An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

St John of God School
Passage Road, Waterford
Uimhir rolla: 18793O

Date of inspection: 12 May 2011
1. Introduction

St John of God School is an all-girls vertical primary school under the patronage of the Catholic Bishop of Waterford and Lismore and the trusteeship of the Sisters of St John of God. There are 271 pupils enrolled and attendance levels are 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

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

- The board of management supports the continued development of the school.
- The parents and parents’ association play an important role in supporting a range of school activities.
- The principal cultivates a positive and industrious school climate.
- The work of the in-school management team contributes significantly to the quality of pupils’ learning experiences.
- The teachers are dedicated to their pupils and the quality of teaching is commendable.
- The pupils engage with enthusiasm in their learning and praiseworthy outcomes are achieved, particularly in English and Mathematics.

The following main recommendations are made:

- The school should consider ways of involving parents more actively in policy development and review, and in pertinent in-school activities.
- Approaches to classroom planning and reporting on progress should be reviewed and augmented.
- The differentiation of teaching and learning activities at individual classroom level should be increased to accommodate fully the range of pupil abilities and needs.
- In English, regular exposure to the range of writing genres and the consistent implementation of a process approach to writing are advised.
- In order to improve learning for pupils with special educational needs, current provision and practice should be reviewed and developed.

3. Quality of School Management

- The board of management functions effectively. Its dedication to the continued development of the school and its regular consideration of teaching and learning matters are praised. Board members play a constructive role in the consideration of curriculum plans and organisational policies. It is recommended that the school's enrolment policy
and code of behaviour be reviewed to take full account of legislative requirements and pertinent national guidelines. It is further advised that financial accounts be certified externally on an annual basis.

- The principal demonstrates a clear commitment to upholding the ethos and traditions of the St John of God sisters. She manages the work of the school competently and cultivates a positive and industrious school climate. She is ably assisted by the in-school management team who fulfil their assigned responsibilities diligently. Their work contributes significantly to the quality of pupils’ learning experiences. In order to utilise the team’s potential fully, it is recommended that regular, formal meetings be convened to progress teaching and learning priorities.

- The school building and grounds, while space-constrained, are well maintained and provide a stimulating learning environment. Interactive whiteboards are used purposefully to aid teaching. Much good practice in the pupils’ use of computers is in evidence and the continued development of this aspect of provision would be beneficial. Very effective use is made of the school’s extensive literacy and numeracy resources. While many teachers have taught a range of classes, a greater level of teacher mobility is recommended.

- Communication between the school and parents is of a high quality. The recent launch of a school website and the proposed introduction of a digital newsletter are welcomed. In the questionnaires, parents report high levels of satisfaction with the quality of teaching and learning and they are kept well informed of their children’s progress. The parents and parents’ association play an important role in supporting a range of school activities. It is now opportune that the school consider ways of involving parents more actively in policy development and review, and in pertinent in-school activities.

- The pupils are very well behaved, eager and motivated and are facilitated to develop their interests, talents and social responsibility. In the pupil questionnaires, almost all report that they like coming to school, that they get on well with other children and that they can talk to their teachers.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- Overall, school planning is of an adequate standard. Following curriculum review and self-evaluation, a number of teaching and learning priorities have been identified and addressed through action planning. It is advised that this latter approach be used more consistently and methodically in addressing areas for improvement to ensure that planned goals are achieved fully.

- Individual teacher classroom planning and reporting on progress varies in approach and quality. In instances where effective practice is in evidence, the teachers ensure strong links to the primary curriculum and the school plan and provide clarity regarding intended learning outcomes. It is advised that existing approaches be reviewed and established good practice be extended on a schoolwide basis.

- 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 teaching, learning and pupil achievement is commendable. The teachers employ a wide variety of teaching approaches and the pupils experience regular opportunities to learn actively and collaboratively. The achievement of praiseworthy learning outcomes is in evidence. In their questionnaires, almost all pupils report that they find their lessons interesting and that they enjoy their lessons and learning.

- Standardised testing in English and Mathematics is implemented consistently and the indepth analysis of assessment outcomes is praised. While the teachers draw on a range of assessment modes at classroom level, the implementation of a more coherent, whole-school approach to assessment is advised. Assessment outcomes should in turn be used to provide greater in-class differentiation and a substantial reduction in the withdrawal of pupils for supplementary teaching.

