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DIRECTORATE FOR
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Quality Assurance Department

Report of the External Review by the QAD

for

**Saint Joseph, *Mater Boni Consilii* School,
Paola**

**External Review carried out from
1st and 4th December 2015**

23rd December 2015

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Introduction

School Details	Name of School	Saint Joseph, Paola
	Date of review	1 st – 4 th December 2015
	Head of School	Dr Kenneth Vella
Review Team	Review Leader	Sr Josette Attard
	Review member	Mr Sinclair Grima
	Review member	Mr Paul Bezzina
Sources of evidence <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School documentation (Pre-external review school self-evaluation, SDP document and other documents provided by the school); • Pre-external review questionnaires disseminated to teaching staff, parents and learners; • Interviews with various stakeholders; • Observations carried out during review week by the external review team members. 		
Survey responses <p>A questionnaire prior to the external review was disseminated to the parents of the 218 learners attending Saint Joseph, <i>Mater Boni Consilii School, Paola</i>. The response rate was 76% (165). In this report, quoted statistical figures indicating parents’ responses reflect percentages that emerge from a random sample of 150 questionnaires. Open ended replies to all questionnaires were read.</p> <p>Of the 18 teachers and one kindergarten assistant who got their pre-external review questionnaire, 19 replied (100%). The response rate for the questionnaire distributed to nine learning support assistants was 100% (9).</p> <p>Of the 128 learners, 114 (89%) replied their pre-external review questionnaire.</p> <p>The review team duly considered the replies to the questionnaires in the preparation for the external review. The highlights of the questionnaires’ results were discussed with the Head of School during the mid-week review meeting.</p>		
School Context <p>Saint Joseph, <i>Mater Boni Consilii School, Paola</i>, henceforth “the school”, is a church school whose premises form part of the convent of the Sisters of St Joseph. The school houses 1 kinder class and 1 class per year group for Year 1 to 6 and Forms 1 and 2. The majority of learners start attending this school from Kinder 2.</p> <p>The school currently caters for 218 learners who come from all areas of Malta. Eleven learners have a statement of needs, three of whom have a full-time one to one statement.</p> <p>Dr Kenneth Vella is the Head of School and he is assisted by one assistant head. Members of the teaching staff include 18 regular teachers, 1 KGA and 9 LSAs.</p>		

Educational Leadership and Management

Standard 1.1

How clear is the Head of School's vision for the school? How well is the Head of School collaborating with the rest of the Senior Management Team to foster and support a professional learning community?

Review findings

The holistic education of learners by 'believing and achieving'- the school motto - is the vision which the Head of School (HoS) and many stakeholders do their best to follow. Learners' holistic development is evident through the various provisions both academic and otherwise. All (100%) teachers and interviewed parents agree that the school leadership is committed to implement meaningful change. The small population and therefore the possibility of giving learners individual attention is a main strength of the school, which all stakeholders praise. The single class for each year group offers limitations to both teachers and learners. Moreover, all stakeholders expressed their wish to possibly extend the secondary classes to Senior 5.

The HoS practises a distributed leadership approach. Co-curricular activities such as *eko-skola*, the Pastoral Team, Health and Safety and everyday school activities such as assemblies and supervision, reflect shared leadership. The majority (68%) of teachers agree that they are given opportunities to take leadership roles at school.

The HoS evaluates and supports learning and teaching mainly through an established system of formal observations, followed by feedback. Records of these observations, are compiled and archived. The HoS collects the Schemes of Work (SoWs), lesson notes, resources, record of work and class diaries. Members of staff appreciate the support given by the HoS. Some teachers invite the HoS themselves to observe their lessons in order to give them feedback for.

For the HoS, parents are considered as partners in education. Informative meetings for parents are organised during the scholastic year. Parents' and Teachers' Association (PTA) committee meetings are held on a regular basis to decide school activities and projects.

Areas of strength

- The Head of School knows the strengths and challenges of the school and together with the assistant head and all stakeholders, shapes the vision to address areas for improvement.
- A thorough observation system informs the SMT on the learning going on in every class and helps identify professional needs.

A way forward

The administration is encouraged to continue its efforts to enlarge the premises in order to accommodate more than one class per year group and possibly extend the secondary classes to Senior 5.

Standard 1.2

How effective are the internal evaluation processes that inform school development planning? How well are the structure, content and format of the school development planning documentation facilitating effective implementation, monitoring and evaluation of targeted actions?

