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**Quality Assurance Department**

# **Report of the External Review by the QAD**

**for**

**St Theresa School  
Ta' Kerċem, Gozo**

**External Review carried out from  
8<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> May 2017**

**4<sup>th</sup> July 2017**

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# Introduction

<b>School Details</b>	Name of School	St Theresa School, Ta' Kerċem, Gozo
	Date of review	8 <sup>th</sup> to 11 <sup>th</sup> May 2017
	Head of School	Sr Lucy Vella
<b>Review Team</b>	Review Leader	Ms Ann-Marie Bartolo, Education Officer
	Review member	Mr Carlos Grima, Education Officer

## Sources of evidence

- 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

Questionnaires were disseminated prior to the external review to the different stakeholders as shown in the table below. The highlights of the questionnaires' results were discussed with the Head of School during the mid-week review meeting.

Pre-external review questionnaire	Distributed	Responses	Response rate
Learners	<b>69</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>100 %</b>
Parents	<b>144</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>83 %</b>
Teachers	<b>10</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>100 %</b>
Learning Support Assistants	<b>9</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>100 %</b>

## School Context

St Theresa School, henceforth "the school", is a Church school run by the Carmelite Missionary Sisters of St Theresa of the Child Jesus. The vision of the school is to build on existing strengths to provide a safe and stimulating environment where learners are happy to stay and to give an education which conveys love and tolerance towards others, faith, and social responsibility.

The school currently caters for 101 boys and 88 girls. Eighteen learners have a statement of needs, three of which are full-time one-to-one. Learners with a statement of needs are supported by nine learning support assistants (LSAs). The school has six class based teachers, four Kindergarten Assistants (KA), a Science peripatetic teacher and a Complementary teacher.

The Head of School (HoS), Sr Lucy Vella, is assisted by an assistant head, Sr Carmen Bonnici.

The school building forms part of the convent and it is not fully accessible to persons with mobility impairment.

# Educational Leadership and Management

## Review findings

The HoS is a caring leader and together with the assistant head are creating a family-like atmosphere within the school community. Her vision is to provide a safe and stimulating environment where children come happy to school and to pass on an education built on sound Christian values. This vision is shared by all stakeholders and reviewers noted this sense of well-being and safe environment. The HoS is aware of the school strengths and areas for improvement.

The HoS supports teaching staff through an open door policy. There is continuous communication and she is always available even beyond school hours. Additionally, verbal feedback is provided after collection of schemes of work and these are discussed with individual teachers/KAs when needed. Most teaching staff stated that the SMT provides them with ongoing effective feedback. Currently there is no established system of formal observations to support teachers. Formal class observations are an opportunity for the SMT to monitor learning and teaching and when followed by feedback may serve purposefully to further support teachers' professional growth.

Through afternoon professional development sessions and individual support all teachers are being trained in AfL strategies. This process is still in its initial stages. The early years' teachers are also supported in phonological awareness by the literacy support teacher (LST) through demo lessons and lesson planning advice. This support is proving to be useful towards the teachers'/KAs professional growth and the LST stated that they are receptive to learn and implement what they learnt. Following a PD talk and a piloting exercise, the school community is planning the purchasing of 'guided reading' books and preparing the ground work for implementation of guided reading next scholastic year. By encouraging and facilitating these professional learning opportunities, the HoS is guiding the school to address areas for development. Monitoring by the SMT of implementation of the newly learnt strategies would further reinforce improvement.

Teachers do not have the opportunity to meet together and collaborate professionally. Meeting together would allow teachers to engage further in professional dialogue, share good practices and evaluate the implementation of the school development plan. On the other hand teachers have the opportunity to collaborate with their peers from the other three primary church schools in Gozo. This is a fruitful opportunity for a small school with a single class in each year group to discuss common year group issues and/or plan examination papers.

The school's internal review is carried out with the teaching staff. The research tools used to gather feedback are mainly discussions with teachers, evaluations of past action plans and two annual reports presented by teachers on their class. These reports provide the SMT with a holistic profile of learners and the specific class needs. Using various research tools to gather information during the year would give a more comprehensive picture of the school. Carrying out lesson observations as indicated above, would also be a valid research tool to provide the SMT with a perspective of teaching and learning through informed data. This would not only give a more comprehensive picture of the school but serve to direct the desired development.

Incidental feedback is gathered from parents when they communicate with the school. This is an important source of information to be used as part of the internal review process. This feedback may be further strengthened through the use of other various tools such as questionnaires which are designed intentionally to gather the parents' feedback. No feedback is gathered from learners.

Parents are important stakeholders and learners are the primary actors hence their voices have to be considered to provide a more holistic picture for school improvement purposes.