- Ar an iomlán, sroichtear caighdeán maith i múinead h agus i bhfoghlaim na Gaeilge agus i ngnóthachtáil na ndaltaí. Éirionn le roinnt mhaith de na hoidí na daltaí a spreagadh chun cainte go h-éifeachtúil. Sna chomhthéacsanna seo, baintear úsáid sciliúil as obair bheirte agus déantar dea-obair ar na feidhméanna teanga agus ar chúrsaí gramadaí. Tá gá leis an dea-chleachtas seo a scalaeadh tríd an scoil. Sa léitheoireacht, sroicheann formhór na ndaltaí caighdeán réasúnta agus tá caighdeán maith le feiscint sna hardranganna. Bunaítear na tascanna scribhneoireachta ar ábhar na leabhar saothar don fhormhór. Moltar deiseanna a thabhairt do na daltaí tabhairt faoi scribhneoireacht phearsanta níos minicí.

Overall, teaching, learning and pupil achievement in Irish is of a good standard. A majority of teachers succeed in motivating their pupils to converse effectively. In these contexts, partner work is employed skilfully and language structures and aspects of grammar are addressed well. It is recommended that these good practices be implemented on a schoolwide basis. A majority of pupils achieve a reasonable standard in reading, with good standards in evidence in the senior classes. Writing tasks are based primarily on workbook content. It is advised that the pupils be provided with more regular opportunities to engage in personal writing.

- Teaching, learning and pupil achievement in English is of a high quality. The pupils display a well-developed capacity to express their views with a richness and complexity of language. They display praiseworthy reading standards through the school and in the questionnaires most pupils report that they consider they are doing well at reading. The attention afforded to the promotion of penmanship and presentation skills in most classes is commended. The pupils participate regularly in a wide range of writing tasks and many fine examples of their writing are on display. In order to develop their writing competence fully, regular exposure to the complete range of writing genres and the consistent implementation of a process approach to writing are recommended.

- Effective teaching, learning and pupil achievement is in evidence in Mathematics. Mathematical concepts are explored successfully through indepth talk and discussion, the promotion of mathematical language, and skilful teacher questioning. Other commendable features of provision include the promotion of mental mathematics skills and the purposeful use of manipulatives and the school environment. Very good levels of pupil understanding are in evidence and almost all pupils surveyed report that they consider they are doing well at Mathematics. Presently, the school is focusing on improving the pupils’ problem-solving competence and it is advised that this area receive continued whole-school attention.
Overall, the quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in Drama is of a suitable standard. In most classes, the pupils demonstrate a good ability to cooperate and communicate in making drama, with a praiseworthy ability to engage in improvisation in evidence in some contexts. Learning in Drama is integrated successfully with other curriculum areas and is complemented by annual school productions and the work of the external teacher of speech and drama. Increased awareness of ensuring the consistent implementation of a broad and balanced programme of learning and due attention to the range of drama elements are advised.

6. Quality of Support for Pupils

The special educational needs (SEN) team is characterised by its high level of commitment to promoting the learning of pupils with additional learning needs. Support teachers and class teachers consult regularly and the quality of relationships between the support teachers and their pupils is praised highly. In order to improve learning for pupils with SEN, a number of areas need further development. They include the review of the selection criteria for supplementary teaching in accordance with national guidelines; the introduction of well-structured models of in-class support to achieve a substantial reduction in pupil withdrawal; and the revision of current approaches to programme planning and assessment.

A small number of international pupils for whom English is an additional language (EAL) attend St John of God School. EAL provision is being utilised presently to promote reading competence in infant and junior classes.

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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 of Management of St. John of God School found the Whole School Evaluation to be an informative process. The Board is pleased that so many positive aspects of the excellent work of the school were affirmed. One of the most rewarding aspects of the W.S.E. was the confidential questionnaire issued to parents and pupils; it is very encouraging to see such a high level of satisfaction from both parents and pupils. The Board thanks the Inspectors for their very positive and helpful feedback during their visit, for their professional co-operation with the Principal and teachers, for their affirmation of our excellent Standardised Assessment results in Literacy and Numeracy, and for their flexibility in accommodating the school timetables.

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

St. John of God School is committed to fostering a culture of continuous improvement. The findings and recommendations of the inspection outlined in the report, in conjunction with the learning needs of individual children, the professional observations of the teaching team, the ongoing self-evaluation of the school, and the results of assessments, will inform all future planning.