Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

St. Joseph’s National School,
Glenamaddy, Co. Galway
Uimhir rolla: 18572V

Date of inspection: 19 June 2010
A whole-school evaluation of St. Joseph’s National School was undertaken in June 2010. This report presents the findings of the evaluation and makes recommendations for improvement. The evaluation focused on the quality of teaching and learning in English, Irish, Mathematics and Visual Arts. The board of management of the school was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the report, and the response of the board will be found in the appendix of this report.

INTRODUCTION – SCHOOL CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND
St. Joseph’s National School is a co-educational primary school located in the town of Glenamaddy, county Galway. The school was constructed in 1962 as a two-teacher school. Three additional classrooms were added in 1995. One of the classrooms serves as a general-purpose room. Enrolment figures have remained stable since the last school inspection in 2000.

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pupils enrolled in the school</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainstream classes in the school</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers on the school staff</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainstream class teachers</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers working in support roles</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special needs assistants</td>
<td>2</td>
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</tbody>
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1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT

1.1 Characteristic spirit, mission or vision
St. Joseph’s National School is under the patronage of the Catholic Archbishop of Tuam. The characteristic spirit of the school is one of a community working collaboratively to promote the welfare of the pupils. It is evident from the many displays in the corridors that there is good provision for the pupils’ cultural, social and physical development.

1.2 Board of management
The board of management is properly constituted and is very supportive of the school. Meetings are convened regularly and minutes are recorded. The treasurer prepares the board’s accounts, which are audited annually. The board is to be commended on the manner in which the school building has been maintained and on the provision of resources for teaching and learning.

It is recommended that the principal provide a report at each board meeting on the progress being made in teaching and learning and in the implementation of the recommendations of this WSE report. It is recommended that the minutes of board meetings be typed, in the interests of legibility.

1.3 In-school management
The in-school management team consists of the principal and deputy principal. The principal is respectful and courteous to visitors. He has given many years of service to the school and deserves credit for his commitment to extra-curricular activities. Up to this point, the principal has focused on the organisational aspect of his role. It is recommended that there now be an increased focus on the provision of curricular leadership as there is significant scope for development in teaching and learning in the senior section of the school. It is recommended that school practices and routines be agreed and recorded clearly in the school plan. It is
recommended that school policies on assessment and record keeping be devised and implemented. It is recommended that monthly records of work covered in each class be collated and filed by the principal in accordance with Rule 126, *Rules for National Schools*. It is recommended that the administrative work completed on the principal’s administration days be recorded. It is recommended that the board of management ensure that the role of the principal is fulfilled in accordance with Section 23 of the Education Act and Department of Education and Science Circular 16/73.

The deputy principal fulfils her assigned duties with professionalism and dedication. The deputy principal’s duties are mainly organisational. They include acting as principal in the principal’s absence, the preparation of the school choir for liturgical services and the management of the Green Schools programme. It is recommended that the post of deputy principal include pastoral and curricular duties as well as those of an organisational nature.

1.4 Management of relationships and communication with the school community
The parents’ association contributes significantly to school life. Members contribute to discussion on school policies and organise many social events and fundraising activities. The association has a dedicated notice board on the school corridor. The school supports local charitable organisations.

1.5 Management of pupils
The pastoral needs of the pupils are addressed effectively. The pupils partake in the St. Patrick’s day parade and in the school Christmas play. Senior pupils have participated in the Dissolving Boundaries project, a cross cultural educational linkage with schools in Northern Ireland, on themes of historical and other interest. Pupils attend dramatic performances in the local town hall. Tours and walks appropriate to the age of the pupils are organised.

It was noted during the recreation period that all pupils were not visible to the supervising teacher on yard duty. It is recommended that a yard supervision policy be formulated, which would include the rules to be observed during recreation time and would ensure that pupils are visible to the supervising teacher at all times.

It is recommended that all teachers establish clear rules regarding classroom behaviour and that the staff consider how the provision of more engaging lessons and learning activities in all classes would improve pupil behaviour. Attention should be given to the development of the pupils’ listening skills in all classrooms.

