Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

St Augustine’s School
Sexton Street, Limerick
Uimhir rolla: 19587Q

Date of inspection: 23 September 2011
1. Introduction

St Augustine’s school was established in 1977 with the aim of providing an alternative model of education for a small number of young people who have had a negative experience of school. The majority of pupils attending St Augustine’s come from large city council estates in Limerick in areas that have recently become known as ‘Regeneration Areas’.

The school has five teachers including an administrative principal. Current enrolment is sixteen boys and six girls. The school retains some pupils until they reach eighteen years of age. In light of the existence of other placement options for older pupils and the limited number of available places in St Augustine’s, the school’s management should examine its enrolment policy to ensure that it is catering for the pupils who are most in need of the unique service it provides.

Until very recently St Augustine’s was located in very poor accommodation. Following years of hard work by the board of management and staff, the school moved into fine new premises in mid-September 2011. At the time of the inspection visit, the logistics around moving to the new premises were ongoing.

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 board of management provides helpful direction to the school.
- Capable and experienced teachers provide relevant learning experiences for pupils; these include much activity-based learning designed to ensure that pupils experience success.
- Committed and capable care staff members succeed in promoting pupils’ self-esteem.
- Valuable, age-appropriate, nationally accredited programmes are provided.

The following main recommendations are made:

- The board of management with the assistance of the in-school management team should prepare a development plan to address the school’s emerging needs.
- Closer attention should be paid to the maintenance of school roll books.
- The school’s overall approach to assessment should be reviewed.
3. **Quality of School Management**

- The members of the board have extensive educational expertise and provide wise support to the staff. While made up of interested and experienced members the board does not yet include parents’ representatives. The board should continue in its efforts to ensure parental representation so that the board is properly constituted. The board of management should engage in a more rigorous process of school self-evaluation and assist the staff in developing a three-year action plan to address the school’s emerging needs. In particular the plan should address the issues of enrolment, pupil attendance, and developing the whole school plan particularly in areas of curriculum.

- In addition to carrying out his administrative duties, the new principal is conscious of the instructional leadership dimension of his role. He has familiarised himself with the pupils’ needs and has visited the majority of the pupils’ homes. He has high expectations for the school. He is appreciative of the experience and capabilities of his colleagues and he is dedicated to promoting a culture of collaborative decision-making.

- Whole-staff meetings are convened on a weekly basis where individual pupils’ attendance and progress are discussed. The teachers work collaboratively and carry out a range of essential duties. The team should now embark on the drafting of a three-year development plan which should include administrative, curriculum and pastoral dimensions. The duties attached to the posts of responsibility should be clarified to ensure that they reflect the changing priorities of the school.

- The existing arrangements around the deployment of teaching staff should be reconsidered to ensure that teachers experience a variety of teaching settings. In particular the long-standing team-teaching arrangement in one class should be reviewed.

- Closer attention needs to be paid to maintaining the school register and roll books.

- Staff members have accessed specific training regarding behaviour management. This has assisted staff in their understanding of the functions of behaviours and supports them in managing pupils. During the evaluation, pupils’ behaviour was good and staff members were positive and sensitive in dealing with pupils. While staff has developed a number of useful strategies to promote good attendance, the poor attendance of some pupils remains a cause for concern.

- The school has developed a code of conduct but the staff now needs to consider further what is regarded as acceptable standards of pupil behaviour. In particular, it ought to specify the procedures to be followed when pupil behaviour becomes a matter of concern.

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

- The school has prepared a wide range of organisational policies and a more limited set of curriculum plans. Teachers endeavour to build on the Primary School Curriculum (1999) and a major focus of the work is on the Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP). Some of the older pupils are on vocational programmes as part of the school’s transition strategy. A formal policy on transition should be prepared and it should lay out a rationale for how decisions are made about post-school placement options.

- Teachers provide adequate long-term and short-term plans for their work. They also prepare individual education programmes (IEPs) in which pupils’ strengths and learning
needs are identified. Many long-term goals within IEPs are suitable but some IEPs do not identify strategies to achieve short-term objectives. Short-term objectives are not always accompanied by learning outcomes which need to be stated in specific and measurable terms.

- As part of the process of curriculum review, the school should examine the curriculum documents of the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) for children in care which emphasise the importance of providing an education that is personalised and designed around pupils’ learning needs. Aspects of the Primary School Curriculum should continue to be emphasised as well as some Junior Certificate subjects. Consideration should be given to providing suitable programmes leading to FETAC certification. Some Leaving Certificate subjects might also be provided where appropriate.

- 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

- Staff members have developed many inventive teaching practices. The local environment and various extracurricular activities are used to enrich teaching. Information and communication technology (ICT) is used in promoting learning. In running their own business as part of the School Enterprise Project pupils learn a variety of literacy and numeracy skills and the students develop workplace skills including planning, communication and teamwork.

