

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

**Whole School Evaluation
REPORT**

**St Joseph's School for Deaf Boys
Cabra, Dublin 7**

Uimhir rolla: 16864B

Date of inspection: 26 February 2010



WHOLE-SCHOOL EVALUATION

A whole school evaluation of St Joseph's school for Deaf Boys was undertaken in February 2010. This report presents the findings of an evaluation and makes recommendations for improvement. The evaluation focused on the quality of management, planning, teaching and learning and the quality of supports for pupils. 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.

INTRODUCTION – SCHOOL CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

St Joseph's School for Deaf Boys is located in Cabra, Dublin 7 and operates under the patronage of the Catholic Archbishop of Dublin. It is designated by the Department of Education and Skills as a special national school for pupils aged four to eighteen years who are Deaf or hard of hearing. The profile of pupil learning needs in the school is diverse. Twenty-six of the pupils board at the school during the week. Staff report that in recent years, an increasing number of pupils are enrolled who present with additional learning needs.

At the time of the evaluation, there were twenty boys in the primary section. September enrolment figures over the previous two years show little change in enrolment at this level. The principal expects that the overall enrolment will increase in 2010. Information regarding pupil absences is communicated on a regular basis to the Education Welfare Officer.

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	68
Mainstream Primary classes in the school	5
Teachers on the school staff	24
Post-primary class teacher posts	16.5
Teachers working in support roles	2
Special needs assistants	13
Irish Sign Language (ISL) Support	1

1. Quality of school management

1.1 Characteristic spirit, mission or vision

The school's mission statement sets out its aim "*to develop a supportive educational environment which meets the individual needs of pupils and enables them to become independent, responsible and creative members of society*". In recent years, the Catholic Institute for Deaf People (CIDP) has played a major role as trustee in supporting and developing the school ethos. It has worked with the school in writing statements describing the characteristic spirit of the school. CIDP has also produced a carefully considered and ambitious policy document in relation to the future of the education of the Deaf in Ireland. Among the proposals is a plan to amalgamate the two schools for the Deaf in Dublin and to develop a national centre of excellence for Deaf and Hard

of Hearing people. The chief executive officer (CEO) of the CIDP reports that the patron has given his blessing to the proposed amalgamation. The CIDP policy document envisages closer collaboration in the future between the CIDP, organisations representing Deaf people, the Department of Education and Skills, and the Department of Health and Children.

CIPD has supported the school in several ways including organising staff training in relation to child safety. It has also arranged for members of staff to visit other schools for the Deaf in the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Finland and Norway. Although the CIDP assumes direct control of the pupil residence, it is not involved in the daily management of St Joseph's School. However, it does provide advice and a significant amount of financial support. This support helps to provide for secretarial services, homework club, sporting amenities and staff training. Every six weeks, a meeting of the management team is convened. This team comprises the CEO of the CIDP, the principals of the two schools for the Deaf, the directors of care and the financial controller. The CEO maintains contact with the board of management of the school and visits regularly.

CIPD is mindful that the atmosphere in the school has been affected by uncertainty about future staffing arrangements arising from the fall in pupil numbers and proposed amalgamation. This uncertainty affects both Dublin's schools for the Deaf. As both schools broadly face the same challenges, St Joseph's could benefit by engaging in some collaborative planning and review with St Mary's school for Deaf girls. Mindful of the possibility of an amalgamation in the near future, the cooperation could focus on developing common strategies for promoting literacy and numeracy levels. Staff should also collaborate to develop common policies in other areas such as communication, assessment and supports for pupils.

An increasing number of pupils present with additional learning difficulties and other disabilities. The school endeavours to cater for these pupils as well as catering for a significant number of pupils of high ability for whom sign language may be the preferred mode of communication. These unusual and evolving circumstances present the school with significant challenges. As a means of proactively addressing these challenges, it is recommended that the whole-school community, including older pupils where appropriate, undertakes a review of the school's mission statement. While a positive ethos is evident and it is clear that all adults are working to help every pupil to achieve his potential academically, staff should review aspects of the school's general organisation to ensure that all pupils derive maximum benefit from their school experience. A three-year school development plan should provide the staff with a framework to achieve a smooth transition to the school's next phase of development. Now that the primary and post-primary sections are located in the same building, it should be easier for staff to collaborate on agreeing a shared vision for the school's future.

1.2 Board of management

The board of management is properly constituted and is representative of the patron, the staff, the parents and the wider community. It meets approximately every two months. Board members are very supportive of the work of the school and are allocated specific tasks. The board is provided with informative, regular reports by the principal. Collaboration with the CIDP is developing and this provides much support to enhance the facilities in the school. Board members have availed of training opportunities provided by the *Catholic Primary School Managers Association (CPSMA)* in areas such as child protection. In line with statutory requirements, the board has agreed procedures for the admission and enrolment of pupils

Minutes of recent meetings indicate that the board is well informed about ongoing school matters and that it has considered and approved a range of policy documents. While the board rightly

avails of the expertise and commitment of the principal and staff in drafting organisational and curricular policies, it should ensure that the board's overall role in relation to school policy is clarified. It is recommended that the board fix review dates for all existing curricular plans and school policies. It is also recommended that the board identify its priorities for school improvement in an action plan. This plan should address the need to afford more attention to monitoring standards of pupil achievement. Over the coming years, the board should engage in a more rigorous process of school self-evaluation by using assessment data, progress records on pupils' outcomes and formal reviews of curriculum implementation.

1.3 In-school management

A new principal was appointed to the school in September 2009. She has engaged in significant professional development and brings a depth of experience and competence in Deaf education to the post. In a very short time, she has effectively assumed the duties of leading and managing the school. She exemplifies high professional standards and sets high expectations for the performance of the school. She is very conscious of the instructional leadership dimension of her role and is committed to supporting the planning processes and to developing the curriculum. It is evident that she values the work of her colleagues in the school and is dedicated to promoting a culture of teamwork and collaborative decision making. She encourages staff members to avail of continuing professional development opportunities, particularly in relation to improving their competence in ISL and in developing their knowledge of special education.

Middle management comprises a deputy principal, two assistant principals and five special duties teachers. The various post holders have been allocated a range of administrative duties, which include co-ordinating programmes, record keeping, timetabling, organising events, managing schemes and maintaining equipment and resources. Few responsibilities relate to the curriculum. One post has been assigned to organising mathematics assessment, but no similar post has been assigned to literacy. Post-holders fulfil their duties individually, but teamwork at the middle-management level is not well established. Previously there have been few team meetings. The posts should now be reviewed in order to ensure that they reflect the changing priorities of the school as a learning and teaching organisation. Each post should include administrative, curriculum and pastoral dimensions. This should ensure that staff members are empowered to introduce change and to make improvements. In agreeing revised roles and responsibilities, consideration should be given to developing the school's planning documentation and record keeping practices. Other posts should focus on evaluating the quality of service, fostering good external relations, facilitating the continuous development of staff and planning strategies for change. At the in-school management level, closer links should be established between the role of special duties holders and the range of tasks involved in whole-school development planning. A number of post-holders have been assigned reduced teaching hours. Attention should be devoted to ensuring that sufficient responsibilities and teaching duties are delegated to these teachers. It is therefore recommended that a comprehensive review of the practices and areas of responsibility of the middle-management team be undertaken in order to identify and address changing curricular, organisational and pastoral priorities.

