

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**  
**Department of Education and Skills**

**Whole School Evaluation**  
**REPORT**

**St Joseph's Mercy Primary School**  
**Navan, Co. Meath**  
**Uimhir rolla: 16100Q**

**Date of inspection: 6 October 2011**



## 1. Introduction

St Joseph's Mercy Primary School, Navan, is a large co-educational primary school under the patronage of the Catholic Bishop of Meath and under the trusteeship of the Sisters of Mercy. There are currently 479 pupils enrolled in the school. During the whole-school evaluation inspectors observed teaching and learning in ten mainstream class settings and five support teaching settings. The board of management 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:

- Clear educational leadership is provided to the school community by the board of management.
- The in-school management team works together very effectively under the prudent and caring leadership of the principal, and all team members contribute to leadership in curriculum, pastoral and organisational areas.
- All staff members display a highly commendable commitment to the school and to creating a stimulating learning environment for pupils.
- The quality of communication and relationships between members of the school community is noteworthy, as is the contribution of the Parents' Association to the life of the school.
- The overall quality of teaching and learning is highly commendable, with lessons presented in a stimulating and purposeful manner.
- The school places an admirable emphasis on pupils' holistic development.
- Valuable supports are provided for pupils with additional learning needs and for pupils from minority groups.

The following **main recommendations** are made:

- It is recommended that more specific reference be made to differentiation practices in short-term plans, and that a school policy be developed for Exceptionally Able (EA) pupils.
- It is recommended that the format of monthly progress records be reviewed.

## 3. Quality of School Management

- The board of management is properly constituted and plays a full and active role in the work of the school. The board meets regularly and comprehensive minutes are kept of

meetings. The board's finances are managed prudently and school accounts are audited annually. Board members undertake particular areas of responsibility and report directly to the board in relation to their work.

- The in-school management team works together very effectively under the leadership of the principal. Each member of the team has a role in curriculum, pastoral and organisational leadership. The regular review of responsibilities ensures that leadership is provided in regard to current priority areas. The principal's vision for the school is informed by the inclusive ethos which is a tangible and highly commendable feature of the school environment. Her dedicated and prudent leadership contributes to the nurturing of a positive and caring culture in the school.
- Resources are managed in a judicious manner. Although the main school building is over 100 years old, it is maintained to a high standard. A number of pre-fabricated buildings is used to house some classrooms. The maintenance and improvement of the school building is a priority for the board of management. A very good range of resources to support teaching and learning has been built up and these resources are used effectively.
- The management of pupils is excellent. Staff and pupils interact in a very courteous manner. It is clear from their questionnaire responses that pupils are secure and happy in the school environment. They feel that they are treated fairly and that teachers listen to their concerns.
- The quality of communication in the school and with the school community is very good. A variety of media is used, including the school website, text messaging services, school noticeboards, weekly newsletters for staff and termly newsletters for parents. The school has an active and committed Parents' Association which contributes significantly to the life of the school. Parental responses on questionnaires indicate very high levels of satisfaction with the quality of teaching and learning and with other provision for pupils.

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

- The quality of the school planning and school self-evaluation process is of a very high standard. Questionnaires for self-evaluation are used by staff to highlight priority areas for school planning each year. The school community is involved fully in the development of policy. Effective mechanisms are in place to facilitate parents' contributions to school planning.
- The principal and in-school management team oversee the implementation of the school plan. They use self-evaluation processes effectively to assess its impact and to identify areas for development. The school's action plan provides a framework for the development of policy. This ensures that each school policy is reviewed on a cyclical basis and is adjusted as required.
- Teachers prepare long and short-term plans to guide teaching and learning. Lesson content is outlined clearly. A common template has been developed for short-term planning. This template is also used as a monthly progress record. It is recommended that the use of this template for planning and recording purposes be reviewed. There is scope for more specific reference to differentiation practices in teachers' planning. It is desirable that an alternative format to the checklist be developed for monthly progress records, in order to allow for details of alterations to the plans to be recorded.
- 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

