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**Quality Assurance Department**

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

**for**

**The Archbishop's Minor Seminary  
Primary Section**

**External Review carried out from  
16<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> January 2017**

**27<sup>th</sup> February 2017**

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# Introduction

<b>School Details</b>	Name of School	The Archbishop’s Minor Seminary, Primary Section
	Date of review	16 <sup>th</sup> to 20 <sup>th</sup> January 2017
	Head of School	Fr Mark Ellul
<b>Review Team</b>	Review Leader	Ms Ann-Marie Bartolo, Education Officer
	Review member	Mr Sinclair Grima, Education Officer
	Review member	Mr Vince Peresso, Associate Assessor

## 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>216</b>	<b>216</b>	<b>100 %</b>
Parents	<b>410</b>	<b>235</b>	<b>57 %</b>
Teachers	<b>37</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>46 %</b>
Learning Support Assistants	<b>22</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>82 %</b>

## School Context

The Archbishop’s Minor Seminary, Primary Section, henceforth “the school” is part of a boys’ Catholic School owned by the Archdiocese of Malta including both the primary and secondary sections, housed in adjacent buildings.

The school currently caters for 454 learners. There are 33 learners with a statement of needs, 11 of whom are full-time one-to-one. Learners with a statement of needs are supported by 22 learning support assistants (LSAs). The school has 18 class based teachers and 18 specialised teachers, most of whom are also subject teachers in the secondary section. A complementary teacher and a guidance teacher provide also their service to the school.

Fr Mark Ellul is the Head of School (HoS) and in the primary section he is assisted by the deputy head and assistant head which in this report will be referred to as the Administrative Senior Leadership Team (SLT). He is also assisted by other senior leadership team members: the Pastoral Care Coordinator, the Inclusion Coordinator (INCO) and the Chaplain who will be referred to as the Pastoral SLT.

The recently built school enjoys ample outdoor space and is fully accessible to persons with mobility impairment.

# Educational Leadership and Management

## Review findings

The HoS is a caring leader of a school community that shares the Gospel values. His vision is to have a school which provides individual attention within a holistic educational environment which contributes to the character formation of learners. The HoS is directing a dedicated SLT whose members all share this vision and collaborate together for the good of the school.

The administrative SLT nurtures distributed leadership and involves the staff in decision making processes. The roles and duties of the SLT are clearly defined in writing and are well known by the teaching staff. Staff are given opportunities to be creative and lead various activities, participate in committees such as the liturgy team and the staff committee. Schemes of work are collected and vetted by the Assistant Head and necessary feedback is provided to teachers. At the end of the year teachers are also provided with an opportunity to reflect on the scholastic year and plan the year ahead together with a member of the SLT. A teaching reflection booklet was compiled and recently distributed amongst teaching staff intended to be used as part of formal class observation visits. Reviewers noted that this could be a useful tool during such visits. So far, very few teachers have been observed by the administrative SLT. This might be partially due to the fact that the setting of an appointment is up to the class teacher. Regular and structured lesson observations established through mutual agreement with the members of staff, offer an excellent opportunity to support teachers' professional growth and also for the administrative SLT to obtain a comprehensive picture while monitoring the quality of teaching and learning. The deputy head and assistant head ensure the maximisation of curriculum development sessions by leading their respective year groups. When possible LSAs are also present. This interaction is enhancing positive relationships and organisational improvement, thus contributing to the well-being of the school community.

The HoS has an open door policy and together with the deputy and assistant head communicate with staff mainly through the management information system, weekly briefing sessions, emails and personal contact. Nevertheless, only a minority of teacher respondents to the pre-review questionnaire indicated that the school has an effective internal communication system. Some of the interviewed teachers attributed this to a limited opportunity for communication across year groups, the less frequent use of information emails as the scholastic year progresses, and the limited accessibility of some members of the SLT. Maintaining the personal contact and consistency in the use of different modes of communication would help the teaching staff feel better informed about school life. The introduction of the weekly briefing this scholastic year was a step in the right direction.