Although the roll book and attendance book are maintained on a daily basis, pupils' records are not always complete. The school needs to ensure that a register of pupils is maintained and kept fully up to date at all times. A number of pupils attending St Joseph's were over eighteen years of age at the time of the evaluation. The Department requires that designated special schools cater for children and young persons with special educational needs from four years until the end of the school year in which they reach their eighteenth birthday. At that point, the Department of Health and Children assumes direct responsibility for young adults with special educational needs, who have not transferred to Further or Higher Education. School management should liaise with the

health authorities in respect of these pupils during their final year, with a view to the development and implementation of transition programmes, in order to facilitate their transfer to adult services.

1.4 Management of resources

A number of significant changes have taken place in the school since its last school inspection. The pupils in the primary and post-primary sections are now accommodated in one location whereas in the past they operated as two distinct schools. Several improvements have been made to the facilities to enable the school provide a range of post-primary subjects including practical subjects. The school now has designated rooms for Metalwork, Woodwork, Art, Science and Technical Graphics. The accommodation, including the school building and extensive grounds, are cleaned on a daily basis and are well maintained. In general, the school provides a stimulating learning environment for pupils. Rooms for practical subjects have been insulated and dust extractor systems have been installed where appropriate. The school has a swimming pool, a fine games hall with stage, playing fields, and basketball courts. All available accommodation is used to meet the curricular and physical needs of the pupils.

The main building in St Joseph's was originally built as a primary special school. There is sufficient space in the seventeen classrooms as class sizes are very small. In addition, there are rooms for administrative staff and for visiting professionals such as an audiologist and a speech and language therapist. There is ample space for staff, storage, display and extra curricular provision.. School corridors and some classrooms are tastefully decorated with samples of pupils' artwork, projects and extensive murals depicting curriculum-related images. Two rooms are designated as computer rooms and a good range of ICT resources is provided. A new server was installed in 2009. Much of the computer equipment is relatively new and the school has begun to consider the use of interactive whiteboard technology. In general, computers are not employed in individual classrooms and this should be addressed. Other equipment includes televisions, DVD players, digital cameras, data projectors, scanners, colour printers and several laptop computers for use in practical subjects such as metalwork, art and technical graphics; and for use by pupils preparing for *Leaving Certificate Applied* (LCA) examinations.

Staff members have devoted considerable time and energy to identifying innovative teaching practices, which can enhance important aspects of their work. The majority of teachers are trained teachers of the Deaf and many have undertaken post-graduate courses in Hearing Impairment. Staff members have prioritised a desire to improve their competence in communicating through ISL and have attended training during school time and outside of school hours. Different levels of accreditation have been achieved and this commitment is appreciated by the CIDP and the wider school community who view the development of ISL as a critical success factor for the education of the Deaf.

Staff members have also accessed a range of national programmes of continuous professional development in curriculum areas and in behaviour management. Areas that have been given priority for future development include continued ISL training for teachers and the education of pupils with other disabilities such as autistic spectrum disorders (ASD). Staff members are also particularly keen to develop their expertise in teaching literacy to Deaf pupils and to pupils with other special educational needs. At present, in-service training for teachers is taking place in the curriculum areas of Mathematics and Social, Personal, and Health Education (SPHE).

The staff is proud of St Joseph's tradition of making separate and distinct educational provision for pupils at primary and post-primary levels. Several of the pupils sit the Junior Certificate,

Leaving Certificate or the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) State examinations during the month of June.

The class contact hours of a number of the post-primary teachers fall below that required of both primary and post-primary teachers. This should be rectified when timetables are being organised in future. At primary level, the teachers' timetables do not meet with the requirements set down by the Department of Education and Skills. Management should ensure that the school day conforms fully with Department circulars governing time in school.

A limited range of resources is available for learning and teaching within classrooms across the school. In many instances, there is an over reliance on textbooks and resources are not always used effectively. The manner in which classes are organised adds to the challenge of managing limited teaching resources effectively and providing print-rich and stimulating learning environments for pupils. At the time of the evaluation, pupils were allocated to particular rooms and in the post-primary wing, the teachers moved from class to class for forty-minute lessons. This model should now be reviewed. Where teachers are assigned to designated rooms, as is the case for practical subjects, rooms are better maintained and there is easier access to teaching resources. This also allows for better management of records of pupils' work samples. There is sufficient staff available to monitor pupil movement at transition times between lessons. In order to facilitate an improved learning experience for pupils and to allow a more efficient management of learning resources, it is recommended that in general each teacher should assume responsibility for a designated classroom.

Fourteen special needs assistants (SNAs) are deployed to support pupils in a variety of ways. While some pupils have care needs in areas such as self-care, toileting and behaviour, most of the work carried out by SNAs involves providing in-class support for pupils in accessing the curriculum. Several of the SNAs are Deaf and fluent in ISL. As well as ensuring that pupils are well cared for, SNAs use their communication competence to make a unique contribution to supporting pupils' personal and social development. Their assistance is valued by teachers especially where teachers are less experienced or lack confidence in their signing competence. Because of their particular talents or qualifications in areas such as sign language and the arts, a number of SNAs are allocated direct teaching roles for part of the day. It is essential that the class teacher retains full responsibility for these activities at all times.

1.5 Management of relationships and communication with the school community

The school values the contribution of parents and has developed a policy on parental involvement. Home-school links are maintained in a variety of ways. The school has developed procedures for dealing with parents' concerns, giving due consideration to the diversity of parents and pupils. Consideration is also given to cultural issues, including Deaf culture; and the social and economic circumstances of their families. Formal parent-teacher meetings are convened as well as Individual IEP meetings. There are flexible arrangements in place for pupils to meet with teachers. End of year reports are provided on pupils' progress. Other forms of communication include the school web site, a new information booklet developed by the CIDP, a school promotions committee and homework journals. At present, there is no parents' association and apart from those who are members of the board of management, parents do not play an active role in school life. St Joseph's parent population is dispersed across the country and it is difficult to arrange after-school events. However, the involvement of parents in supporting the work of the school through fund raising has been successful in the past.

