Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

St. Joseph’s NS,
Hilltown, Ballymitty,
County Wexford
Uimhir rolla: 17554O

Date of inspection: 22 April 2010
WHOLE-SCHOOL EVALUATION

A whole-school evaluation of St. Joseph’s National School was undertaken in April 2010. This report presents the findings of the evaluation and makes recommendations for improvement. The evaluation focused on the quality of teaching and learning in Irish, English, Mathematics and the Visual Arts. The board of management of the school was given an opportunity to comment on the findings and recommendations of the report; the board chose to accept the report without response.

INTRODUCTION – SCHOOL CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

St. Joseph’s NS, Ballymitty is a six-teacher, fully vertical co-educational school under the patronage of the Catholic Bishop of Ferns and located in the townland of Hilltown, near to the historic Bannow Bay in Co. Wexford. Pupil attendance levels are very good and the school’s attendance policy helps to promote and maintain these attendance levels. Enrolment figures are growing steadily and it is expected that the school will be in a position to appoint an additional mainstream class teacher in September 2010.

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pupils enrolled in the school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainstream classes in the school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers on the school staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainstream class teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers working in support roles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special needs assistants</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT

1.1 Characteristic spirit, mission or vision

In its mission statement, St Joseph’s NS expresses its commitment to promoting the full and harmonious development of all its pupils and to creating a school atmosphere that fosters a love of learning and an enjoyment of the educational process. Giving and anticipating respect is central to the school motto. It was evident during the course of the whole-school evaluation that the school exemplifies these commitments through the provision of a broad range of learning activities and through the existence of positive interactions between the teachers, the pupils and their peers.

1.2 Board of management

The board of management is constituted properly and it demonstrates commitment to supporting and developing the school. The board meets regularly, minutes of meetings are maintained carefully and accounts of expenditure are audited. Consideration and formal ratification of curriculum plans and organisational policies are features of all board meetings. A development
plan guides the work of the board and it is evident that the board is focused on meeting the changing needs of the school. The promotion of positive and productive relationships between the board and school staff, parents and the local community is a key priority of the board.

1.3 In-school management

The in-school management team comprises the principal, the deputy principal and one special-duties teacher. The principal was appointed in September 2009, having served for six years on the teaching staff. Since taking up the position, she has worked tirelessly in the fulfilment of her duties. Her skills of leadership, personnel management and communication, and her focused and systematic approach to planning and organisation have impacted very positively on all aspects of school life. Her introduction of a parent information evening, which was held in October, is welcomed and praised. The school climate is characterised by positive working relationships with staff, parents and the wider school community. The deputy principal and the special-duties teacher fulfil their duties with a commendable sense of responsibility and are focused on contributing constructively to the continuous development of the school. Their duties include a range of curricular, organisational and pastoral responsibilities. These duties are reviewed regularly and the in-school management team meets frequently, both formally and informally.

1.4 Management of relationships and communication with the school community

The school encourages the active involvement of parents in supporting the work of the school and communicates continually with its parent community through newsletters and a text-a-parent service. Recently, parents have worked with school personnel to develop a school website which provides up-to-date information on school events. Formal parent-teacher meetings to discuss pupils’ progress are convened annually and a written progress report is provided at the end of the school year. Informal parent-teacher meetings are scheduled during the school year as necessitated.

The parents’ association makes an important contribution to the life of the school. Members of the association review pertinent school policies and their input is valued and respected. The parents’ association assists with sporting activities, the celebration of the sacraments, information and communication technology (ICT), school maintenance and fundraising. The recent initiative by the parents’ association and school personnel to work collaboratively to develop a school library is praised.

1.5 Management of pupils

The management of pupils is very good. The principal and teachers are commended for the positive learning atmosphere fostered in the school. The pupils are courteous and friendly and they engage enthusiastically in their learning. The pupils are allocated appropriate responsibilities and they carry out these duties with enthusiasm and competence. The pupils are also involved in pertinent decision-making through their participation in the Green Schools committee.

2. Quality of School Planning

2.1 Whole-school and classroom planning

The quality of whole-school planning is highly commended and a comprehensive school plan has been prepared. All the school partners are actively involved in its compilation and review. The
plan contains all the policies necessary to comply with legislation and to ensure the effective running of the school. The policies are well structured and succinct, are tailored to the needs of the school, and are stated in clear and unambiguous language. Comprehensive curriculum plans provide a central focus for the delivery of a balanced, sequenced, integrated curriculum in each subject area.

