

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
Management, Leadership and Learning

REPORT

Ainm na scoile / School name	St John of God Special School
Seoladh na scoile / School address	Islandbridge Dublin 8
Uimhir rolla / Roll number	19151C

Date of Evaluation: 20-10-2016



WHAT IS A WHOLE-SCHOOL EVALUATION: MANAGEMENT, LEADERSHIP AND LEARNING?

Whole-School Evaluations – Management, Leadership and Learning report on the quality of teaching and learning and on the quality of management and leadership in a school. They affirm good practice and make recommendations, where appropriate, to aid the further development of educational provision in the school.

HOW TO READ THIS REPORT

During this inspection, the inspector(s) evaluated and reported under the following headings or areas of enquiry:

1. Teaching and learning
2. Support for pupils' wellbeing
3. School leadership and management

Inspectors describe the quality of each of these areas using the Inspectorate's quality continuum which is shown on the final page of this report. The quality continuum provides examples of the language used by inspectors when evaluating and describing the quality of the school's provision in each area.

The board of management of the school was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the report, and the response of the board will be found in the appendix of this report.

SCHOOL CONTEXT

St. John of God School is a co-educational special school catering for pupils with special educational needs arising from moderate, severe and profound general learning disabilities, and autistic spectrum disorder (ASD). The pupils range in age from four to eighteen years. The school is under the patronage of the Catholic Archbishop of Dublin and the trusteeship of the St John of God Order. Staffing includes the principal, sixteen teaching posts and thirty special-needs assistants. Most pupils avail of the Department of Education and Skills funded transport. The school and classroom accommodation is maintained to a high standard. The board of management is currently considering the additional accommodation needs of the school in light of the developing needs of the pupils.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

FINDINGS

- There is evidence of very good quality of teaching and learning in classrooms; a broad curriculum is provided with a positive emphasis on the promotion of the pupils' language and communication skills and their independence.
- The highly experienced and committed staff of teachers and special-needs assistants collaborate effectively in creating a welcoming, caring and supportive environment for the pupils.
- The highly committed and conscientious acting principal, deputy principal and in-school management team have contributed significantly to the work of the school over many years.
- An experienced board of management actively supports the development of the school and is commended for its work on behalf of the school community.
- The roles and responsibilities of the in-school management team have not been reviewed for some time and communication and reporting mechanisms require updating.
- While excellent work is undertaken in relation to individual education planning in many classrooms, all classrooms would benefit from the extension of this good practice across the school.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- The in-school management team roles and responsibilities should be reviewed and arrangements should be put in place for more regular meetings and opportunities to communicate with staff members and members of the board of management.
- The individualised planning process for pupils should be reviewed to strengthen the collaborative and team approach to this work, as far as practicable.

DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. THE LEARNING ACHIEVEMENTS OF PUPILS

There is evidence of very good learning achievements of pupils across the school. Classrooms are well organised and attractively presented. Individual and group activities facilitate beneficial pupil involvement in a wide range of learning activities suited to their needs and abilities. Most parents

indicated in the questionnaires that their child was doing well in the school. Pupils' programmes provide for their strengths as learners, while promoting and supporting development in areas of learning need.

Pupils are skilfully supported in developing language and communication skills, through the use of oral language, augmentative approaches, such as manual signing for people with disabilities (LÁMH), gestures, pictures, and the Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS), as appropriate. Well-structured lessons involving cross-curricular activities were in evidence. Pupils' skills in reading and writing are conscientiously promoted according to individual needs and pupils are supported in progressing at their own pace. In the area of numeracy, pupils are enabled to participate in a broad variety of activities suited to the diverse range of needs and abilities in classrooms. The functional aspect of mathematics is supported across the school, and the practical application of skills is given appropriate emphasis with the senior and post-primary age pupils.

