Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

St Vincent’s School
Lisnagry, County Limerick
Uimhir rolla: 19200M

Date of inspection: 9th March 2012
1. Introduction
St Vincent’s School under the patronage of the Catholic bishop of Killaloe caters for pupils with moderate, and multiple learning disabilities. Some pupils also present with autistic spectrum disorders. There are seventy-nine pupils on roll. In recent years the proportion of pupils with more complex needs has increased. 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:

- The professional dedication of the teachers who provide motivating curriculum experiences.
- Sensitive care of the pupils provided by special needs assistants (SNAs).
- The informed support provided by the board of management.

The following main recommendations are made:

- The board should continue in efforts to refurbish the school.
- The board should support the school management team in developing a three-year school development plan.
- Teachers’ written planning and recording formats should be revised to support cohesion.
- Further professional training opportunities around the management of behaviour should be considered.
- The modes of assessment used by the school should be extended and an agreed school-wide system to monitor the pupils’ progress more extensively should be developed.

3. Quality of School Management

- The board of management provides supportive direction to the school. It affirms the strong commitment of staff and facilitates continuing professional development. Members should endeavour to visit the school regularly to become aware of the work of the school.

- The principal effectively oversees the work of the staff and directs the day-to-day running of the school. She regards the willingness and resilience of staff in supporting each other as strengths of the school.

- Among the teachers with management responsibilities there is a shared commitment to improvement. The team is made up of able, experienced and committed teachers and their energy should now be harnessed further to lead curriculum development. The team with the support of the board of management needs to continue its work in regard to whole-school planning and record-keeping. Meetings between principal and team should now be formalised with clear agenda.

- The pupils are deployed to classes in accordance with their learning needs. One teacher has been deployed in a resource role. A full-time Home Economics teacher and part-time
tutors enhance the tuition. There is a high level of collaboration between teachers and SNAs. Senior teachers act as mentors to newly-appointed teachers.

- A number of teachers have achieved post-graduate qualifications in the area of special educational needs (SEN). An audit of staff training should now be conducted to identify areas of professional interest for staff and matching these to the developing needs of the school.

- The accommodation is extensive and includes some newly constructed and carefully designed prefabricated classrooms. However, there is general consensus that the current accommodation is no longer suitable for the cohort of pupils. At the time of the evaluation, the roof of the school was being repaired. Despite the efforts of the Board to improve some facilities, the quality of some changing and toileting areas is poor. External recreation areas include a well-equipped playground.

- Classroom libraries include a supply of reading materials and a variety of sensory equipment. There is need for more, large-format and age-appropriate books.

- Access to computers is limited. While some effective use is made of technology, including cameras, the range of equipment and the variety of uses should be extended.

- Although there is no formal parents’ association, Home-School links are well developed. Formal parent–teacher meetings are held bi-annually. The vast majority of parents who responded to a questionnaire expressed their satisfaction with the work of the school. Parents’ groups actively support the work of the school through fundraising events. Parents’ representatives on the board of management indicated that parents would be happy to play a greater role in assisting in extra-curricular activities.

- The approach observed in the management of pupils, was positive, and consistent. The code of behaviour is written sensitively with regard to the interpretation of behaviours of pupils with learning disabilities. Staff members have been provided with some training around the management of challenging behaviour and further training opportunities should be considered. More-able pupils carry out a variety of administrative roles around the school. A ‘Buddy System’ between senior pupils who present with moderate general learning disabilities and pupils with multiple learning disabilities could now be developed. The opportunities for further integration of the pupils with Autistic Spectrum Disorders should also be extended in carefully managed ways.

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

- Whole-school plans are initiated through collaborative discussion at staff meetings, examined by board, and adopted with dates for review. A range of policies are developed and provide direction for teachers. Some of the curricular plans need to give clearer guidance regarding the methodologies that are appropriate to the exceptional needs of some of the pupils.

