

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
Management, Leadership and Learning

REPORT

Ainm na scoile / School name	Saint Bernadette's Special School
Seoladh na scoile / School address	College Farm Road Letterkenny County Donegal
Uimhir rolla / Roll number	19592J

Date of inspection: 04-04-2019



An Roinn Oideachais
agus Scileanna
Department of
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WHAT IS WHOLE-SCHOOL EVALUATION – MANAGEMENT, LEADERSHIP AND LEARNING?

Whole-School Evaluation – Management, Leadership and Learning reports on the quality of teaching and learning and on the quality of management and leadership in a school. It affirms good practice and makes recommendations, where appropriate, to aid the further development of educational provision in the school.

HOW TO READ THIS REPORT

During this inspection, the inspectors evaluated and reported under the following headings or areas of enquiry:

1. The quality of pupils' learning
2. The quality of teaching
3. The quality of support for pupils' well-being
4. The quality of leadership and management
5. The quality of school self-evaluation

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 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.

CHILD PROTECTION

During the inspection visit, the following checks in relation to the school's child protection procedures were conducted:

1. The name of the DLP and the Child Safeguarding Statement are prominently displayed near the main entrance to the school.
2. The Child Safeguarding Statement has been ratified by the board and includes an annual review and a risk assessment.
3. All teachers visited reported that they have read the Child Safeguarding Statement and that they are aware of their responsibilities as mandated persons.
4. The Child Safeguarding Statement meets the requirements of the Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools 2017.
5. The records of the last three board of management meetings record a child protection oversight report that meet the requirements of the Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary schools 2017.
6. The board of management has ensured that arrangements are in place to provide information to all school personnel on the Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools, 2017
7. School planning documentation indicates that the school is making full provision for the relevant aspects of the curriculum (SPHE, Stay Safe, RSE, Wellbeing).
8. Child protection records are maintained in a secure location.

The school did not meet the requirements in relation to checks 3 and 7 above and therefore was not fully compliant with the checks undertaken.

Whole-School Evaluation – Management, Leadership and Learning

Dates of inspection	04-04-2019
Inspection activities undertaken	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meetings with principal and in-school leadership team • Meeting with representatives of the board of management • Meeting with parent representatives • Meeting with teachers • Review of relevant documents 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analysis of parent, pupil and teacher questionnaires • Observation of teaching and learning • Examination of pupils' work • Interaction with pupils • Feedback to principal, deputy principal and teachers

SCHOOL CONTEXT

Saint Bernadette's Special School is a school for pupils of primary and post-primary ages with a diagnosis of a mild general learning disability and some with a moderate general learning disability. The school operates under the patronage of the Roman Catholic Bishop of Raphoe. A number of pupils enrolled have a diagnosis of a developmental or behavioural disorder and are presenting with more complex needs. The school has experienced very significant changes in its leadership and staffing in recent times; the principal was newly appointed earlier in the current school year and is the second principal appointed since the beginning of the current school year. While overall attendance levels among the 68 pupils enrolled are satisfactory at present, it is indicated that high absence patterns have characterised the operation of the school in the past few years. The majority of the pupils travel to the school from a wide catchment area.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