Review findings

The HoS believes in the importance of the internal review processes and development planning and is aware that this is an area which needs improvement. An internal evaluation has been carried out. The staff questionnaire results and a set of 10 action plans were provided to the review team by the HoS. The HoS stated that SDP documents were written in previous years. Although the majority of parents (65%) reported that they are regularly asked for their opinion on school-related matters, they were not formally involved in last scholastic year's internal review. The HoS claimed parents of newcomers are asked for feedback every year. Moreover, a questionnaire for all parents is issued once every two years.

In the various action plans, success criteria for effectiveness and success criteria are not clear and measurable. Timescales are not specific. In all action plans more than one person was identified as responsible for monitoring.

A copy of the action plans is given to each member of the teaching staff during summer. The document is then revised during a staff meeting in the beginning of the scholastic year.

Areas of strength

- The HoS is aware that the internal review processes need improvement in order to compile an SDP document according to the parameters established by the Quality Assurance Department.

A way forward

The SMT is encouraged to seek assistance to formulate an SDP document according to the parameters established by the Quality Assurance Department.

Standard 1.3

How well are appropriate structures and good human resources management ensuring effective school administration?

Review Findings

The Senior Management Team (SMT) knows clearly what each and every member's strengths are and distributes roles accordingly. The roles are explained in a staff manual which is distributed to the members of staff at the beginning of the year. This information is also easily accessible on the school website. Learners are also familiar with the different roles of the SMT and staff.

Many (84%) of the teachers agree that the school has an effective internal communication system. Parents can communicate with the school through the school website, by phone and by email. All emails sent by parents are answered personally by the HoS and he returns any phone calls himself. Information about school activities and school policies/regulations are included in the school website. The website is regularly updated. Most (95%) parents agree that they are familiar with the school policies.

The HoS taps on the strength of staff at secondary level to support the learners at primary level. He also provides opportunities for his staff to upskill themselves. New members of staff are monitored closely and supported by the HoS throughout the year to ensure their integration in the school.

Areas of strength

- Roles and duties of the different members of staff are clearly defined for all stakeholders.
- The school has an effective internal and external communication system.
- The school maximises the effectiveness of human resources by involving staff at secondary level to provide support to learners at primary level.
- New members of staff benefit from an effective induction process.

A way forward

Records of SMT meetings should be kept.

Learning and Teaching

Standard 2.1

How well does the school curriculum satisfy learners' entitlement as outlined in the National Curriculum Framework?

Review Findings

Teachers' timetables cater for the different subject areas of the curriculum. The school promotes healthy living by implementing a healthy eating policy. Learners can also participate in sports activities, art and drama after school hours. Education for sustainable development is being addressed through the school's participation in *Dinja Wahda* and by the *eko-skola* group. The school received awards in both initiatives repeatedly.

The regular proper use of the IWB sustains digital literacy across the curriculum. Last year the school participated in the Tablet Pilot scheme and is currently using this technology to interlink geography with ICT in Form 1 and in various other subjects in different levels. The school library is well-equipped and its use is time tabled for all classes. All learners are encouraged to read and express in book reviews through different formats such as drawings of imaginary pictures and guided text. Year 6 learners have a foreign language lesson once a week scheduled in their timetable. Every term they are taught a different language from Italian, French and German.

Outings are regularly organised by the school-as suggested by the Secretariat for Catholic Education. Parents and learners expressed their wish for more educational outings related to the curriculum. The restriction in space is hindering the HoS from introducing further curricular initiatives in the school especially in the secondary sector.

Areas of strength

- The school is catering for the different subject areas of the curriculum in various ways and this is being done through various initiatives.

A way forward

The HoS is encouraged to discover ways and means to counteract the limitations because of lack of space and to implement his vision of introducing other initiatives especially in the secondary sector.

Standard 2.2

Are learners experiencing successful learning in a positive environment? How well is the way teachers plan and deliver scaffolded lessons motivating learner involvement whatever their needs, abilities or learning preferences?

Review findings

Lessons include sequenced activities and tasks targeting the learning intentions. Planning documentation for the different needs of learners, was noted in around half of the classes. However, all teachers were observed to cater for different needs of learners. LSAs and teachers work in synergy for the benefit of all learners. LSAs commented that they are treated *at par* with teachers.

Reviewers noted effective classroom management during all the lessons observed. There is a positive relationship between teachers and learners based on mutual respect.