All the teaching staff is involved in the selection of priority development targets, in the writing, implementation and evaluation of action plans. Action plans are developed for the school as a whole. This generic approach is limiting teachers from addressing the particular needs of different year groups where applicable. Developing action plans according to year group/s would increase relevance and facilitate implementation in the classroom. Additionally action plans are not written in a SMART enough manner. Breaking down the actions into measurable steps with clear timescales will facilitate implementation, monitoring and evaluation. The evaluation of action plans is only done at the end of the year. Regular evaluation would allow the school to adjust the course along the way to achieve the desired goals.

Most parents claimed that they are familiar with the school policies. Currently the school is updating its main policies: assessment, HW, behaviour and attendance policies through its school development plan. Teachers were involved in discussion and updates of these policies throughout this scholastic year. The school has also obtained feedback from the Secretariat for Catholic Education. The updated policies will be implemented as from the next scholastic year. The HoS stated that Maltese versions will be provided in due time. Including parents and learners in the drafting and piloting of these policies would give more ownership and facilitate implementation.

### **Areas of strength**

- The head of school is a caring leader and together with the assistant head are creating a family-like atmosphere within the school community.
- The head of school is aware of the school strengths and areas for improvement.
- The head of school communicates with her staff and is available at all times.

### **A way forward**

Together with the assistant head, the head of school should implement a programme of class observations accompanied by subsequent formative feedback. A lesson observation sheet agreed upon with the teaching staff may be useful to guide the focus of such observations. Such a programme would provide teachers with professional support and the SMT with a comprehensive picture of teaching and learning to direct the desired school development.

In collaboration with the other three Church schools, the HoS should take the opportunity to plan timetables in order to allow for curriculum time sessions that facilitate collaboration amongst teachers. Meeting together would allow teachers to engage in professional dialogue, share good practices and evaluate more often the implementation of the school development plan.

As part of the internal review process the school should gather feedback from parents and learners as this would provide a more holistic picture for school improvement purposes.

After a whole school prioritisation exercise, action plans should be developed for particular year group/s. This would ensure that actions cater better for learners' needs and can be implemented in the classroom. Breaking down the actions into measurable steps with clear timescales will facilitate implementation, evaluation and monitoring. This will also help the teaching staff and the SMT to evaluate throughout the scholastic year.

Including parents and learners in the drafting and piloting of school policies would give more ownership and facilitate implementation. The head of school should continue with plans to translate the salient points of the school policies to Maltese.

# Learning and Teaching

## Review Findings

The school is not completely providing learners with the learning areas entitlement in line with the current stage of the implementation process of the National Curriculum Framework. There is a discrepancy in the amount of hours to which learners are entitled and the amount of hours being provided by the school. An analysis of the teachers' schemes of work indicates that the school satisfies curricular requirements in relation to Languages, Mathematics, Religious and Ethics Education and Health & Physical Education. Nonetheless schemes of work and weekly classroom timetables for the Junior Years also revealed that learners are not being sufficiently exposed to Science and Technology, Visual and Performing Arts and Humanities & Education for Democracy. A balanced curricular experience based on a holistic development encompassing knowledge, skills, competencies, attitudes and values will not only allow learners to successfully make the transition into the Secondary Cycle of education but provide the necessary foundations so learners can successfully thrive as workers, citizens and as individuals in the future.

At kindergarten level, planning is designed thematically. Classroom observations confirmed the implementation and benefits of the thematic approach on learners. Learners were observed making meaningful connections during the learning and teaching process. A phonological awareness programme and the support provided by the literacy support teacher are enhancing the school's education provisions at the Early Years level. In the Primary years the school is sustaining learning through the interlinking of subjects. The interlinking of subjects allows learners to engage in relevant activities that can be connected to real life thus enhancing the learning process. The learners' curricular experience is enhanced through an array of co-curricular activities. Co-curricular activities help to develop learner's personality and boost the holistic development of learners by sustaining emotional, physical and moral development.

Analysis of the planning documents show that teachers plan in a way that sustains lesson delivery through learning intentions, sequenced activities and diverse tasks designed to target different learning abilities and preferences. Analysis of the LSAs' teaching files provide further proof of the collaboration noted during lesson observations. Lesson observations revealed that there is a positive relationship between teacher and learners based upon successful classroom management. Learners were observed to be generally engaged in the lesson and to seek support when required. Teachers were observed to scaffold learning by adopting a clear lesson structure and by teaching new concepts in diverse ways aiming at involving and motivating all learners. All teachers deliver in a way that addresses learning preferences. Presenting information and content in varied ways ensures a more inclusive and flexible classroom environment where barriers to learning are minimised so all learners can become engaged in their own learning.