FINDINGS

- During the inspection, the school did not meet the requirements of all checks in relation to its child protection procedures.
- Overall, the quality of learning is satisfactory; pupils have access to a broad range of curriculum experiences, but there is need to further develop provision for Level 2 Learning Programmes (L2LP) and align experiences and levels of challenge more to the needs of pupils.
- The quality of teaching as observed at an overall level is satisfactory but with significant variation observed; classroom planning practices were not satisfactory in all settings.
- The quality of support for well-being, as observed during the evaluation, is commendable with high levels of collaboration, team work and dedication evident among the teachers and the special needs assistants (SNAs) in supporting pupils' well-being during daily interaction; notwithstanding this, the levels of suspension are too high.
- Overall, the quality of leadership and management of the school is fair at the current time; most whole-school curricular and organisational plans are outdated and the school's current enrolment policy is unsatisfactory and inappropriate.
- The principal teacher, who was appointed at the beginning of the school year, carries out his management duties with interest and with insight.
- The quality of school self-evaluation (SSE) is fair and action is required to improve it: there is little awareness of SSE among the wider school community and certain recommendations from previous inspections, most notably in respect of the involvement of parents in the life of the school, whole-school development planning, and classroom planning, feature again in this inspection.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- As a matter of urgency, the school must ensure it meets all checks required of it in relation to its implementation of the Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary schools 2017.
- A consistent whole-school approach to the preparation of plans, to align with *Rule 126 (Revised) of the Rules for National Schools*, should be implemented.
- An in-school behaviour management approach, such as the Management of Actual or Potential Aggression (MAPA) programme, should be implemented.
- The school's enrolment policy requires review; conditions in it under which pupils may continue to be enrolled in the school should be removed.
- Support should be sought from the National Parents' Council – Primary (NPC-P) to enable the establishment of a parents' association and empower parents in their role in the life of the school.
- The board of management should prepare and implement a strategic plan for the review and updating of whole-school policies including developing L2LP planning and provision much more actively across the senior classes.

DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. THE QUALITY OF PUPILS' LEARNING

- Overall, the quality of learning is satisfactory when learner experiences and progression in the school as a whole are considered.
- In a good number of lessons evaluated very good care was taken to encourage pupils during learning, active learning was dominant and many pupils were very enthusiastic and very well focused. Examples were seen of pupil agency and responsibility being developed appropriately according to individual needs, and of successful independent learning opportunities being created for different pupils. There remains scope for further individualisation of levels of challenge to support all learners, including the more able. In teacher questionnaire responses, a significant minority of teachers disagreed that pupils are encouraged to maximise their potential.
- A significant minority of parents who completed a questionnaire disagreed that work was well matched to their child's ability. A majority of parents who responded were of the belief that the school is enabling their child to progress in language and communication and Mathematics.
- The pupils have access to information and communications technology (ICT) to advance their learning; however, much of this equipment is outdated. Within the available grant aid provided to the school there is need for interactive whiteboards, or more updated comparable interactive technology, to be provided in a staged way.
- Older learners have access to programmes of learning under the Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) framework. The school has commenced implementation of Level 2 Learning Programmes (L2LP) in one senior class this year. There is need for L2LP provision to be extended across the senior classes given the profile of the school. School leadership acknowledges this need.
- Good attention is paid in ongoing ways to the development of functional living skills that align with the needs of pupils with a general learning disability. The social area for daily school meals provides ongoing opportunity for social engagement and development of skills of a range of types. Implementing monitoring procedures and diversifying the experiences to include multiple formats of formal and informal dining are advocated.

2. THE QUALITY OF TEACHING

- The overall quality of teaching as observed was satisfactory. However, in individual lessons observed during the evaluation, this ranged widely from weak to very good.
- Teachers provide a bright, organised and stimulating learning environment which is celebratory of pupil achievement, particularly in the subjects of Social, Environmental and Scientific Education, language and Mathematics. In a good number of lessons evaluated, teachers ensured lessons were paced and structured well and were suitably stimulating and engaging for the pupils. Where the very best practices were seen, high quality differentiation took place, visual and concrete resources were used and learning intentions were shared actively before and during learning.
- The quality of practical preparation of resources was very good in a number of settings enabling significant progression both in pupils' experiences as learners and in observable outcomes. In some other lessons and activities, practical preparation was not of the same extent or quality. In a small number of settings it was limited, and did not support the needs of learners in respect of having access to concrete objects of reference or high quality visual example to support learning.
- Overall, the quality of classroom planning has scope for development; with significant variation evident currently. Some planning was of a very good standard; in other settings forward planning was of a poor standard, occurring only in part or in a very limited way. A consistent whole-school approach to align with *Rule 126 (Revised) of the Rules for National Schools* should be implemented to ensure long-term plans, across the curriculum, are prepared in all classes. Planning in some settings should also take greater cognisance of the curriculum guidelines of the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) for pupils with general learning disabilities.
- A number of individualised education plans (IEPs) evaluated during the inspection identified pupils' strengths and priority needs clearly. In some IEPs, learning targets were linked carefully to need and were measurable. In other examples, targets were too broad, constituting ongoing goals or aims, or referred overly to the actions of adults rather than learning outcomes for pupils. There is need for greater consistency of detail across IEPs and in how IEPs are used to monitor progression in learning.
- Some very useful assessment approaches were found in a number of individual settings, mostly linked to active observation and the use of checklists which recorded the acquisition of exact concepts and skills. Such valuable approaches should be extended school-wide.
- In line with the developing profile of enrolment, there is scope for diagnostic assessment in respect of pupils with an autism spectrum disorder (ASD) to be obtained and for whole-school approaches to supporting learners with an ASD to be deepened. Use of the Psychoeducational Profile – Third Edition (PEP3), should contribute to developing baseline assessments. Going forward, use of the Assessment of Functional Living Skills (AFLS) and the Assessment of Basic Language and Learning Skills (ABLSS) can also be considered. Visual prompting was not used as effectively as it could among learners with an ASD to aid them in managing transitions, provide them with better predictability over the school day and help reduce anxiety. On a whole-school level, further active use of the Picture Exchange Communications System (PECS) in this regard is required.