All the teachers plan conscientiously for their work. They provide high-quality, long-term plans which guide their work at individual classroom level. A commercially produced year book is used to aid short-term planning. Monthly progress reports are prepared by all teachers and are retained centrally. It is recommended that the data arising from these records be reviewed systematically to monitor the effectiveness of curriculum implementation on an ongoing basis.

2.2 Child protection policy and 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 all new staff); and that management has ensured that all staff are familiar with the procedures to be followed. A designated liaison person (DLP) and a deputy DLP have been appointed in line with the requirements of the guidelines.

3. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

3.1 Gaeilge

Spreagtar suim sa Ghaeilge go coinsiasach sa scoil seo. Tá saibhreas d’abhair phriontáilte le feiceáil timpeall na scoile le fógraí agus le lipéidí. Forbraítear gnéacht cultúir na hÉireann trí chluichí, trí dhamhsa, trí cheol agus trí imeachtaí oiriúnacha a eagrú i rith *Seachtain na Gaeilge*. Baintear úsáid as raon straitéisí chun deiseanna cainte a chruthú do na daltaí. Ina measc, tá obair bheirte, puipéid, chluichí teanga agus cur ag freagairt ceisteanna. B’fhéidir, áfach, níos mó béime a chur ar ionchur teanga agus ar straitéisí breise a chruthú chun cumas cumarsáide na ndaltaí a fháil a thuilleadh. Aithrisíonn na daltaí i roinnt ranganna cnuasach deas filíochta go taitneamhach. Chun forbairt bhreise a dhéanamh ar shaibhreas teanga na ndaltaí, b’fhéidir cnuasach filíochta a chur a dhéanamh le fáil chun cumas cumarsáide cabhrú ar sháibhreas teanga an chluais féin.

Ar an iomlán, léann an cuid is mó de na daltaí sna meán- agus sna hardranganna le liofacht oiriúnach, ach is gá a dhíriú ar dheas. B’fhéidir tuilleadh ábhar léitheoireachta a chruthú i rith taisteal de sháibhreas teanga agus ar sháibhreas teanga a chur ar a dtugtar *Teanga* ar *Teanga Chlúadach*. Manteoirí na ndaltaí is lú a oibríonn tuilleadh a chur ar lú le clú léitheoireachta agus tháirgeadh a chur i ngach rang.

Irish

*Interest in Irish is fostered conscientiously in this school. A print-rich environment is in evidence throughout the school. Aspects of Irish culture are promoted through games, dance and music.*
and through the activities organised during Seachtain na Gaeilge. A range of teaching strategies is employed to develop the pupils’ oral capacities, including pair work, puppets, language games and posing and answering questions. However, greater attention should be afforded to the language inputs in use and a broader range of teaching approaches should be employed to develop the pupils’ communication skills. The pupils in some classes recite a good selection of poetry with enjoyment. To further develop the pupils’ richness of language, the memorisation of selected poems and the regular revision of poems previously taught are advised.

Overall, most pupils in middle and senior classes read with appropriate fluency. However, it is advised to focus more closely on the promotion of accurate pronunciation. Additional reading materials should be provided to afford the pupils opportunities to experience a wider range of literature and to develop their reading competence incrementally. The pupils practise functional writing and they engage in a range of writing activities, including personal news, comprehension tasks, grammar exercises and stories. In some classes, there is too great a dependency on the use of workbook activities to promote the pupils’ writing skills. It is recommended that a whole-school approach to the development of the pupils’ independent writing skills be implemented.

3.2 English

The quality of teaching and learning in English is very good. Each class participates in discrete oral language lessons on a regular basis. These lessons enable the pupils to develop the skills to express themselves with confidence and competence across a wide range of topics. Oral language development is also integrated suitably across many other curriculum areas. Throughout the school, the pupils are afforded opportunities to engage productively with a range of poetry themes and to compose their own poetry. It is advised that they be encouraged to recite a variety of their preferred poems.

All teachers create print-rich environments in their classrooms through the use of teaching charts, attractive displays of the pupils’ work and appealing libraries. Suitable activities are used to develop the pupils’ phonological awareness in the junior classes. Supplementary graded reading material is used effectively to ensure that all pupils engage in reading activity at an appropriate instructional level. Novels are a feature of provision, with teachers reading simple novels in the junior classes and class novels being used in the middle and senior classes. They are employed to develop the range of literacy skills including, listening and comprehension skills. Occasionally, local writers are invited to visit the school to share their knowledge and expertise and to enrich the learning experience of the pupils.