School links are particularly well developed with the residence for Deaf boys and with the pupils' homes through the work of the home-school teacher who works in the school as a member of staff, but is employed by the CIDP. The presence of the home-school teacher ensures that meaningful communication is maintained with parents and with care organisations in the wider community. The work of the home-school teacher is multifaceted and involves much pastoral care. In addition to liaising with school staff, residential staff and parents, the work includes dealing with enquiries about the school from visiting teachers and other professionals, from prospective parents and from schools. The home-school teacher establishes and maintains regular communication with parents and organises assessments for current and prospective pupils. The home-school teacher also organises transport for pupils and acts as the designated liaison person for communicating with the Health Service Executive. She attends case conferences concerning pupils' needs. She is also involved in monitoring hearing aids and liaising with the hearing services to have ear moulds taken.

Contacts are maintained with the Deaf community, with youth groups and with various sporting organisations in the locality. Regular links are now developing with St Mary's School for Deaf Girls. Collaborative planning sessions have taken place to develop child-protection policies. An ambitious school tour to Germany was organised for senior pupils from both schools. In considering the proposed amalgamation of the two schools, an inter-staff meeting was organised recently in association with the CIDP. These developments are to be welcomed and in the coming months, the school management and staff should consider further how resources, including human resources, can be shared in the short term between the two schools for the Deaf. This could involve extending the breadth of curriculum, the implementation of team-teaching and of collaborative projects related to the curriculum. It is envisaged that such joint experiences will enable the pupils develop their communication competences further. Benefit may also be derived from more stimulating class discussions where larger numbers of pupils are present.

Some links are also maintained with other schools where pupils attend particular subjects not available in the school, such as Leaving Certificate Biology. Trips out of school to places of interest are organised and the school participates in various sporting competitions. Visits are arranged where a disability officer from Trinity College Dublin talks to senior pupils about accessing programmes in third-level education. Local businesses provide employment placements for periods of work experience.

When interviewed by inspectors during the course of the evaluation, parent representatives on the board of management expressed strong supportive of the work of the school. They were positive in their comments about the education being provided, and teachers were described as caring and supportive. The contribution of native users of ISL was regarded by parents as an important and valuable communication resource. Parental concerns related to the proposed amalgamation, the reduction in pupil numbers, the lack of speech and language therapy services in the school, staff training needs in ISL and difficulties being encountered in arranging transport for pupils. The value of regular communication with parents was highlighted, with particular reference to the school calendar, school events and providing information to parents about ISL classes.

1.6 Management of pupils

During the evaluation, pupils' behaviour and attitudes to learning were excellent. In daily interaction with pupils, staff members use positive feedback effectively to influence and promote good learning behaviour. The school's discipline policy was reviewed in 2009 and the policy acknowledges that staff members are working in a special education setting with some pupils whose learning needs may give rise to challenging behaviour. There is an awareness that the

teachers need to be flexible and sensitive in dealing with such behaviour. Aspects of the code of behaviour could be articulated in a more positive way with a view to promoting good behaviour rather than inhibiting poor behaviour. In addition to introducing sanctions for negative behaviours, teachers should consider other ways to help pupils understand the consequences of their actions. This should help pupils to take greater responsibility for managing their own behaviour.

According to the school's enrolment policy, St Joseph's does not cater for pupils with serious behaviour problems, conduct or emotional disorders which might prevent such pupils or indeed other pupils from benefiting from the education provided by the school. This policy should be reviewed to ensure it is consistent with the purpose and spirit of the *Education Act (1998)* and more recent equality legislation.

2. QUALITY OF SCHOOL PLANNING

2.1 Whole-school and classroom planning

The board of management and the parents are engaged to a limited extent in the development of the school plan. Policies are examined by the board, adopted and signed by the chairperson. Organisational planning includes the school's mission statement, health and safety statement, code of behaviour, anti-bullying policy and the school's attendance strategy. Some sections of the whole-school plan are available to parents. Other means of disseminating whole school policies should now be considered, such as publication on the school's web site. Up to recently, few structures were in place to support and encourage the active participation of the school community in developing school policies. However, staff meetings are now organised twice per term. Issues under discussion include general organisation, discipline, classroom planning, the use of resources including the deployment of special needs assistants and the proposed amalgamation with St Mary's School for Deaf Girls.

As a means of building on this important development, it is recommended that the principal and post-holders develop team processes to facilitate the creation of a short to medium term school-development plan. This plan should pro-actively engage with the emerging needs of the school community. Key areas for development relating to organisational, curricular and pastoral aspects should be agreed. Inclusive planning procedures, responsibilities and timescales for completion and reviews should be established. Members of the in-school management team are well placed to lead an inclusive planning process and should assume a co-ordinating role for the implementation of the school plan. If necessary, external expertise from the Department's support services should be sought to support this process.

The school already has coherent planning in place for some organisational areas of the school and each teacher is provided with a handbook of whole-school policies which guides the management of teaching and learning in each class. However guidance on the implementation of curriculum areas is less well developed. A whole-school policy for communication was ratified by the board of management in 2009. At primary level, curriculum policies are provided for English, Mathematics, Science, History, Geography, and Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE). For these subjects, a rationale, aims, objectives, methodologies and available resources are outlined. The school's existing primary curriculum policy documents provide direction for teachers in relation to the drawing up of short-term curricular plans for each class. They also contain useful guidance on the teaching approaches to be used in the relevant subject areas. Similar whole school planning should now be undertaken in relation to the other areas of the primary curriculum. The teachers in the primary section are also required to provide yearly long-term schemes of work, and this element of planning should now be undertaken.

For the senior pupils, a major focus of the work has been on the adoption of post-primary programmes, leading to accreditation in state examinations. In the post-primary section, teachers have planned and delivered programmes that are based mainly on FETAC Programmes, on the Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP), Junior Certificate, Leaving Certificate and Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA). Written planning at this level reflects the specific post-primary elements that are provided through the certificate programmes. In keeping with the school's status as a special school and in accordance with staff members' desire to deliver a broad curriculum, the staff should now review the practice of only allocating some groups of post-primary pupils to particular subjects such as History or Science.

Staff members have already identified a number of key priorities for future development planning. These include the development of a school-wide policy on literacy and the creation of formal policy documentation on each subject area in the post-primary section. Other areas that should be reviewed at whole-school level include assessment and the development of a whole-school numeracy strategy. Staff should ensure that curriculum policies and subject programmes take cognisance of the curriculum areas which were first introduced at primary level. A spiral approach is recommended to ensure a continuum of provision in a broad range of curriculum areas. The guidance provided by the primary and post-primary support services, along with the advice of the Special Education Support Service (SESS) should be accessed in devising and formulating policy documents.