Various members of staff are currently furthering their studies. During in-house professional development sessions they are given the opportunity to share their expertise. Teachers also have the opportunity to share good classroom practice across year groups during these same sessions. This is an asset to the professional learning community of the school and enhances professional growth.

The school is currently shifting from a three-year to a one-year cycle approach to school development planning. The school's internal review is carried out with the teaching staff and parents using mainly online surveys to assess both the broad situation as well as specific areas for improvement. Learners' involvement in the process is limited. The learners are the primary actors within school improvement and their voice has to be considered. The information gathered is discussed with the teaching staff during SDP days and together with a thorough evaluation of the previous SDP the staff develops a SWOT analysis. Including feedback from parents and learners in the evaluation of previous SDP would provide a more realistic picture of the success of the

implementation of the action plans. Including the Head's vision would be added value to this evaluation. Teachers are involved in the prioritisation of development targets. Reviewers noted that not all three priority development targets are being tackled by the different year groups. When development targets are identified as school priorities it is essential that all teaching staff members work for their achievement to ensure whole school improvement.

Teachers are involved in the writing of the action plans and this is increasing their ownership of the process. Actions were observed to be too broad and not specific enough. Breaking down the actions into measurable steps with clear timescales will facilitate implementation, evaluation and monitoring.

Nearly all parents claimed that they are familiar with the school policies, which are available online. The SLT is currently working on the compilation of existing policies and other information in a handbook, however consultation with other stakeholders is limited. Most LSAs agree that the school adheres to these policies. However there is some uncertainty among teachers about their effectiveness. Interviewed teachers attributed this to the need for policies to be updated. Periodical updating of policies with the input of all stakeholders would contribute to an increase in their effectiveness.

### **Areas of strength**

- The HoS is a caring leader of a school community that shares the Gospel values. Collaboration within the SLT is contributing to the good of the school.
- Distributed leadership and empowerment of staff is evident in decision making processes and participation in school life.
- The deputy head and assistant head are ensuring the maximisation of curriculum development sessions by leading their respective year groups, with the participation of LSAs when possible.
- Expertise and good practices are shared during in-house professional development sessions and this is promoting professional growth of the learning community.

### **A way forward**

The administrative SLT is encouraged to maintain the newly introduced weekly briefing sessions as this would not only ensure that all staff are receiving a consistent message but also allows for direct feedback which sustains a good working relationship. The SLT should consider consulting with the members of staff so as to explore ways of how to increase opportunities for more communication.

The SLT is encouraged to involve the different stakeholders in the evaluation and possible update of the current policies. This would contribute to an increase in ownership and effectiveness.

The administrative SLT should plan together a schedule of class observations with an agreed upon structure and which should be shared with the members of staff. Regular lesson observations would offer an excellent opportunity to support teachers' professional growth and also for the administrative SLT to obtain a comprehensive picture and monitor the quality of teaching and learning. Furthermore, lesson observations should include monitoring of actions related to teaching and learning and promotion of the Head's vision.

As part of the internal review the school should sustain learners' feedback, as this would give added value to the school picture. The school should continue working on priority development targets and evaluating implementation over a one year period. This evaluation is then used together with information gathered through various research tools including lesson observations to provide a more holistic picture of the school's strengths and challenges. This data is then represented in a

SWOT analysis and should include the SLT's vision to provide a collected and easy to view understanding of what the different stakeholders consider as strengths and areas for improvement making it easier to select priority development targets. The agreed upon priority development targets should include at least one priority related to teaching and learning. These are then to be translated into SMART action plans which are developed by each year group to ensure that the actions can be implemented in the classroom. This ensures a concerted effort towards whole school improvement. Actions to be taken need to be successfully broken down into measurable steps with clear timescales to facilitate implementation and monitoring. This will also help the teaching staff and SLT to evaluate through the scholastic year, in definite tangible ways, to what extent learners are benefitting from these action plans so as to amend or tweak accordingly.