- In English, differentiation in planning is in evidence with an emphasis on developing functional reading and writing. Pupils engage in independent reading on a daily basis. Good use is made of class novels and pupils respond well in class discussions about characters and plot. Reading standards attained among pupils are varied. Poetry is carefully selected for appeal to pupils and effective links are made with the social, personal and health education (SPHE) programme. The school’s English literacy document could be further developed to include references to methodologies, assessment and particular strategies to support the reluctant reader.

- Written work in pupils’ copies and folders is monitored closely and the quality of the work in functional writing is often good. More attention should be devoted to pupils’ personal and creative writing and an approach based on the language experience of pupils is recommended. The pupils have participated in literacy initiatives such as the JCSP Make a Book and some of their finished projects are of high quality.

- Mathematics programmes are individualised to suit pupils’ needs. The JCSP statements provide the basis for the mathematics programme and the teachers are developing a three-year numeracy action plan. Pupils have opportunities to develop their understanding of the basic mathematical concepts and to acquire the skills necessary for computation and problem solving. Observed lessons were well conducted with effective questioning by the teachers and good use of calculators and IT. Some of the work is textbook based but teachers also use concrete examples to make links with pupils’ practical experiences. Exciting maths trails are used in the afternoon programmes.
• In Social Personal and Health Education (SPHE), pupils encounter a variety of suitable topics. The school has developed a number of valuable programmes including a new Ethics programme. Teachers work well in collaboration with the school’s community worker in sessions where relevant issues such as drug use are explored. The students were observed to respond well and they willingly engaged in role-play. Relationships and Sexuality Education Programme is implemented in designated lessons with external support.

• During the afternoon programmes pupils encounter a variety of experiences which have relevance to SPHE, such as animal welfare. Horticulture is used as a means of promoting an interest in gardening as a life hobby or career option. Class teachers are centrally involved in the management of these programmes and consequently relations between staff members and pupils are generally very good.

• The school has a modern, well-equipped kitchen. In addition to preparing nourishing meals, the Bean an Ti provides a programme of practical skills which help to prepare pupils for independent living.

• Work in Drama has culminated in a film which was scripted largely by the students themselves. Judging from the interest and talent demonstrated by students and staff members, this curriculum area has significant potential to be developed further.

• While the school has some effective arrangements for assessing pupils’ attainments, the school’s overall approach to assessment should be reviewed. The school uses a range of formal and informal assessment approaches. In addition to the in-built assessment mechanisms which are part of the JCSP, teachers have been inventive in developing some check-lists of learning. Monthly records of pupils’ progress are maintained which record their levels of participation. These records should also document their acquisition of skills and knowledge. Pupils’ social-skills development should be monitored more closely and subject-specific, criterion-referenced assessment should be developed also.

6. Quality of Support for Pupils

• Across the school resourceful teachers and care staff sensitively support the pupils, many of whom come from disadvantaged homes. Free school books and materials are provided and pupils are provided with daily meals.

• The pupils are supported in following their personal interests such as Irish, First Aid, or animal care. Staff members devote large amounts of their personal time to pupils through, for example, participating in over-night trips.

• The school’s special-needs assistants assist with the care of pupils and they, along with the dedicated secretary and diligent caretaker, contribute significantly to the maintenance of a positive social and educational environment.

• While there is no parents’ association, the school has achieved some success in involving parents, particularly recently. The school’s community worker supports families at important times. He visits the homes regularly and he provides an important link between home and school. Responses to parent questionnaires indicated that parents are positive about the school.

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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. Augustine’s School formally accepts the findings of the WSE. The Board would like to thank the Inspectorate for the professional and positive manner in which the inspection was carried out. The Board finds the content of the report to be fair, accurate and they are pleased that the report highlights many of the positive issues pertaining to St. Augustine’s School i.e. recognising the capable committed and experienced teachers and care staff, the positive role of the BOM and the valuable programmes being provided.

As highlighted in the report the school has moved to its long awaited new premises and the staff and board are eager to deliver on the potential and challenges that this welcome move brings.

The Board welcomes the report’s recommendations which will provide a blue print for the development of the school and its emerging needs.

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 BOM acknowledges the recommendations made in the report and in conjunction with the staff have commenced the process of identifying and prioritising elements of the Development Plan and has sourced support from the available expertise through relevant sections of the D.E.S.

With regards to the maintenance of School Roll Books. The Leabhar Tinrimh has been located and will be maintained as the Clárleabhar Leabhar and Leabhar Rollaí currently are.

The school has reviewed its approach to assessment and the staff are currently in the process of implementing the new procedures.

Work has begun in prioritising the other recommendations contained in the report and progress has been made on some of these. The implementation of the WSE Report will be addressed in the Development Plan as highlighted in the report and will form part of the schools continuous improvement plan.

Finally the BOM would like to extend their appreciation to the staff of St. Augustine’s School and affirm the many positives that the WSE has identified.