All teachers in the school carry out short-term planning and provide some indication of pupils' progression. In general, planning documentation indicates that teaching is consistent and delivered with good subject knowledge. However, the overall quality of planning varies greatly and the school's practice in relation to long-term and short planning should be extended. In a number of classes, planning is appropriate and promotes continuity and progression in pupils' learning. However, there are weaknesses in a number of areas where, in particular, long-term programme content and review procedures are insufficiently detailed. In some cases, short-term learning objectives are appropriate and methodologies are well thought through. But there is considerable variety in teachers' approaches, particularly in the way records of pupil progress are maintained. As provided at present, short-term plans are often too general. They do not consistently show precisely what it is intended that pupils will learn. This limits the rate at which pupils acquire literacy, numeracy and knowledge and understanding of other subjects. In a number of classes, teacher planning also needs to be more closely matched to pupils' individual targets in literacy and numeracy. A whole-school framework for planning and record keeping should now be developed and used across the school. Record keeping should facilitate the transfer of information from teacher to teacher at year end.

A whole-school policy on IEPs is in place and at primary level, short IEPs have been developed. There is also evidence that planning in some classes, seeks to meet the needs of individual pupils. In general, IEPs are informed by teacher observations and involve opportunities for consultation with parents. In a few cases, pupil profiles indicate pupil's level of functioning in a number of curriculum areas and describe pupils' strengths and needs. In other classes, planning often lacks sufficient depth and detail to provide fully for pupils' learning needs. In general, IEPs are not sufficiently specific, and do not clearly identify the learning outcomes in terms of the knowledge, skills and understanding that pupils are to acquire within a specified timescale. In preparing IEPs at all levels, staff should establish a system of short-term target setting for all pupils to improve their attainment. It is recommended that staff engage further with the IEP process and develop a collaborative approach to setting and sharing specific targets for individual pupils. Staff training in this area may be available from the SESS.

The identification, review and evaluation of the pupils' learning needs should also take into account the implications for learning of co-existing medical conditions and difficulties such as visual impairment and general learning disabilities. Where general learning disabilities are identified in pupils, the NCCA's *Guidelines for Teachers of Students with General Learning Disabilities* should be consulted to inform planning. Key recommendations by psychologists, speech and language therapists and other professionals should also inform IEPs.

The primary teachers provide copies of monthly progress records as required by the *Rules for National Schools*. This practice should be extended to the post-primary classes. Copies of monthly progress records for all classes should be maintained by the principal teacher for a period of one year.

2.2 Child protection policy and procedures

In conjunction with the trustee, the school has been proactive in reviewing and refining its child protection 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 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 Overview of learning and teaching

In the primary section, in general, the curriculum provided is broad, balanced, relevant and differentiated. Some areas including Drama and Music require further development and the good planning practices observed in a number of classes should be shared among the primary team. There is considerable scope for development in the area of assessment. There is a marked difference in the pupils' school experience as soon as they enter the post-primary section. The extensive range of subjects provided include English, Mathematics, History, Geography, Science, Art, Social, Personal, and Health Education, Business Studies, Accounting, Technical Drawing, Materials Technology (Wood), Metalwork, Graphics and Construction. Rather than building on the learning experienced through engagement with the *Primary School Curriculum* (1999), there is a determined emphasis on preparing pupils for state examinations through the Junior Certificate, Leaving Certificate or LCA programmes. The Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate programmes expand the work previously covered to some extent, but areas of the pupils' educational experience would benefit from closer linkage with the primary curriculum, especially in the key areas of literacy and numeracy.

In the majority of instances, classroom routines are organised efficiently and time is generally spent productively. Across the school, the teachers use helpful strategies such as securing the pupils' visual attention before commencing instruction, writing new vocabulary on the whiteboard and checking for comprehension during lessons. The atmosphere in classrooms is usually relaxed and the teachers maximise the use of support staff with particular skills, for the benefit of pupils. Teachers have built good relationships with pupils based on mutual respect. Many teachers have high expectations for positive learning outcomes and they affirm pupils by giving positive feedback. In these classes, learning areas are used effectively and print-rich environments are provided which support learning and teaching. In these rooms, attractive wall

displays are prominent, which feature explorations of curriculum-related themes, displays of key words, and book reviews. Written work in pupils' copies and folders is monitored and the quality of the work is good. Homework is assigned and corrected regularly. Pupils' work is often put on display and achievements are recognised, valued and celebrated. There is also an emphasis on independent learning and some peer support is promoted.

In some rooms, resources are poorly organized and these rooms need to be arranged more carefully to support individual tuition, independent work, group work and active learning. A range of teaching resources, including the local environment, is used occasionally to enrich teaching and motivate pupils in their learning, but there is considerable scope for development in this area. Teachers should provide and use illustrative and concrete resources to a much greater extent as a means of supporting teaching and learning.

In the most successful lessons observed, teachers were very enthusiastic and animated in their delivery; they provided clear explanations and succeeded in motivating pupils with good use of text, pictures, and vocabulary. Successful methodologies observed include direct teaching, demonstration with good use of visual aids, experiential learning, active learning and good questioning techniques. In some cases, teaching could be significantly enhanced by sharing learning objectives with pupils at the introduction and conclusion of lessons; and through reinforcing and consolidating key teaching points. It is essential that teachers set consistently high standards and expectations for the pupils. Teachers should ensure that sufficient time and opportunities are provided for pupils to express themselves. Under the guidance of the teachers, many pupils are developing independent working skills, but in a number of classes, there are insufficient opportunities provided for pupils to partake in purposeful, collaborative or paired-learning activities.

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is taught explicitly in designated rooms. ICT is used to an extent in enhancing teaching and learning and pupils gain experience in a range of applications using computers. These applications include word-processing, e-mail, importing images from digital cameras and sourcing data from internet web pages. Some of the rooms where practical subjects are taught have computers with subject-specific software installed. Because ICT is not available in the classrooms, its full potential is not exploited.

A mandatory introduction to ICT is provided for pupils undertaking the LCA programme and content is informed by specific curriculum learning. At the time of the evaluation, pupils were introduced to spreadsheets. Instruction was effective and included a combination of group teaching and independent work. Pupils' progress was monitored and they were provided with individualised support. They were encouraged to self-correct their work and their efforts were affirmed.

It is recommended that the school build on the existing good practice in a number of classrooms by promoting a wider range of methodologies including active learning, co-operative learning, team teaching and the effective use of information and communication technology within classrooms.

3.2 Language

A distinctive feature of communication in this school is the consistent use of signs in communication. Across the school, teachers are flexible in their approach to meeting pupils' diverse communication needs. Pupils demonstrate a range of language preferences. Some sign clearly using ISL while others prefer to use speech in their communication. Through interaction with more mature peers and adults, pupils develop fluency in ISL. Sign language is used in

almost every setting. Pupils understand what is signed to them and they are able to interact and converse easily with peers and adults. Pupils and adults switch modes depending on circumstances. Pupils who are new to the school are given discrete instruction in ISL. Staff members ensure that they communicate effectively with all pupils. Many teachers and SNAs are confident users of sign language. They improve their skills by availing of ISL lessons which are organised during school time. One of the school's SNAs has relevant qualifications in sign language and has been assigned the role of ISL co-ordinator with responsibility for pupil and staff tuition.