## Learning and Teaching

### Review Findings

The school is committed towards providing a holistic curriculum and the learning areas stipulated in the NCF are being catered for through a well-balanced timetable of subjects. However, while class timetables include an allowance for dismissal time, reviewers noted that this is at times being extended beyond stipulated procedures and waiting time is not always contributing to a proper closure to the school day.

Co-curricular activities organised during and after school hours, as well as regular school outings, complement and enhance the curriculum. Most learners find the activities organised by the school interesting. The inclusion of such activities strengthens classroom learning and sustains learners' holistic development.

During the last three years the school has focused on the development of literacy through an SDP action plan. This has led to the introduction of a new reading scheme in English and a workbook series in Maltese. Teachers and learners commented that this has left a positive impact on learners in the case of both languages. All classes have a timetabled weekly library session which is serving to develop research skills and encourage reading. Guided reading sessions are being regularly provided to learners from Years 1 to 4. These are being facilitated in Years 1 to 3 by the involvement of parents, whom the school trains to provide this service. This initiative is supporting learners of different reading abilities to keep progressing in this skill while increasing parental involvement

The school participates in *Dinja Waħda* and organises other school-based initiatives focusing on environmental awareness. The fact that the school is currently planning to embark on the national EkoSkola programme will steer the school to address appropriately Education for Sustainable Development which is not limited only to environmental awareness. This would further empower learners to develop an active role in decision-making and problem-solving that are indispensable in the context of lifelong learning. The school also has a student council which is mainly involved in organising fund raising activities. Reviewers noted that learners in the council are not assigned specific roles of responsibility, this is limiting the opportunity for an exposure to participating in democracy thus promoting education for democracy through experiential learning.

Class teachers within year groups collaborate in planning and this is leading to quality longer term planning that includes specific timeframes and clear learning goals. Teachers have a positive relationship with learners who were generally observed to follow set classroom procedures.

Quality planning, an appealing classroom set up, and in most cases effective classroom management, are creating an atmosphere conducive to learning.

Most teachers observed adopt a clear lesson structure and share verbally the learning intention with learners, although it was noted that the learning intention was not always referred to again at the end of the lesson to assess learning. Revisiting the learning intention at the end of the lesson can serve as an opportunity, for both teachers and learners, to assess the learners' level of understanding and whether the learning intention was achieved or not so as to guide future planning. Most teachers explore learners' prior knowledge and nearly all assess learners' level of understanding through appropriate questions. However, it was noticed that learners are invariably expected to raise their hands when teachers ask questions. This is often limiting the possibility of assessing individual learning and at times leading to unwanted disruptions from over enthusiastic learners.

In most lessons observed, reviewers noted good use of pair or group work which is increasing learner participation and contributing to a learner-centred environment. Nonetheless, very few teachers provided opportunities for some form of peer assessment to take place. When properly used, peer assessment helps learners to develop peer-evaluation skills. Teachers give appropriate verbal feedback, however formative written feedback in learners' corrected work was observed to be limited notwithstanding the emphasis on formative assessment in the relevant school policy. Including formative comments in learners' work will help them reflect on their progress and what to do to improve further.

Good time management which sustains an appropriate lesson pace together with quality tasks that form an integral part of lesson development were observed in most lessons. Many teachers make use of different resources that appeal to different learning preferences. These positive aspects in teaching are contributing to learner engagement during lessons.

The interactive whiteboard (IWB) in all classrooms is potentially an important tool to promote digital literacy across the curriculum. Although reviewers noted extensive use of the IWB, there were only few instances where it was used interactively with learners. Such interactivity facilitates learning, increases participation and enhances collaboration.

The school has an assessment policy which focuses on the integration of formative assessment alongside the summative element in the teaching and learning processes. Most teachers keep record of learners' performance. Reviewers noted that many teachers are using a variety of assessment strategies to assess learning which is allowing learners to express themselves through different media. This is a way of effectively addressing learner variability and ensuring that all learners are included.