Digital literacy is integrated in the learning process. The use of the computer lab from K2 to Y6 and the tablet use in Y4 are also enhancing learners' digital literacy. Digital tools which are embedded in the daily classroom experience to enhance creativity and offer opportunities for transformational learning will sustain learners' holistic development and prepares learners to become global digital citizens.

Class teachers from Y1 to Y6, provided little opportunities where learners can learn by collaborating with peers. No tasks where learners were engaged together in pairs/groups or situations where learners are provided with the learning opportunity to carry out peer-assessment were observed during review week. Collaborative learning would allow for social development amongst learners

where they become exposed to diverse viewpoints and personalities and learn to function effectively within group settings.

Lessons observed during review week and an evaluation of learners' coursework indicate that teachers generally give verbal and written formative feedback. Each teacher keeps detailed assessment records of learners' progress. Teacher interviews confirmed that there are formal summative assessment practices (testing) in Y1, Y2 and Y3. A formative style of assessment embedded in the daily classrooms activities and including observations of learners whilst they are engaged in spontaneous behaviour in familiar settings, as opposed to summative, is more conducive to child-centred philosophy which allows the holistic development of each learner.

Parents are regularly informed about their child's level of attainment through two parents' days and *ad hoc* meetings as required. The parents' days are well attended. Class teachers and KAs use various modes of communication to update parents about their children's progress. A few use an online application to share what is going on in the classroom on a daily basis. Interviewed parents appreciate this as it keeps them informed on what is going on in the classroom and they can sustain it at home.

Reports used at Kindergarten Level are competence based and address the different areas of development, with space for formative comments. Current reports utilised in Y1 to Y6 still do not provide the holistic picture required to sustain parents in supporting learners. The school is aware of this and they are addressing it through one of its action plans. A more holistic and formative reporting system would provide learners and their parents with a clear description of what learners can do in their stage of development and is an opportunity to motivate learners by highlighting their positive attributes. Such reports would also enhance the transition process from one year to the next.

The learners perform well in the benchmark examination. For the past three years they have been scoring higher than the national median in all three subjects. Benchmark examination results are not analysed for school improvement purposes. Data gathered from an analysis of specific subject components would allow the school to plan for improvement purposes.

### **Areas of strength**

- The thematic approach at kindergarten level and the interlinking of subjects in the primary years is helping learners make meaningful connections during the learning and teaching process.
- Analysis of the planning documents shows that teachers plan in a way that sustains lesson delivery through learning intentions, sequenced activities and tasks to target different learning abilities and preferences.
- Lesson observations revealed that there is a positive relationship between teachers and learners based upon successful classroom management and meaningful interaction.
- The learners perform well in the benchmark examination. For the past three years they have been scoring higher than the national median in all three subjects.

### **A way forward**

The school management needs to revise each year group's curricular programme to ensure better distribution of learning areas and increase provision of Science and Technology, Visual and Performing Arts and Humanities & Education for Democracy. Addressing the discrepancy in the amount of hours entitled by learners to make sure that they get their learning time entitlement shall also help in this process.

Teachers should enhance their classroom pedagogies with skills related to principles underlying assessment for learning such as cooperative learning and peer-assessment so as to develop a more

learner-centred experience in the classroom. The school management through the teachers' current AfL training and other training opportunities should support and monitor these pedagogies.

The current draft assessment policy should be updated to make it clear that there should be no structured formal testing procedures before learners reach Y4 as per Letter Circular DCM 074/2015: *Assessment in Years 1, 2 and 3* and this will benefit learners' holistic development. Additionally, the school should implement the current SDP action plan to 'upgrade the current report book' for Y1 to Y6. The staff should discuss and consider a school report which is more formative by indicating clearly learner strengths and areas for improvement.

The school is encouraged to analyse examination results for specific subject components as this would allow the school to plan for improvement purposes.

## School Ethos

### Review Findings

The school community is based on values of love and respect where the whole community including the Carmelite sisters collaborate together for the well-being of learners. Each child is known, loved and cared for. The teaching staff feel respected in their role by different stakeholders. This respect is carried forward by teachers in the dedication they show in their work. Parents remarked on the dedication shown by the sisters and staff. Almost all stakeholders would recommend the school. Furthermore, the school has a strong Catholic ethos. This is enhanced through the various religious activities organised for learners including the weekly class adoration held in the Convent's chapel. These initiatives are enhancing the moral and spiritual values of learners.

The school promotes positive behaviour amongst learners. Each class sets rules to ensure a safe learning environment. During review week, reviewers noted that learners were generally well behaved. Interviewed learners stated that in class they have reward schemes to encourage positive behaviour and achievements both as a group or individually. A draft behaviour policy is in-line with the *Respect for All Framework* highlighting principles of respect, safety and responsibility. Having rules that are written in a positive way indicating what learners are expected to do and also listing consequences for inappropriate behaviour is sustaining positive behaviour.