Effective and positive classroom management is a key dimension of school practice. Pupils are enabled to develop suitable behaviours to support their participation in learning, and in classroom and school activities. The school has recently introduced the School Wide Positive Behaviour Support (SWPBS) system to support the management of behaviour across the school. Good school arrangements have been put in place to support the implementation of this positive development.

Pupils participate in a broad range of activities across the curriculum areas, with a good emphasis on development of independence and life-skills. Pupils have opportunities to attend and engage purposefully in the areas of personal care and well-being, and in being part of a community, in and beyond the school. The positive and beneficial engagement of pupils in Home Economics was observed. The active participation of pupils in the Arts, Visual Arts, Drama, and especially Music, through the school choir and band is commendable. The pupils were observed participating enthusiastically in Physical Education both in the school hall and in the outdoor play areas, and derived particular enjoyment from activities in the area of dance. Despite the limited space available in the school grounds, some opportunities are provided for outdoor activities, including gardening and horticulture related tasks.

The senior pupils in the school leavers' classes have very positive experiences in the programme that incorporates well-planned opportunities for work experiences in local businesses and services. Pupils' learning is supported by the use of a good range of resources in classrooms, including information and communication technology (ICT). Throughout the school, the pupils' work is attractively displayed in classrooms and circulation areas.

The continuity and progression of pupils is carefully monitored through the school. However, further use could be made of ICT in the recording of pupils' work and progress, and this could be considered in the forthcoming review of the school assessment policy.

2. QUALITY OF TEACHING

The quality of teaching in evidence is very good. Pupils are facilitated in engaging purposefully in a wide range of learning activities across the various age groups and classes. The very good collaboration of classroom teams of teachers and special-needs assistants supports positive pupil involvement. Teaching activities are well planned and structured and carefully linked to the needs, abilities and interests of the pupils. Commendable programmes of work are also provided for the school's senior pupils and school leavers. The organisation and implementation of the "Out and About" programme for senior pupils, which supports pupils in accessing and developing life skills in the community, is highly praised.

Substantial curriculum planning has been undertaken over the years contributing to the good practice observed in teaching in key areas of the curriculum across the school. Ongoing work and careful planning has also been undertaken in the introduction of the Junior Certificate Level 1 and Level 2 programmes in relation to the needs of the pupils in this school. The implementation of these programmes will provide further structured learning opportunities for senior pupils, leading to certification of their work and accomplishments. The classroom preparation for teaching is of a high standard demonstrating good understanding of pupils' learning needs in the different areas of the school.

3. SUPPORT FOR PUPILS' WELL-BEING

The highly experienced and committed staff of teachers and special-needs assistants collaborate effectively in creating a welcoming, caring and supportive environment for the pupils. Pupils' well-being is given due care and attention across the school and a range of organisational arrangements, policies and practices supports the work of the staff in this area. The enthusiasm and willingness of the pupils to engage in learning activities is praiseworthy. In their questionnaire responses, almost all parents feel their child enjoys school. While the overall attendance of the pupils is good, the attendance of a minority of pupils requires closer attention.

In the senior classes, pupils are provided with opportunities to participate in their own individualised education planning process. To strengthen the contribution of the pupil voice in the work of the school, consideration should be given to setting up a pupil council. Effective arrangements are in place for home-school communication, and include the use of diaries. In their questionnaire responses, almost all parents feel communication between home and school is good, that their child feels safe and is well looked after and respected in school.

4. LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The quality of leadership and management in the school is commendable. An experienced board of management actively supports the development of the school and is commended for its work on behalf of the school community. The work of a highly committed and conscientious acting principal, deputy principal, and in-school management team is in evidence in the management of the school and this has contributed significantly to its development over many years. Useful planning across the curriculum areas is undertaken on an on-going basis. However, the roles and responsibilities of the in-school management team have not been reviewed for some time and an early review should be considered. Arrangements should also be put in place for more regular meetings and opportunities for this team to communicate with the wider staff team and with the members of the board.

