Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

St. Mary’s Junior National School
Main Street
Blessington
County Wicklow
Uimhir rolla: 17091A

Date of inspection: 11th November 2010
1. **Introduction**

St. Mary’s Junior National School, Blessington is a co-educational primary school under the patronage of the Catholic Archbishop of Dublin. It caters for pupils from junior infants to second class. Attendance of the 271 pupils is very good. The board of management was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the evaluation, and the response of the board will be found in the appendix to this report.

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The following are the <strong>main strengths</strong> of the work of the school:</th>
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<td>• The principal and in-school management team provide effective leadership to the school.</td>
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<td>• A range of teaching methodologies is effectively used ensuring positive learning outcomes for pupils.</td>
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<td>• A holistic education is provided for pupils. Pupils are confident and enthusiastic about their learning.</td>
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<td>• The quality of the school’s organisational and curriculum plans is very high.</td>
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<td>• A wide range of teaching resources is available and used very effectively to support teaching and learning.</td>
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<td>• Excellent levels of communication exist within the school and with the wider school community.</td>
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<td>• The board of management and parents are highly supportive of the work of the school.</td>
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The following **main recommendations** are made:

- It is recommended that pupils be grouped according to ability for the teaching of reading using suitably graded reading material.
- It is important that strategies to support in-class differentiated learning are devised to ensure that appropriate support is provided for all pupils in Mathematics.

3. **Quality of School Management**

- Commendable support is given to the school by the board of management. Board members play an active role in all areas of school life. Praiseworthy efforts have been made to maintain the building and grounds to a very high standard. School policies are developed collaboratively, ratified and reviewed. The board communicates effectively with the wider school community through the issuing of regular newsletters, the school website and the parent representatives on the board.

- The quality of the leadership provided by the principal and in-school management team is very good. The principal has succeeded admirably in establishing positive relationships with the staff, board of management and the wider school community. She demonstrates
highly-effective organisational and management skills. Under her leadership the whole-school planning process has advanced significantly. The in-school management team carry out their assigned duties diligently and make a valuable contribution to the smooth operation of the school. 99% of parents surveyed responded that they thought the school was well run.

- A wide range of teaching resources is available and used very effectively to support teaching and learning. The school has made considerable investment in information and communications technology (ICT). Commendable efforts have been made to develop the school’s resources for History. Teachers make very good use of the local environment to support teaching and learning.

- Communication with parents is excellent. There are two formal parent-teacher meetings held annually. Additional meetings can be arranged with teachers. A written pupil progress report is issued to parents annually. Attractive newsletters are issued regularly. The school has a very active and dedicated parent/teacher association (PTA) which is involved in a wide range of activities including organising fundraising events and supporting various school-based initiatives.

- The management of pupils is very good. The teachers have positive relationships with pupils. They focus on their holistic development and on ensuring that their experience of school is positive and happy. A wide range of co-curricular and extra curricular activities is provided at the school. 96% of parents responded that their children like school.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- The quality of the school’s organisational and curriculum plans is very high. They provide clear guidance on the day-to-day administration of the school and identify agreed whole-school approaches in curriculum areas. A collaborative approach to planning is used involving staff, board members and parents. The principal is praised for leading the formulation of a five-year action plan which provides clear guidance on the future development of the school.

- All teachers prepare appropriate long-term and short-term plans. Teachers of similar class grades plan together. This practice is commended. Monthly progress reports are maintained consistently.

Child protection policy and procedures

School authorities provided evidence that, in compliance with Primary Circular 0061/2006, the board of management has formally adopted the Department’s Child Protection Guidelines for Primary Schools. Evidence was provided to show that these child protection procedures have been brought to the attention of management, school staff and parents; that a copy of the procedures has been provided to all staff (including all new staff); and that management has ensured that all staff are familiar with the procedures to be followed. A designated liaison person (DLP) and a deputy DLP have been appointed in line with the requirements of the guidelines.

5. Quality of Teaching, Learning and Pupil Achievement

- Tá caighdeán an-mhaith sa scoil i múineadh agus i bhfoghlaim na Gaeilge. Cothaíonn na hoidí dearcadh dearfach i leith na Gaeilge i measc na ndaltaí agus meallann siad iad chun cainte as Gaeilge go neamhfhoirmiúil i rith an lae. Baíneann na hoidí úsáid as raon maith de mhodhanna múinte agus acmhainní i rith na gceachtanna. Canann agus
The quality of teaching and learning in Irish in the school is very good. The teachers promote a positive attitude to Irish among pupils and they encourage them to speak Irish informally during the day. The teachers use a good range of methodologies and resources during lessons. The pupils recite and sing a selection of poems and songs enthusiastically. They can answer and ask questions based on the themes of the curriculum. Pupils in second classes display good reading skills. They read with accuracy and understanding. Fine samples of pupils’ writing can be seen in copybooks and on classroom walls.