The school has addressed the unique characteristics of its pupil population by developing a whole-school communications policy. At enrolment, parents are asked to indicate the child's preferred mode of communication with adults and peers. The policy aims to be flexible and takes account of the place of ISL, Signed English and spoken English in the lives and identities of the pupils. The staff members see the school as an inclusive community with hard of hearing pupils integrating positively with Deaf pupils.

Two teachers are assigned to the roles of language support teachers and provide individual tuition to a number of pupils on a weekly basis. The emphasis of this provision is on developing oral language, reading and writing. Some pupils are withdrawn from classes for language support in English and literacy. Others are taught speech, if referred by teachers or if parents request it. Approaches to learning included a focus on vocabulary and word recognition development; and reading and comprehension exercises. Attention was also paid to auditory discrimination, articulation and to correct pronunciation. Lessons were well prepared and contexts were created for engaging pupils in conversation about issues that were meaningful to their lives. Pupils were encouraged to question and initiate dialogue.

Where the development of competence in speech or fluency in sign language is identified as a priority need for a pupil in his IEP, this should be included in specific, short term learning targets. The school should also clearly set out the criteria which are used to determine which pupils attend for speech tuition. An assessment policy for language development should also be put in place.

English

Staff have identified the need to develop the whole-school plan for literacy. At primary level, all classrooms provide a language-rich source for the pupils' development of sign communication, English and literacy experience charts are used effectively to enable pupils to tell and to sign; and later to read personal experiences. The use of large-format books should be extended as a basis for structured reading and as a means of providing teachers with opportunities to model and read to the pupils. In teaching reading and writing, the teachers are cognisant of the need to teach vocabulary and English grammar explicitly. Teachers ensure that the vocabulary level of the information being read or written matches the vocabulary level of the pupils. Shared reading and writing approaches enable the pupils to participate in some group discussion. During guided reading and writing, pupils are able to work their way through a text or writing piece with the support of their teacher or SNA. In order to help with comprehension, the teacher repeats questions and answers given by the other pupils in the classroom. Younger pupils write simple repetitive sentences, often drawing from their own experiences. Lower attaining pupils write simple sentences with support. Higher attaining pupils write independent accounts even though some sentences are incomplete, or in ISL order. Teachers pay careful attention to ensuring that pupils understand how sentences are constructed to compensate for the pupils' lack of access to spoken English. Teachers are also mindful of the need to promote the pupils' use of literacy throughout other subjects. The central school library is well stocked and there is a good range of suitable and age-appropriate books and reading material. Consideration should be given to

increasing the availability of computers in classrooms. ICT should be used more extensively to support literacy development.

All pupils in the post-primary section of the school attend between five and seven classes a week studying either the Junior Certificate or Leaving Certificate English syllabus or the LCA course *English and Communications*. Pupils who have been identified by a combination of teacher observation and poor performance on standardised reading tests are selected to attend additional, individual language and literacy support classes once or twice a week. While a whole-school literacy plan is not in place in the senior section of the school, all post-primary teachers use JCSP statements related to cross-curricular literacy development. Some teachers have had JCSP literacy training and the school has participated in literacy initiatives such as *Make-a-Book*, *Book Challenge* and *Paired Reading*. The implementation of a comprehensive literacy programme specific to the particular needs of the pupils attending the school should now be prioritised.

The quality of English teaching was very good where lessons were well paced, and allowed for good levels of repetition, as appropriate. These lessons were teacher-led, but pupils were also encouraged to answer and ask questions and to engage in class discussion. Teachers were enthusiastic and supportive of their pupils, regularly giving praise to acknowledge effort and to encourage participation. Many teachers had high expectations for positive learning outcomes. Approaches to the teaching of writing included the use of writing frames and graphic organisers. An appropriate amount of time was devoted to vocabulary development and ensuring comprehension. Classrooms were equipped with a range of appropriate learning materials including text books, language development workbooks and novels. In some classrooms, learning could be improved by focusing attention to a greater extent on teaching specific word recognition and reading comprehension strategies. Teachers should also ensure that pupils are allowed sufficient time to respond to questions and to express their thoughts. As observed, some teachers were too willing to accept a single word or sign response and should encourage pupils to elaborate.

During class discussions of reading assignments, teachers usually asked questions pitched at the pupil's level of literal understanding. They should ask more open-ended questions aimed at developing higher-order comprehension skills. The teachers should encourage pupils more to give their personal opinions, to make judgements, to infer from text and to predict what might happen next. As part of the future literacy strategy, teachers should also develop a monitoring system to assess pupil progress in reading. This system should include checklists of word recognition skills, receptive vocabulary and spelling competence.

Where pupils communicate principally through ISL, teacher professional development should include training in how to use ISL to support literacy skills. The language of instruction should be clearly identified with a rationale for how it is to be used to develop both meta-linguistic skills and phonological awareness. The use of Signed English and Sign Supported English in teaching literacy should also be explored.

The development of pupils' written work should also be monitored more closely. Particular difficulties experienced by Deaf pupils need to be identified, such as the omission of word endings, or 's' in plurals, the mixing of tenses, omitting function words and confusing word order. Attention should also focus on pupils' narrative development, fluency, expression and vocabulary. Samples of pupils' creative writing should be maintained to monitor and document the development of their writing skills as pupils progress through the school. These writing profiles should provide the basis for ongoing individualised planning.

3.3 Mathematics

Mathematics is clearly identified throughout the school as a key curricular area and as a vital life skill. Across the school, pupils are provided with opportunities to develop their understanding of the basic mathematical concepts and to acquire the skills necessary for computation and problem solving. In primary and post-primary classes, the Mathematics lessons that were observed were well planned and structured. Effective questioning by the teachers confirmed learning and challenged pupils to think for themselves. Pupils' written work was well monitored. Teachers used concrete examples to teach concepts and to make links with pupils' practical experiences. The teachers provided support to the pupils by using a range of presentation modes. This involved combining sign, visual, verbal, symbolic and pictorial forms. There was an emphasis on a *guided discovery* approach to learning, although more time should be devoted to collaborative problem solving and group-learning activities. Teachers were mindful of the need to provide additional support to help pupils acquire basic mathematical vocabulary and concepts. In primary classes in particular, pupils followed individualised programmes and teachers were careful to match learning activities to pupils' different abilities. Appropriate concrete and visual materials were used effectively to support teaching and learning. The frequent reinforcement of mathematical language, concepts and number work through the practical subjects is commended.