Many teachers were noted to scaffold learning by adopting a clear lesson structure and employing a creative teaching approach that involves and motivates learners. All teachers share learning intentions at the beginning of the lesson and revisit them again during lesson closure. Resources for teaching and learning are readily available and sharing is common practice among teachers.

All teachers provided positive verbal feedback. Use of group/pair work was observed to be limited. Teachers make frequent use of various strategies related to Assessment for Learning (AfL) during lessons, even though no training has, as yet, been offered to the teaching staff.

Areas of strength

- Classroom management is effective and a positive relationship based on mutual respect exists between teachers and learners.
- Learners actively participate in well-scaffolded lessons.
- Learners register identifiable progress in an engaging and motivating class atmosphere.

A way forward

Planning documentation should refer to the activities being implemented for different learner abilities. The documentation should reveal different means of representation of content, action and expression and engagement so as to support all learners.

The school should provide professional development training for teachers in AfL strategies so as to reinforce current practices.

Standard 2.3

How well are the school's assessment policy and practices sustaining quality development at classroom and school levels, through both formative and summative assessment?

Review Findings

All teachers use summative assessment. November tests are held in addition to the formal half yearly and annual exams as of Grade 1. All prepared test/exam papers are vetted by the HoS. He collects, checks and signs the corrected exam/test papers of every girl at school. During the year, the HOS also collects and checks the files/copybooks/workbooks of all the learners at school. Corrected test/exam scripts are given to learners to take home to be worked out again if necessary. This gives learners the opportunity to identify and work upon areas for improvement. The school identifies and supports marginalised learners after school hours and the HoS provides them with a pack of working material for the summer holidays. These are handed to teachers for correction on their return from the summer recess.

Homework is given daily. Parents of learners who are absent from school can collect the missed HW after school hours. The school has no formal assessment policy. Reviewers noted limited evidence of formative feedback and lack of coherence in formative assessment methods throughout the year groups.

A smooth transition for the learners is being ensured by the organisation of meetings, held at the end of each scholastic year between staff members of consecutive year groups, to discuss learners' issues. Moreover the HoS gathers samples of learners' work to be able to give feedback to teachers and learners before the sitting of the annual exams. Parents reported that they are satisfied with the regular information they receive about their child's progress.

Benchmark examination performance in English, Maths and Maltese has been consistently above the national mean throughout the last five years.

Areas of strength

- The HoS is well informed about learner achievement.
- Procedures are in place to ensure a sufficient handing over from one year group to the next.
- The school is performing well in the national benchmark examinations in the three core subjects.

A way forward

The school should compile its assessment procedures in a formal assessment policy.

School Ethos

Standard 3.1

How well is the school supporting learners to reach their full potential?

Review Findings

The school's educators strive to boost the learners' sense of self-confidence and self-esteem. Teachers allow learners to voice their ideas through individual attention and encouragement. The *eko-skola* programme and the Student Council, give learners the opportunity to bring forward suggestions, thus feeling empowered and involved in decision-making processes. Parents are satisfied (94%) with the school's efforts to raise the learners' self-esteem.

The system of secondary teachers supporting learners in primary classes, helps learners at a young age to become used to having more than one teacher in class and to support those learners who do not qualify for complementary assistance. As of last year, learners considered as being "borderline" achievers are given extra help twice a week after school hours. The school complementary teacher provides support to girls having learning difficulties during pull out sessions. Gifted and talented learners are supported through handouts and research work.

Meetings for parents held at the beginning of the year and discussions on annual exam results are all ways of involving parents. Nearly all (95%) parents feel that the school provides them with opportunities to learn how to support their child. The school utilises the specialist support provided by the Secretariat for Catholic Education together with the private services of a child psychologist. The HoS voiced his concern on the need for more immediate assistance and support provided by state entities and agencies.

IEP sessions are organised at the beginning and reviewed at the end of the scholastic year.

Areas of strength

- The efforts made by the school are yielding positive results to the learners' self-confidence and self-esteem.
- The school educators have a clear picture of the learners' individual needs and work constantly to address their needs and abilities.
- Specialist support is provided for learners with difficulties.

A way forward

The school is encouraged to keep up its efforts to respond to the different needs of learners to enable them to achieve their full potential.

The HoS is encouraged to evaluate the impact and reflect on the benefits of the pull out sessions.

Standard 3.2

How much does a sense of mutual respect amongst all stakeholders, which promotes positive behaviour and fosters a sense of belonging, prevail in the school?

