Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

St Joseph’s National School
Miltown Malbay, County Clare
Uimhir rolla: 18720K

Date of inspection: 20 January 2011
1. **Introduction**

St Joseph’s National School, Miltown Malbay is a co-educational primary school which operates under the patronage of the Catholic Bishop of Killaloe. The school has five mainstream class teachers and there are 118 pupils enrolled.

This report presents the findings of a whole-school evaluation undertaken in the school in January 2011. The evaluation focused on the quality of teaching and learning in English, Irish, Mathematics and History.

The board of management was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the report; a response was not received from the board.

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

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<th>The following are the <strong>main strengths</strong> of the work of the school:</th>
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<td>• The quality of teaching in English, Irish and Mathematics is good.</td>
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<td>• The presentation of pupils’ work is generally very good.</td>
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<td>• Pupils engage in a good range of activities which support learning and social development.</td>
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<td>• The inclusion of pupils with special educational needs and pupils from the Traveller community is very good.</td>
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<td>• The school building and grounds are very well maintained.</td>
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<th>The following <strong>main recommendations</strong> are made:</th>
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<td>• The school authorities should ensure as far as possible, that there is an equitable distribution of pupils in mainstream classes. The differential between the largest and smallest class should be kept to a minimum.</td>
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<td>• Additional emphasis should be placed on the maintenance of school rolls and registers in accordance with the guidelines provided in these documents.</td>
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<td>• Mainstream class teachers are advised to differentiate lesson content and pace for pupils who present with varying levels of ability. Less emphasis should be placed on the completion of text books and work books as a means of addressing curriculum content.</td>
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<td>• The school should review its practice in the teaching of personal and local history. A review of the whole-school plan in History is also recommended.</td>
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<td>• There is scope for more flexible deployment of support teachers to provide support to groups of pupils based on their needs. This may take the form of in-class support or withdrawal of groups of pupils from the mainstream classroom.</td>
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<td>• In the infant classes, the school should provide whole-class early intervention in literacy.</td>
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3. Quality of School Management

- The board of management leads the school efficiently, demonstrating commitment to school maintenance and the provision of resources. School accounts are certified annually. The board has formulated and ratified a range of school policies. There is scope for more collaboration with parents when formulating these policies. Suitable procedures are in place for disseminating school information amongst the parent body. While the board demonstrates satisfaction with the way the curriculum is taught, it should use more objective criteria including the annual review of assessment data to monitor standards in the school.

- The school is led by a committed principal. He initiates improvements to school procedures and to the school building and offers good leadership in relation to whole-school planning. He identifies targets for whole-school improvement in curricular areas and ensures that teachers are afforded opportunities for continuing professional development. The in-school management team works effectively and provides good support to the principal in fulfilling an appropriate range of duties.

- Additional emphasis should be placed by the principal and the teachers on the maintenance of school rolls and registers in accordance with the guidelines provided in these documents.

- Over the course of the evaluation, pupils were well behaved. In some classes, there is scope to develop pupils' turn-taking and listening skills.

- The organisation of classes and the numbers of pupils in various classes should be reviewed. The differential between the number of pupils in the largest and smallest class is significant. In some classes, this adversely affects pupil engagement, the quality of interactions and the organisation of learning activities. In accordance with Primary Circular 0021/2010 which outlines the regulations governing class sizes, the school authorities should ensure that as far as possible there is an equitable distribution of pupils in mainstream classes. There is a critical need to address this issue and it should be prioritised.

- The parents' association supports the work of the school in many practical ways. There is scope for the role of the association to be extended to include involvement in the formulation and review of school policies. Responses received from parents through parent questionnaires indicate satisfaction with the work of the school.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- The school's administrative policies are helpful and outline clear expectations and procedures. The quality of whole-school curriculum planning in Irish, English and Mathematics is good. A review of the whole-school plan in History is advised. The school should outline a plan for the teaching of personal and local history at each class level as well as for the use of appropriate resources and methodologies as outlined in the History curriculum.

- All teachers provide long-term and short-term plans. In some instances these contain clear learning outcomes. This effective practice should be extended throughout the school. Less emphasis should be placed on the use of textbooks as the basis for planning. Monthly progress reports (cuntais mhíosula) are devised. There is scope for
greater use of these documents to monitor the implementation of the curriculum throughout the school.

- The three support teachers provide individual plans for pupils who receive additional support. These plans should contain more precise, measurable targets. This would help teachers to address pupils’ specific needs and to monitor their progress more carefully. The school should ensure that all data pertaining to individual pupils are retained in accordance with data protection legislation.

- All mainstream class teachers assess pupils’ progress by maintaining checklists and administering regular class tests. The school should analyse the results of standardised tests on an annual basis for the purpose of setting targets for improvement. At whole-school level, aspects of the curriculum are selected periodically for review and development. This is good practice. Use of Looking at our School, a publication of the Department of Education and Skills, is recommended as a basis for whole-school self-evaluation.

- 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


The quality of the teaching of Irish is good. Worthwhile efforts are made to foster interest in the language throughout the school. In the junior classes, lively lessons are taught and pupils are well engaged in the activities. In some classes, pupils take part in pair work to practise phrases and vocabulary. Extension of this good practice throughout the school is advised. Pupils sing songs with musicality and they know a good range of rhymes. From second class onwards, pupils’ reading ability is good. Writing lessons are effectively taught. It is evident from the copies that pupils are making good progress.

- Overall, the quality of teaching and learning in English is good. Discrete oral language lessons are taught. Increased emphasis should be placed on the strand unit developing competence and confidence in using oral language and on developing pupils’ expressiveness, skills of reporting and communicating across the curriculum. Print-rich environments and attractive reading areas support the development of reading skills. In the infant classes, pupils’ phonological and phonemic awareness receive good attention. Teachers are advised to place greater emphasis on differentiating lesson content and pace for pupils who require extra support within the classroom, that is, pupils at stage one of the Staged Approach to Special Educational Needs as outlined in Primary Circular
24/03. Pupils’ handwriting and written work are of a very good standard, particularly in the senior classes.

- Mathematics is well taught. In the junior classes, early mathematical skills are well developed and pupils engage interactively in lessons. In many classes the relevance of mathematical concepts to daily life is well explored. It is advised that, at some class levels, a greater emphasis be placed on teacher demonstration of concepts and on the use of talk and discussion. During the evaluation, pupils were generally accurate when answering questions on a range of topics.

- Some aspects of History are well taught. In middle and senior classes, project work is undertaken. This facilitates collaborative work and the development of research skills. At each class level, further work on developing pupils’ understanding of personal and local history is advised. Opportunities should be provided for pupils to work as historians and to analyse and interpret different accounts of the past, to examine different sources of evidence and to communicate their findings.

6. Quality of Support for Pupils

- The provision of support for pupils is of a good quality overall.

- Very good-quality learning support is provided by a teacher who is based in this school on a full-time basis. Lessons are very well structured and clear instruction is provided. The school makes appropriate use of standardised tests and diagnostic tests in the identification of pupils who receive support. A resource teacher provides good support to one pupil in the form of in-class support.

- The quality of support for pupils from the Traveller community is good. The school is commended for the emphasis which it places on the welfare and educational attainment of these pupils. In some instances, the standards achieved by individual pupils in English and Mathematics are very high.

- There is scope for the school to deploy support teachers more flexibly. Support for groups of pupils who present with similar needs should be provided. This may take the form of in-class support or withdrawal of groups of pupils from the mainstream classroom.

- In the infant classes, the school should provide whole-class early intervention in literacy.

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