- Sonraítear cinnteacht agus dea-struchtúr i dteagasc na Gaeilge. Is léir go bhfuil dea-thoil ag an bhfoireann don teanga agus eagraíonn siad raon inmholta gníomhaíochtaí foghlama thar na ceithre snáitheanna curaclaim. Baineann na daltaí taitneamh as chluichí teanga agus bíonn go leor deiseanna acu an teanga nua a chleachtadh le linn ceachtanna. I roinnt ranganna, baintear feidhm as obair bheirte agus as grúpobair go torthúileach chun deiseanna cumarsáide a thabhairt do dhaltaí. I ngach rang, foghlaimíonn na daltaí dánta agus amhráin go rialta agus is maith is fiú é sin a dhéanamh chun a n-eispéireas teanga a shaibhriú. Is inmholta freisin cáilíocht agus éagsúlacht na samplaí de scríbhneoireacht phearsanta na ndaltaí atá ar taispeáint tríd an scoil.
- *Certainty and good structure are notable features of the teaching of Irish. It is evident that the staff is well disposed to the language and they organize a commendable range of learning activities across the four curriculum strands. Pupils enjoy language games and they have plentiful opportunities to practice new language during lessons. In some classrooms pair work and group work are used purposefully to provide pupils with opportunities for communication. In every class, pupils learn poetry and songs regularly and this is well worth doing in order to enrich their language experience. Also of commendable quality is the range of pupils' personal writing on display throughout the school.*
- The quality of teaching and learning in English is very good. The school and individual classroom environments are presented in a very print-rich manner, showcasing a broad range of the pupils' work in a range of genres. Lessons include suitable emphasis on the development of the pupils' oral language skills and provide them with ample opportunities to discuss and debate. A structured phonological programme is in place with good provision being made for the development of the pupils' reading skills. In some instances, there is potential for the use of a wider range of guided reading strategies. Pupils reveal a keen interest in topics they have read and are exposed to a broad range of literature. Very good provision is in place for the use of the writing process, with the pupils writing in a variety of genres. A broad range of poetry is taught throughout the school and pupils show a keen appreciation of poetry.
- The quality of teaching and learning in Mathematics is very good. Lessons have very good pace and direction, making effective use of concrete resources and hands-on activities. Teachers make very good provision for the development of the pupils' mathematical language and knowledge of number facts. Classrooms are presented in a suitably maths-rich manner. Specific provision is in place for the revision of lesson content. Teachers monitor pupils' progress regularly and carefully. Appropriate emphasis is placed on problem solving and on developing pupils' reasoning and communicating skills. Very good provision is in place for the development of the pupils' estimating skills.
- A comprehensive and well-planned programme, encompassing all curriculum strands, guides the teaching of Visual Arts in the school. Pupils look at and respond to art of different styles, and teachers provide a highly commendable array of resources for the study of the lives and work of a wide range of artists. Visual Arts lessons are integrated very effectively with other curriculum areas when appropriate. Pupils work with a variety

of media to produce art and samples of their work enhance displays in classrooms, along corridors and on the school website. It is evident that pupils enjoy making art and discussing their work.

- The overall quality of teaching and learning is highly commendable. Lessons are presented in a stimulating and purposeful manner. Classroom management is very good and there is very good rapport between teachers and pupils. Very good use is made of resources and teachers employ a range of teaching methods very effectively. Pupils display a keen interest in lessons and learning outcomes in each of the four curriculum areas evaluated are very good. A good range of formative and summative assessment instruments is in use in the school and teachers give constructive feedback to pupils on how to improve their work.

## **6. Quality of Support for Pupils**

- Provision for pupils with Special Educational Needs (SEN) is very good and pupils are supported in an inclusive environment. Teacher planning is of a very high quality and guides the delivery of programmes of support in both numeracy and literacy. Pupils' progress is regularly monitored and the need for continuance of support is reviewed regularly. The school has documented a commendable policy to guide provision for pupils with SEN.
- Support teachers formulate and maintain Individual Education Plans (IEPs) and Individual Profile and Learning Programmes (IPLPs) for all pupils in receipt of additional support.
- The Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) provide appropriate support in facilitating pupils to access the curricula under the guidance of the class teachers.
- Teachers are specifically commended for the warm, concerned and affirming manner in which support is delivered. While support is provided through the use of a range of approaches, there is potential for greater use of in-class support. It is also recommended that the school develop a policy for Exceptionally Able (EA) pupils. Support for these pupils should be managed within the classroom context.
- Language Support for pupils for whom English is an additional language (EAL) is provided on a withdrawal and in-class support basis. Appropriate assessment instruments are used effectively and proficiency benchmarks are used in compiling stimulating learning programmes. Pupils from minority groups are integrated in mainstream classes and participate fully in all school activities.

*Published March 2012*

# **Appendix**

**SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT**

**Submitted by the Board of Management**

### **Area 1: Observations on the content of the inspection report**

The staff and BOM of our school are very pleased with this affirming and positive report. We are pleased that the main strengths of the work of the school were identified and the commitment and dedication of all members of the school community was affirmed. We are delighted that our school was acknowledged for the high quality of teaching and learning in the school. We wish to acknowledge the professional and courteous manner in which the inspectors carried out the evaluation.

### **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 consultation with the principal, staff and school community has prioritised implementation of the recommendations as part of our school action plan.