Review Findings

A strong sense of respect is evident between all stakeholders of the school community. All (100%) members of the teaching staff feel respected in their role by different stakeholders. The HoS adopts an open-door policy and meets personally all parents that come to school even when they come without an appointment. He is always present at the school door both for admission and dismissal. He knows all learners and their families individually. Parents feel respected by the SMT and are satisfied with the support they receive.

Learners are well behaved and generally respect their peers. The school's behaviour policy is clearly defined. Teachers (95%) and parents/guardians (93%) are satisfied with the school's management behaviour procedures. Parents/guardians are asked to approve these procedures by signing them.

There is a strong sense of collegiality among teaching staff. Staff and learners feel a strong sense of belonging at school. Morning school assemblies are a demonstration of the school's strong Catholic ethos; the school reflects the identity of St Emily De Vialar, Mother Foundress of St Joseph schools, who is regarded with reverence. Smartness in the learners' school uniform also reveals the strong sense of belonging. All (100%) teachers and nearly all (98%) parents/guardians would recommend the school to other teachers/parents/guardians.

Areas of strength

- Learners are being cared for in an environment promoting respect, love and care towards one another. The commitment of the school towards the well-being of each and every learner is clearly evident. Behaviour management procedures are in place. A sense of pride and belonging prevails among all stakeholders.

A way forward

The school is encouraged to keep on ensuring the holistic education of learners in the welcoming and the secure environment based on the positive attitudes and respect.

Standard 3.3

How much do parents take an active part in the life of the school?

Review Findings

The school's parents' meetings at the beginning and at the end of the scholastic year and parents' days in December and March are well attended. Information about the activities held at school throughout the scholastic year is available on the school website. Most (93%) parents make use of online portals to keep in touch with the activities organised by the school.

PTA members organise various fundraising activities during the year. Formation activities like the Lenten Talks are also organised. Generally, these activities are well-attended by the parents. During PTA meetings parent representatives also discuss different educational initiatives that are taken by the school administration. Any suggestions in the interest of the school are always welcomed by the administration.

Areas of strength

- Parents, generally, are involved in the life of the school through activities and meetings and regularly access the school website.
- The PTA is a well-organised entity within the school and functions to the best advantages of learners.

A way forward

The school staff and PTA are encouraged to maintain their efforts to sustain the involvement of parents in the life of the school.

Recommendations

Taking into account the external review's findings, these recommendations represent the development areas the school needs to prioritise in the post-review action plan.

- The administration is encouraged to continue its efforts to enlarge the school premises.
- The SMT is encouraged to seek assistance to formulate an SDP document according to the parameters established by the Quality Assurance Department.
- Lesson planning documentation should refer to activities for different learner abilities. The documentation should reveal different means of representation of content, action and expression and engagement so as to support all learners.
- The school should provide professional development training for teachers in AfL strategies so as to reinforce current practices.
- The school should compile its assessment procedures in a formal assessment policy.

Next external review

The next external review will take place on completion of this cycle of External Reviews. This may be reconsidered as a result of the follow-up visit as per Parameters of the External Review available at: <http://education.gov.mt/en/education/quality-assurance/Pages/External-Reviews.aspx>

Ms Jacqueline Vanhear
Director, Quality Assurance

Appendix

Standards

- 1.1 The Head of School has a clear vision for the school and, in collaboration with the rest of the Senior Management Team (SMT), fosters and supports a professional learning community.
- 1.2 The school has effective internal evaluation processes that inform school development planning. The school development planning documentation (SDP) has appropriate structure, content and format facilitating effective implementation, monitoring and evaluation.
- 1.3 Appropriate structures and good human resource management ensure effective school administration.
- 2.1 The School's curriculum satisfies learners' entitlement as outlined in the National Curriculum Framework.
- 2.2 Learners experience successful learning in a positive environment. Teachers deliver scaffolded lessons that motivate learner involvement, respecting different needs, abilities and learning preferences.
- 2.3 The school's assessment policy and practices sustain quality development at classroom and school levels through both formative and summative assessment.
- 3.1 The school supports learners to reach their full potential
- 3.2 A sense of mutual respect amongst all stakeholders prevails, promoting positive behaviour and fostering a sense of belonging.
- 3.3 Parents take an active part in the life of the school

Table indicating the average quantities and proportions referred to when the following terms are used:

nearly all	=	with very few exceptions
most	=	90% or more
many	=	70% or more
a majority	=	over 60%
half	=	50%
around half	=	close to 50%
a minority	=	below 40%
few	=	below 20%
very few	=	less than 10%