The pupils benefit from the schoolwide promotion of a process approach to writing. Impressive examples of the pupils’ work across a range of genres are in evidence in the classrooms. Good use is made of ICT to aid the publication and display of the pupils’ stories and poetry. The pupils’ work is well monitored and formative feedback is provided. A multi-strategy approach to the teaching of spellings is employed.

3.3 Mathematics

The quality of teaching and learning in Mathematics is very good. Dedicated mathematics areas in all classrooms serve to support the pupils’ learning in this area of the curriculum. The teachers provide clear explanations of concepts, present content succinctly and implement purposeful and structured learning activities. In all lessons, there is a suitable emphasis on the teaching and use of appropriate mathematical language. The concepts being examined are linked aptly to the pupils’ own experiences and to real-life practical situations. The teachers provide learning opportunities
that link content from the different mathematics strands, while also competently integrating learning in Mathematics with other curriculum areas. A range of manipulatives is used effectively to support teaching and learning. In the main, the pupils display laudable understanding of the content previously addressed across the strands. In planning for the future development of Mathematics teaching and learning, the teachers are advised to focus further on the pupils’ problem-solving skills and to introduce mathematical trails.

3.4 Visual Arts

The implementation of the visual arts curriculum in the school is praised. The numerous displays around the school are of a very high standard and confirm the broad nature of curriculum delivery. Opportunities are provided at each class level for the pupils to explore the full range of strands. Judicious use is made of a variety of materials and resources to develop the pupils’ skills in both making art and in looking and responding to art. During the course of the evaluation, the pupils engaged in the visual arts lessons with great enthusiasm. The teachers exploit opportunities for the integration of learning in the Visual Arts with many other areas of the curriculum, including Music, English and History.

3.5 Assessment

A range of assessment modes is employed to build a profile of each pupil’s progress and learning achievements across the curriculum. The most common forms of assessment in use are teacher observation, teacher-designed tasks and tests, work samples and portfolios, and homework tasks. In some classes, the pupils engage in self-assessment practices and this approach should be extended to all classes. Standardised assessment in English and Mathematics is conducted annually from first to sixth classes. These tests are instrumental, in conjunction with teacher observation and other assessment data, in the selection of pupils for additional support. The specific learning strengths and needs of individual pupils are subsequently identified using a broad range of diagnostic tests. Suitable screening assessment is administered in both junior and senior infant classes to inform the school’s early intervention measures.

4. Quality of Support for Pupils

4.1 Pupils with special educational needs

The overall provision for pupils with special educational needs (SEN) is very good. The SEN team approaches its work in a highly professional manner, informed by a clear school policy for SEN. The staged approach to assessment, identification and programme planning is practised in the school. Very good communication is in evidence between the support teachers, mainstream class teachers, the principal and parents. A very successful programme of team teaching and cooperative teaching has been developed. The withdrawal model of support, which offers individual or small group tuition, is also implemented successfully.

Individual education plans (IEPs) have been developed on a collaborative basis for all pupils in receipt of support teaching. They contain detailed information on the specific learning targets to be achieved by individual pupils and are reviewed on a termly basis. Lessons for pupils in receipt of supplementary teaching are well structured and the support teachers utilise a variety of active-learning methodologies and approaches. Lessons contain a suitable range of learning activities that address the pupils’ individual needs. There is evidence that the pupils are growing in self-confidence and that their progress is in keeping with the targets set for them in their IEPs. A
positive rapport is in evidence between the support teachers and their pupils. The support rooms are presented imaginatively with print-rich and mathematics-rich displays. Samples of the pupils’ work are displayed and their work is acknowledged and celebrated. A vast range of teaching and learning resources is available and these are well organised, readily accessible and utilised efficiently.

5. **Conclusion**

The school has strengths in the following areas:

- The school enjoys the support of a committed and supportive board of management and parents’ association.
- The principal provides very effective leadership for the school.
- The principal and staff are dedicated to providing the pupils with a broad range of learning experiences in a happy, caring environment.
- The pupils are very well behaved, courteous and engage enthusiastically in their learning.

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

- The pupils’ ability to communicate competently and confidently in the Irish language should be developed.
- In planning for the future development of Mathematics teaching and learning, the teachers are advised to focus further on the pupils’ problem-solving skills and to introduce mathematical trails.

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.

*Published December 2010*