An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

St. Joseph’s NS
Ballinagar, County Offaly
Uimhir rolla: 17637S

Date of inspection: 16 September 2010
1. Introduction

St. Joseph's NS is a mainstream, co-educational primary school under the patronage of the Catholic Bishop of Kildare and Leighlin. It is situated between Tullamore and Daingean and its catchment area is the local community. Currently the school has one administrative principal, seven mainstream class teachers, two teachers in support roles and one special needs assistant. There are 186 pupils on roll in the current school year. The board of management of the school was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the report, and the response of the board will be found in the appendix of this report.

2. Summary of Findings and Recommendations for Further Development

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

- Teachers demonstrate proficiency and competence in their teaching. Classroom routines are very capably managed and pupils are regularly encouraged and motivated in their learning.
- Pupils in receipt of learning support and resource teaching receive very good quality, well-structured interventions.
- Pupils are very well behaved throughout the school. They participate willingly in class activities and are courteous and respectful at all times.
- Classroom environments are bright and stimulating and pupils feel safe, listened to and treated fairly in the school environment.

The following main recommendations are made:

- The system of involving parents in the work of the school should be developed. Particular attention should be paid to strengthening the links between the parents’ association and the board of management, providing parents with standardised test results and involving parents in school planning.
- There should be more differentiation of programmes and learning activities in mainstream classes in order to meet the varying learning needs of pupils.
- Core topics and items for each subject for each class should be identified in the school plan. These should be taught and regularly revised in mainstream classes and monitored at whole-school level with a view to ensuring continuity and progression in pupils’ learning.

3. Quality of School Management

- The board of management provides good governance to the school. It is particularly commended for the significant work it has completed in advancing the school’s building project. The links between the parents’ association and the board of management should be strengthened with a view to enhancing parental involvement in the school. The board is advised to ensure that all of its meetings have a quorum. Board accounts should be audited or certified annually. An agreed report of each board meeting, setting out the
information to be conveyed to members of the school community and the manner in which it should be conveyed, should become a standard item at all board meetings and should be recorded in the minutes.

- The in-school management team is praised for meeting regularly to discuss school management and for engaging in school self-evaluation based on *Looking at our School* (Department of Education and Science 2003). The range and scope of the responsibilities of the in-school management team should be extended to reflect existing school priorities and to include responsibilities in the curricular, organisational and pastoral domains. Each member of the in-school management team should have a contract, detailing their responsibilities and signed by themselves and the chairperson of the board.

- The management of pupils is excellent. Discipline is very good throughout the school and pupils are courteous and respectful to their peers, their teachers and visitors to the school. Results of pupil questionnaires, conducted as part of the whole-school evaluation, indicate that the school has successfully created a safe environment where pupils feel comfortable and where issues relating to pupil safety are frequently discussed.

- The school intends to provide the results of pupils’ standardised tests to parents in written format. They are encouraged to do this in order to comply with Circular 0138/2006 *Supporting Assessment in the Primary School*.

### 4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- Administrative policies are clearly written and context specific. They serve as a useful guide to school procedures. Curricular plans for all areas are in place. Plans for areas such as Irish, Social, Personal and Health Education, and Geography, contain clear guidance on core topics to be covered under curricular strands and strand units for each class level. This approach should now be extended to all curricular plans with a view to enhancing continuity and progression in pupils’ learning.

- There is scope to broaden parental involvement in the process of whole-school planning. The school is therefore encouraged to involve the parents’ association in a cyclical review of school policies.

- Mainstream class teachers plan well for their teaching. Planning reflects the structure and format of the curriculum and, in most cases, is informed by curriculum objectives. The link between short-term planning and monthly progress records would be enhanced by recording specific objectives attained in monthly progress records.

- The quality of planning for pupils with special educational needs (SEN) is very good. The process of devising and updating individual educational programmes reflects best practice.

- The school is encouraged to extend its process of self-evaluation through embarking on a systematic review of the impact of existing curricular policies on classroom practice and their effectiveness in enhancing continuity and progression throughout the school.