- The quality of teaching and learning in oral language and writing in English is very good. In addition to discrete oral language lessons, oral language is integrated effectively with other curriculum areas. Pupils speak with confidence and can recite a wide range of poems and rhymes. Writing is effectively taught throughout the school. Teachers model the writing process appropriately and they teach the conventions of writing consistently. Pupils experience writing in a variety of genres. The quality of the pupils’ penmanship is high.

- The overall standard of reading is good with a small number of pupils achieving very good standards. Parents have made a significant contribution to supporting the school’s efforts to promote and foster a love of reading. They are involved in paired reading, shared reading and have made considerable investment in developing and organising a well-stocked school library. The school has recently introduced an agreed phonological-awareness programme. English reading is primarily taught through whole-class teaching using a class reader. This approach does not sufficiently challenge the more-able readers and does not cater fully for pupils experiencing difficulty in reading. It is recommended that pupils are grouped according to ability for the teaching of reading using suitably graded reading material.

- The quality of teaching and learning in Mathematics is good. There has been steady, measurable improvement in attainment in recent years. The teachers explain mathematical concepts clearly and provide the pupils with concrete materials and learning tasks. Due emphasis is placed on the teaching of mathematical language. The predominant methodology utilised is whole-class teaching. While the majority of pupils display good knowledge and understanding of number operations and measures there are some pupils in every class who are experiencing difficulty with core elements of the Mathematics curriculum and a few pupils who are not appropriately challenged. It is important that strategies to support in-class differentiated learning are devised to ensure that appropriate support is provided for all pupils.

- The standard of teaching and learning in History is commended. Teachers present interesting, well-structured lessons. They afford pupils ample opportunities to investigate the local environment and examine photographs and artefacts to develop their skills as historians. Age-appropriate timelines are in many classrooms. The pupils display a well-developed appreciation of both time and chronology, and change and continuity. They can confidently recall stories, myths and legends and they can sequence historical events with competence. They are able to discuss changes that have occurred in their own lives, the lives of their families, the school and locality. A praiseworthy feature of provision in this area is the use of interviews and presentations by guest speakers from the local community.
• Teachers use a range of methodologies effectively including use of the environment, skills through content and excellent use of ICT. They explain concepts clearly and deliver well-structured lessons. There is some provision for group and pair work. Extension of this practice to include more differentiated tasks and activities is required. Teachers employ a range of assessment tools to assess pupils’ progress and record the outcomes of these carefully. Further analysis of this data is required to inform programmes of learning in English and Mathematics. Copies are regularly and carefully corrected by teachers and positive feedback to pupils is recorded.

• The pupils are eager to display their knowledge and understanding of topics covered in a range of curriculum areas. Classrooms and communal areas of the school host an impressive range of visually stimulating displays of pupils’ work and teachers’ resources and posters. An overwhelming majority of parents indicated that they were satisfied with the quality of the teaching in the school and their children’s learning.

6. Quality of Supports for Pupils

• The quality of support for pupils with special educational needs (SEN) and for pupils for whom English is an additional language (EAL) is very good. A variety of tests is administered by the support teachers to identify individual pupils’ learning needs and to assist in the development of individual pupil learning programmes (IPLPs). There are high levels of collaboration between class teachers, support teachers and parents in developing the IPLPs. These set out appropriate learning targets for each pupil and are reviewed regularly. An appropriate variety of approaches and methodologies is effectively used by the support teachers to enhance learning.

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Appendix

School response to the report

Submitted by the Board of Management

Area 1: Observations on the content of the inspection report

- The Board welcomes the publication of the report and feels it is an accurate reflection of our school. We are delighted that the inspectorate appreciated the holistic approach which we have striven to foster in our school community.

- The Board wishes to thank the team of inspectors for their professionalism and for their supportive attitude throughout the WSE process.

- The Board would also like to acknowledge the commitment and dedication of the Principal and the entire staff at St Mary's Junior school to the ongoing development of the school – both in their provision for our pupils' needs and in their role within the community.

- The Board would also like to thank the parent body for their ongoing support and commitment to the education of their children and to the development of our school as a whole.

- The Board also thanks our pupils for being so wonderful every day in so very many ways. They are at the heart of all we do in St Mary’s junior school and we are very proud of them.

We in St. Mary's look forward to the continuing development of our school with the proposed physical expansion of the school buildings. The proposed development will further enhance our provision for the needs of our pupils into the future.

Area 2: Follow-up actions planned or undertaken since the completion of the inspection activity to implement the findings and recommendations of the inspection

- An audit has been conducted to assess the proposed provision of further group work in the teaching of English reading and Mathematics within the older classes.

- A new reading scheme, implemented through station teaching, will be introduced in Senior Infants in September 2011.

- The current reading scheme will be supplemented with more parallel readers, at an earlier stage of the school year, in First and Second classes.

- Continuous investment in concrete Mathematics materials will enable class teachers to promote group work in Mathematics within the mainstream classes.