While excellent work is undertaken in relation to individual education planning, there is scope for this good practice to be extended across the school. The individualised planning process for pupils should be reviewed to strengthen the collaborative and team approach to this work, as far as practicable.

Responses to the parents' questionnaires indicate that parents feel welcome in the school. Almost all parents feel that overall they are happy with the school and that it is well run. The parents are commended for the support they have given to the school over the years, particularly in the area of fund-raising. While the school has previously had a parents' association, it has since lapsed. Consideration should now be given to re-establishing the parents' association.

Confirmation was provided that the board of management has formally adopted the *Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools* without modification and that the school is

compliant with the requirements of the *Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools*.

5. SCHOOL SELF-EVALUATION

The school has engaged actively with school self-evaluation processes and has completed the required school improvement plans and reports.

CONCLUSION

This school's capacity to engage in school improvement and to develop further is very good. There is evidence of an effective school focused on meeting the needs of the pupils and a school community committed to the ongoing development of the work of the school.

Appendix

SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

Submitted by the Board of Management

Part A Observations on the content of the inspection report

The Board of Management of St. John of God Special School welcomes the Whole School Evaluation – Management, Leadership and Learning Report which acknowledges the high standard of teaching and learning, the provision of a broad curriculum and the commitment and collaboration of staff within the school. The report was very positive and constructive in its recommendations. It gives valued positive reinforcement to the Board, the staff and the parents, as well as encouragement to continue working collaboratively to provide a stimulating and productive working environment for pupils and staff.

Part B Follow-up actions planned or undertaken since the completion of the inspection activity to implement the findings and recommendations of the inspection.

The recommendations made regarding the in-school management team and the individualized planning process for pupils will be implemented this year.

THE INSPECTORATE'S QUALITY CONTINUUM

Inspectors describe the quality of provision in the school using the Inspectorate's quality continuum which is shown below. The quality continuum provides examples of the language used by inspectors when evaluating and describing the quality the school's provision of each area.

Level	Description	Example of descriptive terms
Very Good	Very good applies where the quality of the areas evaluated is of a very high standard. The very few areas for improvement that exist do not significantly impact on the overall quality of provision. For some schools in this category the quality of what is evaluated is outstanding and provides an example for other schools of exceptionally high standards of provision.	Very good; of a very high quality; very effective practice; highly commendable; very successful; few areas for improvement; notable; of a very high standard. Excellent; outstanding; exceptionally high standard, with very significant strengths; exemplary
Good	Good applies where the strengths in the areas evaluated clearly outweigh the areas in need of improvement. The areas requiring improvement impact on the quality of pupils' learning. The school needs to build on its strengths and take action to address the areas identified as requiring improvement in order to achieve a <i>very good</i> standard.	Good; good quality; valuable; effective practice; competent; useful; commendable; good standard; some areas for improvement
Satisfactory	Satisfactory applies where the quality of provision is adequate. The strengths in what is being evaluated just outweigh the shortcomings. While the shortcomings do not have a significant negative impact they constrain the quality of the learning experiences and should be addressed in order to achieve a better standard.	Satisfactory; adequate; appropriate provision although some possibilities for improvement exist; acceptable level of quality; improvement needed in some areas
Fair	Fair applies where, although there are some strengths in the areas evaluated, deficiencies or shortcomings that outweigh those strengths also exist. The school will have to address certain deficiencies without delay in order to ensure that provision is satisfactory or better.	Fair; evident weaknesses that are impacting on pupils' learning; less than satisfactory; experiencing difficulty; must improve in specified areas; action required to improve
Weak	Weak applies where there are serious deficiencies in the areas evaluated. Immediate and coordinated whole-school action is required to address the areas of concern. In some cases, the intervention of other agencies may be required to support improvements.	Weak; unsatisfactory; insufficient; ineffective; poor; requiring significant change, development or improvement; experiencing significant difficulties;