**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

- Overall the quality of teaching throughout the school is good. Teachers demonstrate well-developed classroom management skills. They present clear and purposeful lessons and provide suitable learning opportunities for pupils. During the evaluation an effective blend of methodologies, including whole-class teaching, group work and pair work were observed. However the data garnered from pupil questionnaires indicates that there is scope to practise group work more frequently in some classes. A greater emphasis should be placed on differentiation in curriculum planning and implementation in mainstream classes in order to cater for pupils’ varying learning needs.

- Pupils demonstrate very positive attitudes towards their learning and achievement. The vast majority of pupils sampled in the pupil survey indicate a high level of satisfaction with their progress in specific curricular areas, the way in which concepts are explained to them and their homework.

- Effective assessment modes are in operation at class and whole-school level. The collation and analysis of standardised test results at whole-school level is good practice. In some cases teachers have records of pupils’ previous class-based assessments. A system of forwarding key, class-based assessment data to subsequent class teachers should be implemented throughout the school.

- A non-reading intelligence test is administered to some pupils in receipt of learning support. The staff should consider administering this test to all pupils at least once during their school life and comparing individual pupil’s attainments in non-reading intelligence with their standardised test results. The system of tracking pupils’ attainments in standardised tests as they progress through the school should be further developed.

- Good practice in the teaching of Irish is evident at some levels in the school and there is a supportive atmosphere towards Irish throughout the school. New vocabulary is taught in a lively, stimulating way and effective use is made of pictures, resources and language games in the pre-conversational stage of lessons. A greater emphasis should be placed on the fostering of authentic conversation in Irish. To this end teachers are asked to ensure that each conversational lesson contains a distinct conversational phase. It is also advised that a whole-school plan, that includes the specific communicative strategies appropriate for the various class levels, be implemented. Pupils undertake appropriate writing activities, in various genres, and reading skills are developed systematically.
The overall quality of teaching and learning in English is good. There is good use of appropriate activities and resources in the teaching of reading and writing. The quality of pupils’ handwriting and presentation of written work is very good. Cross-curricular strategies are used competently to promote oral-language development. Pupils display enthusiasm for reading and writing and many pupils are familiar with a broad range of children’s fiction. More deliberate use should be made of structured play and large-format books as a vehicle for language development in junior classes. A dedicated oral language lesson should be included in the weekly timetable for every class. The school should provide and implement a whole-school phonics scheme. The school is advised to develop and make more effective use of classroom libraries in the teaching of reading. It is recommended that the school provide more frequent opportunities for pupils to draft, edit and publish their own writing.

Effective practice is evident in the teaching of Mathematics. Concepts are clearly explained, good use is made of concrete resources and pupils’ skills are developed through appropriate learning activities. Assessment results indicate that the majority of pupils have mastered the key concepts of the curriculum. A whole-school approach to problem-solving and to the language of mathematics is devised and implemented. A similar whole-school approach to the other key skills and concepts of Mathematics should now be devised. The use of mathematics trails within the school should be further developed and included in the school plan.

A broad, balanced music programme is planned for in all classes. The quality of the vocal and instrumental performances heard during the evaluation was very good. Good practice was observed in some classrooms in the selection of appropriate keys for songs and the use of vocal warm-up exercises. It is recommended that this practice be extended to all classes.

6. Quality of Supports for Pupils

The quality of support for pupils with SEN is very good. Pupils in receipt of learning support and resource teaching receive focused instruction targeted to their learning needs.

The use of in-class support should be increased and implemented in the context of differentiated group teaching.

Currently a significant number of pupils that register at or above the 12th percentile in standardised tests attend learning support. This practice should be reviewed.

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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

We address your observations regarding having quorums at meetings. The Board of Management is always diligent in following regulations including having a quorum. However, during an exceptional period of sixteen calendar months in which there were ten meetings it proved impossible to have a quorum on four occasions. We feel it important that the impression is not given that the Board is irresponsible with regard to quorums.

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

We thank you for your courtesy and professionalism during the W.S.E. and we appreciate fully your recommendations – all of which will be addressed.