consider an early-intervention programme for the infants.

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

There are currently no pupils requiring other supports in the school. The school’s ethos is welcoming of all pupils. It promotes the principles of inclusion and equality.

5. Conclusion

The school has strengths in the following areas:

- The school has a very effective, hardworking staff who have a shared vision.
- The school is led by a motivated principal who promotes continual school improvement and displays effective curricular leadership.
- The board of management is very supportive of the work of the school staff and carries out its duties efficiently and effectively.
- The quality of communication between home and school is very good.
- The quality of whole-school planning is commendable and is ensuring a consistent development of organisational and curricular aspects of school life.
- The quality of pupils’ oral language development is very good.
- The quality of teaching and learning in Science is very good.
- The quality of supports for pupils with different learning needs is very good.
- The quality of assessment is very good.
The following key recommendations are made in order to further improve the quality of education provided by the school:

- Due to the significant differences in mathematical ability among pupils it is recommended that pupils are grouped for instruction and that the school initiates a ‘Maths for Fun’ project in conjunction with parents.
- It is recommended that an early-intervention strategy for infants is incorporated into the schools’ learning-support caseload.
- Sa Ghaeilge, moltar scileanna labhartha na ndaltaí a leathnú agus iad a chur ag caint in aimsirí difriúla ar bhonn leanúnach.

In Irish, it is recommended that teachers broaden pupils’ oral skills by getting them to talk in different tenses on an ongoing basis.

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.
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 WSE report as it affirms the great work being done by the children, parents, staff and school community. We found the experience to be a fair and positive one. The staff and Board of Management would like to thank the Inspectorate for the courtesy, respect and sensitivity they showed to the staff and pupils during their visit to our school.