In the post-primary classes, pupils engage with JCSP, Junior Certificate, Leaving Certificate and LCA programmes. There is an emphasis on reinforcing mathematical skills that are associated with business and leisure activities. Mathematics is integrated with other subjects, most notably Geography and Business Studies. Calculators are used effectively in some mathematics lessons and if computers were available in classrooms, it would be possible to incorporate more technology into lessons. Senior pupils are scheduled for five to six mathematics classes per week. Most junior cycle pupils study Business Studies while Leaving Certificate pupils study Accounting. Best practice was observed when teaching involved a combination of direct teaching, demonstration and experiential learning. A probing questioning technique was used more effectively in some lessons than others to maintain pupil participation. Pupils received positive feedback on both their class work and their homework. Commendably, the conclusion of some lessons was used to summarise and reinforce learning.

3.4 Social, Environmental and Scientific Education (SESE)

A programme in SESE, incorporating History, Geography and Science is provided at primary level. However at post-primary level, some classes are not taught History or Geography. Only one group is taught Science in the post-primary section of the school. Pupils sit Junior Certificate examinations in Civic, Social and Political Education (CSPE) and Environmental and Social Studies (ESS). To help pupils understand concepts in SESE, the school organises regular field trips to places of historical and geographical interest at home and abroad.

Some very good History lessons were observed. Teachers were enthusiastic about their chosen topics and lively in their presentations. This contributed significantly to pupil motivation. Teachers differentiated curriculum content and delivery to accommodate a range of pupil abilities. Good use was made of both visual images and text; and time was spent profitably on careful introductions to the subject-related language and to vocabulary development. Pupils received individual attention and support if required and were consistently affirmed in their achievements. Some lessons could have been improved by better introductions, by sharing the intended outcomes with pupils and by concluding the lessons with a review of the learning. Examples of work completed in History show that pupils in the primary classes are developing a good understanding of the past. They have learned about the difference between how we live now and how their parents and grandparents lived in their earlier lives. Older pupils have learned

about ancient civilisations, the age of exploration and discovery as well as major historical events, nationally and globally in the twentieth century.

Teachers make some good use of the environment to illustrate and underpin geographical concepts and field trips are a strong feature of subject delivery. Pupils have studied local amenities and they have become familiar with places of geographical interest in the locality. Geography lessons are also used to develop pupils' literacy skills through an emphasis on key words and developing pupils' general knowledge. Impressive use is made of wall space on the corridors outside classrooms in some instances, to display pupils' work.

At primary level, the school has developed a Science policy which defines the purposes and practice of Science teaching throughout the school. A classroom has been designated as a science room and Science is integrated with language development and Visual Arts. Horticulture, which was once a feature of the programme, is no longer provided. The school resources for Horticulture include open grounds and polythene tunnel. If available, Horticulture could foster an understanding of plant growth and be used as a means of promoting an interest in gardening as a life hobby or career option. These areas of study could be linked to Science and Mathematics. The study of Horticulture could also be used to promote pupils reading and writing skills as part of the school's future literacy strategy.

3.5 Arts Education

Visual Arts

Visual Arts is an area of strength in the school. The pupils in the primary section are provided with opportunities to explore art activities through guided discovery using different techniques and materials. Talk and signed discussion are features of these activities and learning is frequently integrated with other areas of the curriculum, especially SESE. At post-primary level, the pupils sit state examinations in the Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate. Lessons are exciting and lively and high levels of individual pupil creativity are apparent. The displays of art work in the primary classes and inside and outside the art room in the post-primary section of the school are of high quality. The art samples are wide-ranging, expressive and imaginative. Pupils gain experience of using two and three dimensional media. Teacher expectations are high and teaching is successful in motivating pupils. More of the pupils' art samples at post-primary level should be displayed throughout the school. Although particular attention is paid to teaching key vocabulary, more attention could be paid to linking Visual Arts and English. As a means of developing literacy skills, pupils should be asked to write more often about their experience in the visual arts.

Materials Technology: Wood, Metal Work, Technical Graphics

The school's accommodation includes designated rooms for Technical Graphics, Metalwork and woodwork. These provide fine work areas for practical subjects. In the lessons observed, the pupils were engaged and well-behaved. They concentrated well and paid attention to safety requirements. The teachers shared the enthusiasm of the pupils who were making good progress in their learning. Appropriate post-primary programmes were implemented. Teaching was very competent. The teachers displayed a good knowledge of pupils' abilities and used a number of successful strategies to promote learning and achievement. Teaching consisted of direct instruction and demonstration followed by monitoring and support of independent project work, in line with the requirements of the syllabus. The teachers regularly repeated and reinforced directions and information to consolidate learning. They also focused regularly on the correct usage and understanding of subject-related vocabulary. The pupils' completed work samples were all of good standard.

Junior Certificate *Materials Technology: Wood* is provided for pupils in two specialist rooms which are well-equipped with a range of tools, machinery and teaching resources. Appropriate health and safety measures were observed including posted workshop rules, safety guards, a dust extraction system and fire and first aid equipment. Materials were well organised and good structures and safe environments were in place. The teachers reinforced subject specific vocabulary and language with appropriate repetition. Pupils were confident and competent in handling equipments including tools and machinery. Much of the written planning was determined by state-examination preparation. Folders maintained by the teachers show developmental stages of each project with designs and notes. The teachers keep careful and regular records of the progress of pupils in these subjects. Homework was assigned to reinforce learning.

Pupils in second, third and fourth year of the post-primary section study Metalwork. When it relocated from the school's basement, this specialist classroom was equipped by means of a grant which enabled the school to purchase a good range of modern equipment. During inspection visits, appropriate procedures and features were in place to ensure a well organised and safe learning environment and good health and safety standards. The teacher was enthusiastic about the subject and about the pupil's abilities. Direct instruction in skill development was provided at the whiteboard and at pupil's individual work benches. Pupils were both motivated and engaged in the lesson. They were appreciative of the teacher's skill and knowledge and of the support they received. The work in progress was of good quality as was the work of other pupils on display.

Design and Communication Graphics is also offered as a Leaving Certificate subject, together with Technical Graphics at Junior Certificate Level. Pupils work independently but with significant guidance and support through a prepared sequence of drawings designed to develop spatial problem-solving and graphical communication skills. In observed lessons, direct instruction was used to introduce new skills or points of information. The teacher commendably began and ended lessons by reviewing and reinforcing previous learning. Teacher expectations were high and pupils responded positively by working to the best of their abilities. Both classroom discussion and peer support were used to facilitate problem solving.

Music

No provision is currently made for Music. A specially built room with good acoustics is available and in the past, a specialist teacher delivered music and sound perception lessons. Different music styles, rhythms and sound effects were demonstrated. It is recommended that the school develop a whole-school programme for music.