At the end of each term all teachers upload assessment reports on the school's online information system. This is enabling parents to be constantly abreast with the progress of their child. In Years 1 to 3, reports are based on a number of standards which are marked according to the level reached.

In Years 4 to 6, teachers give summative test/examination marks together with an accumulative assessment mark of every subject based on the work carried out at school and at home. Evidence on the sources of the marks is also given. This continuous assessment process is making learners aware that every single step in the learning process is acknowledged and important. Furthermore, the correction of examination scripts includes a formative component. Teachers review corrected half yearly examination papers with learners. Two of the school's three parents' days, are purposefully organised after the half yearly and the annual examination sessions so that learner performance and ways for improvement could be discussed in view of the corrected examination papers. Moreover, this is facilitated by setting examination papers with sections that match the

school's standards for assessment.

Besides the assessment marks, all reports include the accumulation of the behaviour points. However, reviewers noted that reports do not include any individualised comment neither by the class teacher nor by a member of the administrative SLT on the overall development of the learner. Receiving direct formative feedback would indicate to learners and their parents what to focus on to progress further. Parents are contacted personally in circumstances when the learner is noted to be underperforming. Generally parents are satisfied with the regular information they receive about their child's progress.

Benchmark examination results for the last three years reveal that the school consistently outperforms the national median in all three subjects, significantly so in Mathematics. Benchmark examination results are analysed for improvement purposes.

### **Areas of strength**

- The school is committed towards providing a holistic curriculum.
- The school has a strong focus on the development of literacy that is rendering good results.
- Quality planning, an appealing classroom set up, teachers' positive relationship with learners and frequent use of group work are creating an atmosphere conducive to learning and contributing to learner engagement during lessons.
- The school's online management system helps parents to be abreast with their child's educational progress.
- The school consistently outperforms the national median in all three subjects, significantly so in Mathematics.

### **A way forward**

The school should review the dismissal time to ensure that this is not being extended beyond the stipulated procedures. While maintaining the current efficient way of exiting the school, a calming activity for learners waiting for school transport could be considered. This would bring a proper closure to the school day.

The student council can expose learners to specific roles of responsibility, promoting further education for democracy. Moreover, the school is encouraged to keep up with its plans to start working on the seven step EkoSkola programme which would further empower learners to develop an active role in decision-making and problem-solving that are indispensable in the context of lifelong learning.

Teachers are encouraged to start the lesson by sharing the learning intention and referring to it at the end of the lesson. This would further direct the learners' attention towards the lesson objectives and facilitate a proper lesson closure. An appropriate closure to the lesson would also help both the teacher and the learners to recapitulate the salient points of the lesson and assess the level of understanding. Teachers are encouraged to explore more ways to extend further the learner-centred approach in the classroom by for example including peer assessment or increasing the interactive use of the IWB so as to further increase learner engagement and provide a further stimulating learning environment. The school should consider increasing teachers' know-how in Assessment for Learning as a means to develop these areas for improvement.

The assessment policy should be revised to include the promotion of regular written formative feedback both in learners' work and on the online assessment reports. Administrative SLT are also encouraged to include a comment on the overall development of the learner in the final assessment report.

# School Ethos

## Review Findings

Mutual respect, responsibility and collaboration are not only highlighted in the various school policies and documents but are evidenced in the way various stakeholders interact together and participate in the life of the school. Furthermore, the HoS, the pastoral SLT and the guidance teacher offer services to meet the emotional, psychological and spiritual needs of all stakeholders. Parents praised the strong Catholic ethos and family like atmosphere in the school. This is creating a healthy environment that sustains the well-being of the school community.

The school promotes positive behaviour amongst learners. During review week, reviewers noted that learners were generally well-behaved and collaborated with teachers and peers during the school day. Notwithstanding this, only a few teachers feel that discipline procedures are effective enough. The HoS explained that the SLT deals with learners in a firm but caring manner, however interviewed teachers expressed their concern that sometimes the SLT tends to be more caring than firm. The SLT is concerned about this teachers' concern and would like to address the situation. Tackling such issues openly with teaching staff members would ensure that there is a common understanding for the benefit of learners.