- The teachers’ short-term written planning is generally informative with clear objectives and selection of pupil activities. The teachers have endeavoured to modify and improve the planning templates but the quality of short-term planning varies. Staff should adopt an agreed approach to fortnightly planning to ensure consistently high quality.
• Teachers endeavour to meet the needs of individual pupils through Individual Education plans (IEPs) that focus on improving communication, social skills and behaviour. In some cases short-term objectives could be more specific. There is evidence of some involvement by parents although parents do not receive a copy of the IEP. The IEPs should include a summary of advice provided by relevant professionals. It is recommended that the staff engage further with the IEP process and develop a more consistent approach across the school. The work of the resource teacher who provides intensive tuition for some pupils should be more closely aligned with that of the class teachers, and the resource teacher’s contribution should be described in the pupils’ IEPs.

• Confirmation was provided that the board of management has formally adopted the Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools without modification and that the school is compliant with the requirements of the Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools.

5. Quality of Teaching, Learning and Pupil Achievement

• Teachers have developed innovative teaching practices and successful teaching methodologies are used. Classroom routines are organised efficiently and teachers maximise the use of support staff for the benefit of pupils. Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is used to limited extent in enhancing teaching and learning and there is scope for development in this area.

• The whole-school plan for Communication and Language recognises the potential of developing language across the curriculum. Opportunities for language development are successfully exploited through the use of news sessions, circle time, games and sensory stories. Augmentative and assistive methodologies in use include PECS and LÁMH. A school-wide policy that the staff members sign when in the view of any pupil using LÁMH when communicating would support incidental learning.

• Reading skills are addressed depending on individual ability and a ‘Language Experience Approach’ is used to create individual reading texts. A number of commercial schemes, novels, and teacher-prepared materials are used. ICT and the internet could be used more extensively. Consideration should be given also to purchasing more graded reading schemes, as well as to the inclusion of a greater variety of environmental reading. In writing activities, emphasis is placed on developing pupils’ fine motor control and on functional and personal writing exercises.

• In Mathematics, stimulating multi-sensory activities are organised with cross-curricular linkages. Suitable focus is placed on the development of early mathematical activities. Good practice in the presentation of lessons using activity-based, hands-on activities was observed. Emphasis is placed on the acquisition and application of skills that are useful in daily living including managing money, and cooking. The use of visual time-tables increases pupils’ familiarity with the concept of time and sequencing. The enhancement of mathematical-rich environments within the school would further enhance the good work undertaken.

• Pupils in all classes enjoy Music lessons. Due attention is directed to integrating music across the curriculum. Music is used to enhance pupils’ listening and social skills, increase their attention span and develop receptive and expressive language. Songs and
music of reference are constructively employed. Consideration should be given to ensuring that pupils experience a wider range of musical traditions and styles. A whole-school approach to maximising the use of the school’s existing resources is recommended.

- Social, Personal and Health Education is seen as a shared responsibility with parents and effective communication has been developed with home using home/school diaries. Circle-time activities focus on elements such as self-identity and awareness of others. Displays of children’s work serve to celebrate individual and collaborative efforts. The development of social skills receives a particular focus in compiling IEPs. Social Stories are also used effectively to help pupils manage their own behaviours. SNAs play a significant role in helping pupils to manage self-care.

- Resources for Relationships and Sexuality Education include materials that were specially developed for use with pupils with Autistic Spectrum Disorders. Materials have been provided for parents to be used when dealing with pupils’ personal issues.

- The Home Economics teacher provides a programme of practical skills to help prepare pupils for a measure of independent living. Active participation is emphasised in well-organised lessons.

- Senior pupils take part in the Fast Friends initiative with students in a local post-primary school and this provides benefits to all concerned. In the past, pupils were able to access community facilities more often because a school bus was available. Unfortunately, this is no longer a feature of the school’s practice.

- Teachers recognise the relevance of assessment outcomes, and valuable checklists have been developed recently to monitor the development of receptive and expressive language. Pupils’ reading development is also monitored. Checklists of pupils’ functional skills such as their acquisition of good table manners are used effectively. Some teachers assess other aspects of pupils’ social development and this practice could be extended.

- Commendably, among the teachers’ documentation, a section on the evaluation of individual progress is maintained. In some cases, assessment should be clearly aligned to teaching objectives.

- As there is considerable variation in practice across the school, teachers have identified assessment as an area to be developed. In some cases progress towards achieving objectives could be recorded more systematically and it is recommended that an agreed school-wide system to track the pupils’ progress more extensively should be developed.