Drama

Drama is used occasionally to enhance learning in some areas of the curriculum. Teachers should develop this area further and utilise drama regularly in the teaching of language and SESE in particular. Drama contributes to the children's ability to develop confidence in expressing and communicating their own ideas and feelings through imaginative role-play and movement. In the context of SPHE, Drama can also provide active learning situations in which pupils explore human relationships, behaviour and events. Because of their particular talents or qualifications in the arts, support staff are sometimes used to enhance provision in Drama. It is essential that the class teacher retains full responsibility for and is present during these lessons at all times.

3.6 Physical Education (PE)

Resources for PE are very good and a range of sports activities are provided. The school makes use of playing fields, a fine hall and a swimming pool. St Josephs has a proud tradition of sports provision. Games and practice drills are well organised and pupils and staff participate in

activities with enthusiasm. Pupils from St. Josephs represent the school in a variety of team games including football and water polo and the school enjoys notable success in inter-school competitions. Pupils from St Josephs have been selected to represent their province and country in competitions. A teacher of swimming is provided by the CIDP and the board of management funds a water polo coach.

3.7 Social, Personal and Health Education

The climate that prevails in the school and the positive relationships that the children experience contribute to their social, personal and health development. The staff endeavours to foster the welfare of each individual. They try to provide opportunities for each child to succeed and to develop individual talents. Pupils are sociable and welcoming, their attendance is generally good, and they enjoy school. It is evident that the principle of mutual respect and appreciating difference is practised. Learning and teaching in SPHE occurs both formally and informally in the school and SPHE is successfully integrated with other subject areas. There is a particular emphasis on small-group activities. As pupils progress through the school they encounter a wide range of social and health related issues and discrete time is used to develop and practice particular skills in SPHE. CSPE expands some of the themes delivered in the SPHE lessons with exploration of the relationship between the individual and society, understanding of political systems and knowledge of issues such as *Fair Trade* and workers' rights. Teachers use local and pupil-relevant topics to stimulate discussion on national and global issues such as conflict in Northern Ireland and the functions of the institutions of the European Union.

The provision for SPHE culminates in the subject area of Social Education at LCA level where the pupils actively participate in a task aimed at raising awareness and funding for a particular cause. Teachers are eager to prepare pupils for the world of work and arrange work placements for senior pupils in the community. Much of the material covered in the LCA programme helps to prepare pupils for independent living in areas such as the management of personal and family finance.

A sense of belonging in a school for the Deaf is promoted and individual, class and school achievements are celebrated. The provision of Deaf studies aims to promote a positive attitude to Deaf culture. Deaf history is covered incidentally in some History lessons but it is not explicitly highlighted and celebrated as a distinct cultural element in the pupils' lives. Consideration should be given to placing further emphasis on Deaf culture, Deaf identity and Deaf history in the SESE or SPHE programmes. Valuable resource materials which have been developed recently by the National Deaf Children's Society in the United Kingdom could be utilised. These materials provide for the exploration of Deaf issues across the curriculum and include information about Deafness, Deaf identity, Deaf history, and Combating Isolation.

Pupils in fourth year and those following the established Leaving Certificate programme attend classes in vocational preparation which centre on academic, vocational and personal guidance. In one of the classrooms visited, pupils were learning about the theory of multiple intelligences. A range of visual images and key words were introduced to develop the basic concept and pupils were encouraged to identify their own attributes.

Pupils in the LCA programme complete a set of modules called Vocational Preparation and Guidance. This course aims to promote vocational development as well as developing each pupil's understanding of the world of work. It includes a range of mandatory modules including Guidance which is delivered by the school's shared guidance teacher. This involves two periods of work experience. Lessons observed focussed on appropriate behaviours in the workplace and

advice was offered by the teacher and shared with the pupils regarding coping with possible problems in areas such as communication.

Social Education is an LCA course which focuses on the personal and social development of the pupils. In the lesson observed, the teacher began by sharing the expected learning outcomes and eliciting from pupils what they knew about racism. This was followed by reading a relevant newspaper article, discussion and answering written questions related to the article. A successful questioning technique was employed which motivated pupils to think and reflect on their own ideas. This led to an open discussion about their views and experiences. Explanations were clear and pupil efforts were praised and affirmed frequently.

In the CSPE lesson observed, pupils were actively engaged in learning about the role and function of government departments and the names of the current ministers who lead them. The lesson involved a good combination of review and reinforcement of previous learning, while also introducing the pupils to a new government department. Challenging words were presented for reading, signing and speaking; and the meanings were explained clearly with relevance for the pupils. Pupils responded enthusiastically to the teacher's questions.

The Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) programme was ratified by the board of management in 2003 and this is to be reviewed. A meeting was held recently with regard to RSE and a new pilot programme is to be introduced specifically for use with senior pupils.

3.8 Assessment

Assessment and record-keeping practices varied widely among the teachers. The school should develop an agreed school-wide system to track all pupil progress and attainment in communication skills, social development, literacy, numeracy, and subjects. In the primary section, the monthly progress record was the main means for recording work completed by the pupils. While monthly progress records are helpful, their usefulness could be enhanced by noting within these records the outcomes of assessment used to evaluate pupils' progress. Additional detail regarding pupils' learning outcomes is required, since few teachers make use of diagnostic or criterion referenced assessment instruments. Recently, standardised testing has been introduced to assess pupils' achievement in literacy and numeracy. The results in reading and mathematics attainment should now be reviewed at whole school level to identify particular areas of strength or weakness and to plan whole school strategies to address areas of particular difficulty.

In the post-primary section, pupils are tested periodically as part of their preparation for State examinations. Many teachers maintain records of assessment outcomes in subject areas carefully and monitor pupil achievement on a regular basis. They have designed suitable worksheets and tests for this purpose. Some teachers use the stated learning outcomes of the JCSP and LCA to provide a detailed record of attainment. Although pupils' achievement is monitored by the teachers, records tend to be overly dependent on external evaluation such as the state examinations.

It is recommended that the school undertake a formal review of its policy on assessment. The review should consider the use of formal and informal modes of assessment in the first instance, Assessment for learning and assessment of learning methodologies should also be considered in accordance with the guidelines provided by the NCCA. The review should inform the development of a whole-school assessment policy, the acquisition of appropriate assessment materials and the compilation of baseline assessment information against which pupils' progress can be benchmarked and measured annually. The assessment of pupils' competencies in oral English should include speech tests and other instruments as well as the use of curriculum

objectives for English or Irish. In general, pupils' progress in the acquisition of sign language was not monitored or recorded. The assessment of pupils' competencies in Sign Language should be undertaken, possibly by adapting instruments developed for British Sign language (BSL) and documents produced by the Council for the Advancement of Communication with Deaf People (CACDP).