3. THE QUALITY OF SUPPORT FOR PUPILS' WELL-BEING

- The overall support for pupils' well-being, as observed during the evaluation, is commendable. Engagement between adults and children, as observed, was caring, supportive and respectful. Pupils engaged happily with their teachers, with SNAs and other staff members in lessons and other daily incidental interactions observed. In their

questionnaire responses, all teachers expressed the belief that there is a good atmosphere in the school and that its core values are implemented well day-to-day. In engagement with the inspection team, many pupils, in line with their abilities, conveyed sentiments about their enjoyment of learning and of feeling well cared for.

- Very good collaboration was evident between the teachers and the SNAs during the evaluation, most especially when encouraging pupils' engagement during learning experiences.
- In certain other respects, however, practice has scope for further development to ensure well-being is best supported going forward. Both school leadership and teachers reported to the inspection team issues related to managing challenging behaviour that affect the provision of education, and which have led to an overly high number of suspensions. Most parents who completed and returned a questionnaire as part of the evaluation were of the opinion that the school manages children with challenging behaviour well, while a few disagreed and a further few were unsure. Almost all of the pupils who completed a questionnaire indicated an understanding of the existence of school rules and most indicated they felt safe in class and well cared for. Only a majority, however, felt that their fellow pupils behaved well in class or that they felt safe in the school yard. Overall, evidence suggests there is now need for the use of augmented, active in-school behaviour management strategies, through implementation of a whole-school approach such as the Management of Actual or Potential Aggression (MAPA) programme.
- At the time of the evaluation, school leadership had distributed information and engaged in communication with the parents in pursuit of the establishment of a parents' association; these actions are commended. Questionnaire data showed a significant minority of parent respondents disagreed or were unsure if the school actively sought the views of parents on school matters. Just under half indicated that the board of management reported annually to parents on school operation. Further to the school's actions, additional support should be sought from the National Parents' Council – Primary (NPC-P) to enable the establishment of a parents' association and empower parents in their role supporting the education of their children.
- The learners' engagement with woodwork classes and cookery contribute well to their sense of achievement and the overall breadth of their curricular experiences. Their significant achievements in national and local awards are worthy of great commendation.
- Many pupils travel significant distances to the school with a large number of buses arriving each morning. During this evaluation, some pupils were observed arriving on the buses after the official commencement time of the school day.