2. QUALITY OF SCHOOL PLANNING

2.1 Whole-school and classroom planning
The overall quality of whole-school planning is poor. A range of organisational policies has been formulated and reviewed. Many of these, including the code of behaviour and the anti-bullying policy, require revision, with a view to making them more specific to the needs of this school. It is recommended that the school formulate and implement suitable policies regarding assessment, record keeping, teaching English as an additional language, environmental awareness, gender equity, information and communication technology and staff relations. The roles of non-teaching staff and the procedures to be followed in the case of a serious accident should also be documented. All school policies should include the date of ratification, a target date for review and the signature of the chairperson.

The extent to which the curricular policies contained in the school plan influence the practice of teaching and learning is limited. It is recommended that this issue be addressed through action
planning. Deficiencies and omissions observed in particular curricular policies were discussed at the post-evaluation meeting.

It is recommended that all teachers prepare both long-term and short-term plans of work. Each teacher should also provide a monthly record of work completed in accordance with Rules for National Schools. It is recommended that a suitable common template for short-term planning and monthly progress records be adopted by the teachers.

2.2 Child protection policy and procedures
Confirmation was provided that, in compliance with Department of Education and Science Primary Circular 0061/2006, the board of management has formally adopted the Child Protection Guidelines for Primary Schools (Department of Education and Science, September 2001). Confirmation was also provided that these child protection procedures have been brought to the attention of management, school staff and parents; that a copy of the procedures has been provided to all staff (including all new staff); and that management has ensured that all staff are familiar with the procedures to be followed. A designated liaison person (DLP) and a deputy DLP have been appointed in line with the requirements of the guidelines.

3. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

3.1 Language

Irish
A good standard of teaching and learning is evident in Irish in the infant and junior classes. There is effective use of verses, songs, story, drama and games. Pair work and group work are used to good effect. Irish is used as a language of communication outside of the Irish lesson. Good use is made of charts and other illustrative materials to make it easier for the pupils to learn and speak Irish. The pupils demonstrate an appropriate understanding of the language and the standards achieved in reading and writing are satisfactory.

The teaching and learning of Irish in the middle and senior classes was poor. The pupils had significant difficulties with regard to making simple sentences, with spelling and with the use of verbs. It is recommended that that school revise its Irish policy, with a view to ensuring
progression and continuity in the learning of every pupil. It is recommended that the teachers in the middle and senior classes implement the good practice that was observed in the infant and junior classes, with a view to improving pupil achievement.

**English**

In the infant classes, there is an effective emphasis on oral-language development in English as part of the preparation of the pupils for formal reading. Due emphasis is placed also on the recitation of rhymes and poetry. Drama, brainstorming, circle time and games are used effectively in the majority of classes to develop oral language. There is some use of class debates in the middle and senior classes.

Reading, spelling and grammar are very well taught in the infant and junior classes. There is good use of appropriate activities and resources, such as shared reading, large-format books and class novels. Pupils are making good progress. There is significant scope for improvement in the teaching of reading in the middle and senior classes. It is recommended that the principal oversee the planning and delivery of a structured reading programme for these classes, to include the use of a combination of graded materials and authentic reading materials such as class novels and other children’s literature. This programme should also address pupil achievement in the areas of spelling and grammar and include the use of activities to enable pupils to use the dictionary and the thesaurus at an age-appropriate level.

The quality of the pupils’ handwriting by the time they reach the middle classes is very good. Pupils are given experience of writing in a range of genres. It is evident that pupils in the middle and senior classes could be enabled to achieve higher standards in English writing. Pupils would benefit from an increased emphasis on punctuation, spelling, vocabulary development, and presentation of written work.

**3.2 Mathematics**

The lessons observed in Mathematics in the junior half of the school were very good. There is very good use of mathematical equipment and of charts and other illustrative materials. Programme and lesson content is differentiated to cater for the range of ability in each classroom. Pair work and group work are used regularly. There are commendable displays of mathematical language. Concepts are consolidated appropriately through regular revision. There is effective monitoring of pupils’ written work.