Learners are developing their self-confidence and self-esteem through various in-class and school initiatives. The school assembly is being used to promote the Catholic ethos and to celebrate learners' achievements. Reviewers noted that learners' involvement during assembly through class presentations or performance was limited. Being able to successfully participate in school assemblies would increase in learners their sense of being active members of their school community.

The INCO holds regular meetings with LSAs. LSAs feel supported in their work. Individual Education Plans (IEPs) are regularly developed in the first term with the participation of all stakeholders. There is clear evidence of collaboration between LSAs and teachers both in planning and during lessons. This is facilitating the learning process of learners with a statement of needs as well as the other learners in class. The LSAs files are well organised and communication with parents is constant.

One of the challenges of the school is teacher replacement. Members of the administrative SLT are doing their utmost to replace absent teachers themselves. This is allowing learners to continue to receive their daily entitlement. However, when this is not possible the complementary teacher is asked to take charge of a class. This disruption in the complementary teacher's normal schedule might be limiting the support in classrooms.

Parents are active in various aspects of school life including the PTA committee. The PTA is very active in organising various fund raising and social events for parents during the year, for which attendance is numerous. Furthermore the PTA helps out the school in the organisation of parental educational and formation meetings. This is sustaining the community spirit within the school.

Nearly all learners are happy to belong to the school and nearly all stakeholders would recommend the school to others.

## Areas of strength

- A culture of mutual respect and collaboration is evident amongst all stakeholders within the

school community.

- The school is providing the necessary services for the emotional, psychological and spiritual well-being of all stakeholders.
- Collaboration between LSAs and teachers both in planning and during lessons is facilitating the learning process of learners with a statement of needs as well as the other learners in class.
- Parents take an interest in school life and are actively involved in supporting the school.
- Nearly all learners are happy to belong to the school and nearly all stakeholders would recommend the school to others.

### **A way forward**

Whilst the school should continue to adopt a holistic approach to discipline, the SLT should explore the teachers' cause of concern regarding current practices in sanctioning instances of learner misbehaviour. The SLT is to discuss with members of staff so as to establish a common understanding and facilitate adherence to by all staff.

The SLT should explore ways how to utilise the morning assemblies to involve learners more. These may include classroom presentations revolving round a theme and the promotion of learners work.

The SLT is encouraged to explore alternatives to teacher replacements so as to ensure smooth running of the daily routine.

## 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 administrative SLT should plan together a schedule of class observations with an agreed upon structure and which should be shared with the members of staff. This would provide an opportunity to support teachers' professional growth and to obtain a comprehensive picture while monitoring the quality of teaching and learning that can also inform school development planning. Lesson observations should include monitoring of actions related to teaching and learning and promotion of the Head's vision.
- The SLT has to continue to improve the internal review process by including learners and using a wider variety of information sources, including the Head's vision, to inform the SWOT analysis. All selected priority development targets should be developed by each year group showing clearly the actions to be taken to reach the set priority and how these actions are going to be evaluated and monitored. Target actions should be broken down into measurable steps with clear timescales to facilitate implementation and monitoring. This will help the teaching staff and SLT to evaluate, in tangible ways, to what extent the learners are benefitting from these action plans to bring about improvement.
- The school should increase learner participation by:
  - ensuring that the student council exposes learners to specific roles of responsibility, promoting further education for democracy,
  - keeping up with its plans to start working on the seven step EkoSkola programme,
  - and increasing their active participation in morning assemblies.
- The school should consider increasing the teaching staff's knowledge on Assessment for Learning strategies to reinforce effective learning. Implementation of these strategies may be linked to school development planning and be implemented over a span of time.
- The SLT should involve the different stakeholders in the evaluation and possible update of the current policies. This would contribute to an increase in ownership and effectiveness.

### 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**  
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# 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%