4. Quality of support for pupils

4.1 Pupils with special educational needs

All pupils present with needs related to Deafness. Some of the pupils also have additional learning needs. These additional needs are sometimes related to general ability or to diagnosed conditions such as autistic spectrum disorders (ASD). The school policy on enrolment indicates that a child's placement in the school follows a case conference involving parents, teachers, psychologist and other relevant professionals.

Psychological support is now being provided by the National Education Psychological Service (NEPS). At the time of the evaluation, a speech and language therapist position, based in the school, had been sanctioned by the HSE, but this post had not been filled. This was a cause for concern for the school staff, as the availability from the Health Service Executive (HSE) of regular speech and language therapy is an important service in the assessment of and the development of pupils' communication skills.

At the request of the trustees, an audit of the audiological needs of the school was conducted recently by an educational audiologist and acoustic engineer. The audit involved an examination of all rooms and equipment. The audit report indicates that there are significant deficits in the listening conditions for Deaf and Hard of Hearing people in some of the classrooms and larger open spaces in the school. The report recommends acoustic treatment to the school building to make it more "deaf-friendly", the use of specialised equipment such as radio aids and sound-field systems, the provision for each pupil of a personal FM system, and the availability of auditory trainers for the specialist teachers. The report also recommended that an adequate amount of hearing aid maintenance kits should be available, and that a named person should be responsible for the monitoring of aids and acoustic technology. Teachers should retain copies of all audiological assessments on file and a teacher should have responsibility for updating policy and promoting the best use of audiology resources. Where necessary, teachers should be trained to use the equipment and be able to ensure ongoing effective management. It is important that the board acts on this report without delay. Where necessary, applications for support should be made to the appropriate agencies.

Older pupils are well supported in studying for State examinations. Staff members seek to assist pupils in achieving the highest possible academic standards and the generous pupil-teacher ratio allows for the provision of much individualised and differentiated support. The school is justly proud of its endeavours to provide the most appropriate education for the pupils and the pursuit of post-primary accreditation for pupils is indeed a commendable feature of practice. Having achieved notable success in developing age-appropriate courses with recognised accreditation in state examinations, the school should now begin to concentrate on developing further, those aspects of the provision which relate to the general and specific learning needs of its pupils. In this regard, areas such as individualised planning, assessment, social development and the formulation of whole-school literacy and numeracy strategies should be prioritised.

A whole-school policy has been put in place which documents the role of form teachers. Form teachers meet pupils on a weekly basis to explain various routines and school practices. The form teacher is centrally involved when disciplinary issues arise. The role of the form teacher should now be further developed. In addition to taking responsibility for coordinating end of year school reports, the form teacher is best placed to play a key role in the development of individual education plans and particularly in monitoring the achievement of targets and goals.

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

Although pupils have had different life experiences and come from a range of cultural and ethnic backgrounds, a strong sense of community exists in the school as pupils share the common bond of Deafness. A number of pupils come from disadvantaged backgrounds and the school has supported these pupils in a number of sensitive ways. The school welcomes pupils from different nationalities and language support is provided for them. The school has developed effective ways of communicating with parents for whom English is an additional language (EAL). To build on this good practice, a school policy on the inclusion of pupils from minority groups should be put in place. *Intercultural Education in Primary Schools* published by the NCCA and other publications relating to interculturalism should be of significant assistance in this regard.

5. CONCLUSION

The school has strengths in the following areas:

- The board of management is made up of committed members who give generously and voluntarily of their time to provide supportive direction and good governance to the school.
- The principal exemplifies commendable professional standards and sets high expectations for the performance of the school: She values the work of her colleagues in the school and is dedicated to promoting a culture of team work and collaborative decision making.
- The teachers have demonstrated their commitment to ongoing professional development and have accessed a range of relevant courses including Irish Sign Language, post-graduate qualifications in hearing impairment and special educational needs.
- Excellent practice was observed in a number of classes characterised by, effective communication, empathy and responsiveness to pupil needs and impressive pupil engagement.
- A positive school climate is in evidence and is well supported by caring and competent teachers and special needs assistants.
- The special needs assistants support the teachers in providing a suitable learning environment where there is a perceptible emphasis on promoting pupils' self-esteem and confidence, and where behaviour of pupils is generally good.
- The school provides valuable age-appropriate education programmes that boost pupils' self-esteem and lead to national accreditation.
- The school has access to an extensive range of accommodation and other facilities including practical classrooms, swimming pool and transport.

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

- In light of the current and future needs of the school, the in-school management team with the support of the board of management should undertake a comprehensive review of their practices and areas of responsibility to address changing curricular, organisational and pastoral priorities.
- In-school management should develop team processes to facilitate the creation of a short to medium term school development plan. This plan should pro-actively address the emerging needs of the school community.
- In order to facilitate an improved learning experience for pupils and to allow for more efficient management of learning resources, it is recommended that each teacher should assume responsibility for a base classroom as much as possible.
- It is recommended that the school build on the existing good practice in a number of classrooms by promoting a wider range of methodologies including active learning, co-operative learning, team teaching and the greater use of information and communication technology within classrooms.
- The school should further engage with its individual education planning processes to include the development of collaborative approaches to the setting and sharing of specific targets for individual pupils.
- Future curriculum planning at whole-school level should prioritise the development of a literacy strategy.
- It is recommended that the school undertakes a formal review of its policy on assessment.
- The school should act on the recommendations of the recent audit of its audiological needs and make representations for support to the appropriate agencies.

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 here at St. Joseph's welcomed this report, and found it to be positive with constructive recommendations. The Board wishes to acknowledge the professional manner in which the inspection process was carried out. The Board of Management will devise an action plan to address recommendations of the report.

The Board recognises that while there is no Parent's Association at present, it feels that a special relationship with all parents exists and that parents are welcomed into the school. The school has a unique relationship with the Deaf community and our own past pupils, from whom we gain insider knowledge from their own experiences.

The Board wishes to acknowledge the "caring and competent" work of all the Staff.

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 have already identified the area of technology for improvement within the school. At present interactive whiteboards and software are being purchased and training is secured for teachers to use these resources.
- Two initiatives are currently being piloted within the school in order to address literacy for our pupils. With our 1st Years we are making use of Team teaching; and the Wilson Reading Scheme is being researched to be used with some pupils across the school.
- All teachers are now assigned designated classrooms. Teachers have found that this has proven to be of huge benefit to the teaching of pupils as resources for each are centralised.

The Board of Management and Staff have totally revamped our code of discipline to include the positive sanctions for positive behaviour that we always had in place (termly Prize Giving) and other incentives (a fortnightly reward scheme for good behaviour). So far this has proven to be of benefit.