Learners are developing their self-confidence and self-esteem through participation in sports and other school activities such as the Christmas concert and participation in local and national competitions. All stakeholders are generally satisfied with the school's efforts to raise learners' self-esteem. The school assembly is used well to promote the Catholic Ethos and celebrate birthdays. Learner participation is limited. Increasing learners' involvement during assembly through class presentations or performance in the presence of the school community would enhance learners' sense of pride in forming part of the school community and increase further their self-esteem. The school does not have a student council. The school is aware of the importance of such a council and listed it in the SWOT analysis as one of things they need to improve on. Apart from enhancing learners' contribution for school improvement through democratic participation, such a council would give learners a voice and help learners develop skills which they need for life.

Through the Complementary teacher and the support of the visiting LST and INCO the school seeks early identification and intervention in order to address learners' needs effectively. The INCO supports LSAs with their needs and visits them regularly. The school also offers complementary

support including support in Maltese for a non-Maltese speaking learner. In most cases this support is one-to-one and programmes are individualised. The school also invested in a learner-friendly and appealing digital resource which is used during complementary support. All this is contributing to the care and support necessary to sustain holistic development of learners.

Meetings for all parents are organised to empower them with literacy strategies to be able to support their child or children at home. Most parents take an active interest in their child's education and they attend these activities. Parents are appreciative of the fact that important meetings are held in the evening.

Many parents feel represented by an active PTA. The PTA members contribute and volunteer during learner activities and fundraising events. The PTA is not involved in school development discussions. Extending the contribution of PTA members in internal review discussions may serve not only to increase parental involvement but also as another source to collect feedback. This may provide new perspectives and enrich the school development planning process.

### **Areas of strength**

- Each learner in the school is known, loved and cared for and all the school community collaborates together for the well-being of learners.
- A sense of mutual respect exists amongst all stakeholders.
- A strong Catholic ethos prevails at school which is enhancing the moral and spiritual values of learners.
- The school has structures which are supporting learners' diverse needs.

### **A way forward**

Learners' involvement during assembly may be further enhanced through class presentations or performance as this will enhance learners' sense of pride in forming part of the school community and increases their self-esteem.

Next scholastic year the school should start the process of having a democratically elected students' council as this would enhance the learners' contribution towards school improvement and it would help learners develop skills which prepare them for life and be active citizens in their community.

The HoS may use particular PTA meetings to gather feedback and encourage school development discussions.

## 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 school management needs to revise each year group's curricular programme to ensure better distribution of learning areas and increase provision in Science and Technology, Visual and Performing Arts and Humanities & Education for Democracy. Addressing the discrepancy in the amount of hours entitled by learners to make sure that they get their learning time entitlement shall also help in this process.
- The head of school should implement a programme of class observations accompanied by subsequent formative feedback. A lesson observation sheet agreed upon with the teaching staff may be useful to guide the focus of such observations.
- The school should as part of the internal review process:
  - widen research by including feedback from parents and learners and do a trend analysis of benchmark results, considering subject components;
  - analyse the data/feedback collected and translate it into a SWOT;
  - evaluate action plans regularly throughout the year to adjust the course to achieve the desired goals,
  - develop action plans for specific year/s group needs,
  - develop SMARTer action plans to facilitate implementation, monitoring and evaluation.
- Teachers should enhance their classroom pedagogies with skills related to principles underlying assessment for learning such as cooperative learning and peer-assessment so as to develop a more learner-centred experience in the classroom. The school management through the teachers' current AfL training and other training opportunities should support and monitor these pedagogies.
- The current draft assessment policy should be updated to make it clear that there should be no structured formal testing procedures before learners reach Y4 as per Letter Circular DCM 074/2015: *Assessment in Years 1, 2 and 3* as this will benefit learners' holistic development. Additionally, the school should continue to discuss and plan a school assessment report for Y1 to Y6 learners which is more formative and indicates clearly learner strengths and areas for improvement.
- The school should start the process of having a democratically elected Students' Council. This would sustain learners' contribution towards school improvement and it would provide them with skills which prepare them to be active citizens in their community.

## 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>

**Dr 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, 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 and consistency in all actions.
- 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 referred to when the following terms are used:

nearly all	=	more than 95%, to under 100%
most	=	more than 80%, to 95%
many	=	more than 65%, to 80%
a low majority	=	more than 55%, to 65%
around half	=	45% to 55%
a minority	=	less than 45%, to 35%
few	=	less than 35%, to 20%
very few	=	less than 20%, to 5%
almost none	=	above 0%, less than 5%