In the middle and senior classes, there is a need to improve pupil achievement with regard to mental arithmetic, problem solving, mathematical language and the recording and presentation of written work. Lessons could be improved through greater clarity about intended learning outcomes, the provision of more active learning opportunities for pupils and the differentiation of programmes and lessons for different levels of ability. Regular revision and the use of classroom displays would make it easier for pupils to understand and remember what is taught.

**3.3 Visual Arts**

The quality of the work in Visual Arts is very good. There is variety in the school’s programme for this subject. Pupils’ creativity and imagination are developed appropriately. The pupils are given experience of a range of techniques and materials. There is an appropriate emphasis on the strand unit *Looking and responding*. All teachers display the pupils’ work in classrooms and on corridors. The majority of teachers maintain portfolios of the pupils’ work, which is good practice.
3.4 Assessment
The school administers standardised tests annually in Mathematics and English. Annual parent-teacher meetings are convened and the school issues an annual report to the parents of each pupil.
In the infant and junior classes, pupils’ work is monitored through a range of appropriate assessment tools. There is a need for a more consistent approach to the monitoring and assessment of pupils’ work in the middle and senior classes.

4. Quality of Support for Pupils

4.1 Pupils with special educational needs
This is the base school for a learning-support/resource teacher. A part-time resource teacher for pupils with special educational needs is also employed. Two special-needs assistants, one part-time and the other full-time are assigned to particular pupils. Individual learning programmes are devised in respect of each child receiving support. Short-term planning is provided but needs to be more comprehensive.

The supplementary teaching observed was well-structured. There was effective use of a multi-sensory approach. It is recommended that supplementary teaching be provided in both English and Mathematics. It is recommended also that support be provided in the pupils’ mainstream classroom as a regular alternative to withdrawing the pupil.

4.2 Other supports for pupils: disadvantaged, minority and other groups
Dedicated, appropriate and differentiated support is provided for pupils with English as an additional language. The quality of preparation and teaching is very good. The pupils’ learning benefits from effective communication and collaboration between the EAL teacher and classroom teachers.

5. Conclusion

The school has strengths in the following areas:

- The board of management and the parents’ association work collaboratively in support of the school and this is appreciated by the staff.
- The building and the physical resources available for the education of the pupils are of a high quality.
- The pupils engage in a wide array of co-curricular and extra-curricular activities.
- A broad and balanced Visual Arts programme is provided.
- There are high standards of teaching and learning in the infant and junior classes.
- Support for pupils with special educational needs is of a high quality.

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

- It is recommended that the significant deficits in teaching and learning identified in middle and senior classes be addressed.
- It is recommended that the principal provide effective leadership and example in the areas of planning, teaching, learning and assessment.
• It is recommended that each teacher provide a monthly record of the work completed and that these records be collected and filed by the principal in accordance with Rules for National Schools.
• The board should support and monitor the work of the principal and teachers in implementing the recommendations of this report, especially those regarding in-school management, planning, teaching and learning.
• It is recommended that the school code of behaviour be reviewed and that there be an increased emphasis on developing pupils’ listening skills.

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, May 2011
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 wishes to acknowledge the courtesy and professionalism of the Inspectorate. We accept the positive findings, constructive comments and recommendations of the report.

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, working alongside the principal and staff will facilitate the implementation of the recommendations as outlined in our W.S.E. and will endeavour to implement them as effectively as possible.

- Curriculum plans have been reviewed with particular attention paid to maintaining continuity of teaching and learning throughout the school.
- A monthly record of work is being provided by each teacher to a member of B.O.M. each month and is filed in the school office in accordance with the rules for National Schools.
- With support from the board, the principal, will fulfil his role as laid out in section 23 of the Education Act and Circular 16/73. The principal will participate in a leadership development course through the L.D.S.
- The Board is supporting and monitoring the work of the principal and teachers in implementing the recommendations of this report.
- The School code of behaviour is being reviewed with a view to developing pupils’ listening skills.