6. **Quality of Support for Pupils**

- Nursing support is provided by the Daughters of Charity Services for the Developmental Education Classes (DEC). East Limerick Children Services provide therapies on a referral basis. The best examples of successful collaboration between school staff and the multi-disciplinary team were observed where the teachers incorporated therapies into curriculum activities.
Sensitive care is provided by responsive SNAs. They play an important role in meeting the care-needs of pupils and in enabling pupils to access the curriculum. SNAs are aware of the importance of promoting pupils’ independence.

Pupils from economically disadvantaged backgrounds are supported discreetly in a number of ways. Many of the pupils travel considerable distances to school and a supervised hot lunch is provided. The school should review its arrangements for gathering voluntary financial contributions from parents.

The school has developed systematic transition procedures whereby pupils prepare to transfer to adult services. The school authorities are mindful of the need to be vigilant in considering the most suitable placement for its pupils especially the most able.

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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 B.O.M. and staff would like to thank the inspection team for the recent Whole School Evaluation. The Board accepts the identified strengths and recommendations contained in the report and will continue to plan accordingly. We would like to thank the inspectors for acknowledging the commitment and hard work of our very dedicated staff team. The school is committed to continuing to strive for best practice in its provision of teaching and learning in an inclusive and caring environment.

The B.O.M. welcomes the recognition that the quality of school accommodation is no longer fit for purpose, and the B.O.M. recognises the need for a new school. As the long and publicly documented outstanding issues, which have taken up significant amounts of B.O.M. time, have now been concluded, the B.O.M. will strive to rectify this. While the Board has been working within its resources to improve standards, we are very aware of the need to access further D.E.S. funding and so appropriate applications have been submitted. We are still awaiting approval for same.

In relation to Challenging Behaviour, the B.O.M. has supported staff in the past by funding Studio 111, to train the 32 SNA staff in strategies to cope with Challenging Behaviour. Teachers also attended a Studio 11 Summer Course funded by the S.E.S.S. M.D.T. and Psychiatry support continues for our very severe Challenging Behaviour pupils to prevent continual occupational injury. Help has been sought from S.E.S.S. with regard to management of Behavioural issues and we will continue to access same.

With regard to I.E.P.’s as they will become legal documents in the future, we will await training by the D.E.S. before we make them available outside of school. M.D.T. support is only available on a referral basis therefore it is challenging to have up-to-date therapeutic information for an IEP. Where up-to-date information is available, this will be incorporated into future I.E.P.’s.

We would like to point out in relation to social training that a bus is hired on a weekly basis for the M.L.D. classes. Local amenities within walking distance are accessible to enhance the social training curriculum.

The B.O.M. would like to state that the D.E.S. recommendations for I.C.T. (ratio of 5:1 for computers) are being met. Eight of the thirteen classes have Touch Screen Computers. The school has a server and uses share point to keep staff up-to-date with curricular change, curricular announcements. Policy updates and day to day issues in the school. Five IPads are in use. The B.O.M. has added an additional 55.6% over and above what the school received for I.C.T. grants.

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

- In school Management Team have met with B.O.M for the development plan.
- Ongoing In School Management meetings are now formalised and minutes taken.
- Different types of assessment are to be trialled in September 2012 with a view to adopting one for Moderate pupils and one for Severe & Profound pupils.
- Teacher format for planning and recording is going through a change which began last October. This has yet to be finalised and Inspectors recommendations will be incorporated into the end result.
- The audit of staff training has been done.
• A parent’s forum will be set up in September 2012 by Parent representative on B.O.M. to renew efforts to develop formal parents association.
• Classroom libraries are being updated. Additional Big Books have been obtained with further to follow in September.
• When reviewing its arrangements for gathering voluntary financial contributions, the word “Payment Contract” has been removed from the Registration Form and replaced by “Payment Details” as per inspector’s instructions.
• Computers – Teachers will now be able to access their own school computer from home.
• A further five IPads will be coming on stream for 2012/2013, The overall objective is that each class will have class IPads for students use.
• The purchase of interactive white boards is being examined at present.