4. THE QUALITY OF LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

- The overall quality of leadership and management is fair at the current time.
- The board of management is constituted properly and ensures it meets at least five times as required by the guidance for boards of management. It is supportive of the continuous professional development of staff; all teachers confirmed this in their questionnaire responses. At present, however, the records of the board of management do not contain a child protection oversight report that aligns with the requirements of the Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary schools 2017; going forward this must be ensured. While it was reported to the inspection team during the inspection that financial accounts are audited annually, updated summary accounts of the school's income and expenditure are not being presented on an ongoing basis in board of management meeting records; this should occur, in line with best practice.
- The principal teacher, who was appointed at the beginning of the school year, and who is the second principal appointed since the commencement of this school year, carries out his

management duties with interest and with insight. During the evaluation he outlined practical and sensible approaches to support the future development of the school and there is good potential in this leadership approach. The inspection found that a post of responsibility of assistant principal to which the school has been entitled for some time has not been filled on a permanent basis; it is unclear why this has occurred. This is a resource allocated to support the school's leadership and curriculum and syllabus implementation; this appointment process must be progressed as a priority.

- School leadership acknowledges the operational policies of the school require review and the principal has indicated this is being prioritised. The school's enrolment policy is unsatisfactory and inappropriate; the immediate removal of conditions contained in it under which pupils may continue to be enrolled is necessary. During the evaluation, evidence found also indicated a few pupils enrolled do not meet the criteria for enrolment in this special school. This is even where the practice of special schools having expanded their remits, to enrol pupils with a wide range of special needs as referenced in Department Circular 0042/2011, is considered. Going forward the school must ensure enrolment practice aligns with both its policy and the needs of prospective learners.
- Attendance levels among the pupils are satisfactory at present. In the past few years, school records show that there have been high absence patterns. In support of maximising attendance levels going forward, there is need for the board of management to formally prepare and implement an attendance policy.
- Many whole-school curricular plans have been superseded by changes in the school's context and curriculum developments for children with general learning disabilities or do not encompass or describe adequately approaches and programmes currently in use by teachers. A small number of teachers - under a quarter - in questionnaire responses were either unsure or disagreed that whole-school curriculum policies inform teaching and learning in the school. These policies are therefore in need of review; the board should prepare and implement a strategic plan for this to be carried out. Parent involvement in policy development should be strengthened.
- The school facilitates the placement of student teachers from initial teacher education (ITE) school placement programmes.

5. THE QUALITY OF SCHOOL SELF-EVALUATION

- The quality of school self-evaluation (SSE) is fair. The school has engaged previously in the SSE process in respect of literacy and numeracy. There is evidence of re-engagement with the process in respect of written language. However, in meetings, the board members and parents exhibited little awareness of the outcomes of SSE in the school and did not confirm the summarised outcomes of the SSE process and the completed legislative checklist have been communicated to the parent body.
- Under the leadership of the principal and leadership team good potential for school improvement is indicated.
- Partial progression on certain recommendations of previous inspections is indicated. Some recommendations from previous inspections, most notably in respect of furthering parental involvement, whole-school development planning and classroom planning, feature in this inspection.

Appendix

SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

Submitted by the Board of Management

Part A: Observations on the content of the inspection report

- The Board welcomes the report and recognises that there has been significant change in management. The Board is currently in the process of appointing an AP11 post-holder to fully staff the school's management and leadership team.
- The Board is delighted to receive commendation from the Inspectorate with regard to supporting our pupils' well-being. Students' well-being and safety are of paramount importance to the Board.
- The Board welcomes the Inspectorate's recognition that the school provides a broad range of curriculum experience and that the school develops functional living skills that align with our pupils' needs.

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 school has taken action with regards to the Inspectorate's Child Protection concerns. A welcome pack has been designed to ensure all staff must read our Child Safeguarding Statement before commencing any type of work within the school. The Stay Safe programme is currently being taught throughout all classes.
- School planning is being reviewed and the school has obtained the services of the NCSE to help in this matter.
- The Board of Management has provided funding for staff to be trained in MAPA (Management of Actual and Potential Aggression). This training will be completed before the end of this school year.
- The school's enrolment policy has been amended as suggested by the Inspectorate and is awaiting ratification.
- The school has had difficulty in setting up a Parents' Association given the large geographical area that our students come from. However the school has been in contact with the NPC and are trying to find solutions to these challenges.
- The school is rolling out its L2LP pilot programme to all senior classes and have secured training in September to ensure these programmes are up to best practice standards.

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 of 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 very good 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;