

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**  
**Department of Education and Skills**

**Whole School Evaluation**  
**Management, Leadership and Learning**

**REPORT**

<b>Ainm na scoile / School name</b>	Little Angels Special School
<b>Seoladh na scoile / School address</b>	Knocknamona Letterkenny County Donegal
<b>Uimhir rolla / Roll number</b>	19724A

**Date of inspection: 27-04-2018**



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agus Scileanna  
Department of  
Education and Skills

## **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 inspector(s) 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 met the requirements in relation to each of the checks above.

*\* At the time of this inspection two joint managers were acting in place of a board of management in this school.*

## Whole-School Evaluation – Management, Leadership and Learning

<b>Dates of inspection</b>	27-04-2018
<b>Inspection activities undertaken</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Meetings with principal and in-school leadership team</li><li>• Meeting with joint managers</li><li>• Meeting with teachers</li><li>• Review of relevant documents</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Analysis of parent, pupil and teacher questionnaires</li><li>• Observation of teaching and learning</li><li>• Examination of pupils' work</li><li>• Interaction with pupils</li><li>• Feedback to principal, deputy principal and teachers, and to one of the joint managers</li></ul>

### SCHOOL CONTEXT

Little Angels School is a multi-denominational, co-educational, special school for pupils aged three to eighteen years. The school serves a wide catchment area and provides education for pupils with general moderate learning disability, with severe/profound learning disability, and with autistic spectrum disorders (ASD). Two pre-school classes for children with ASD have been operational since 2012. Currently, there are 101 pupils enrolled and attendance is good overall. Teaching staff includes eighteen class teachers, an administrative principal and an administrative deputy principal. Three part-time teachers for Art, Drama and Woodwork, funded by the Donegal Education and Training Board, also work in the school.

The school is under the patronage of the Little Angels Association. The school has been without a board of management since October 2015. At the time of this inspection, two joint managers, appointed in January 2018, were overseeing the governance of the school and arrangements to constitute a new board had commenced.

### SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

#### FINDINGS

- The school provides pupils with a high-quality, holistic educational experience, with an appropriate focus on developing independence, communication and social skills; senior pupils have access to certified learning programmes.
- Teaching is very good overall with teachers and special needs assistants (SNAs) working very well together to provide happy, empowering, motivating learning environments.
- The quality of support for pupils' wellbeing is excellent overall; the current arrangement where some pupils have to wait in buses in the school yard prior to the official commencement time is not satisfactory.
- Currently, two joint managers oversee the governance of the school in an effective manner and they and the patron are working towards the re-establishment of a full board of management; as there has not been a fully operative board for a period of time, many whole-school organisational and curricular policies are in need of review, development and ratification.
- The principal and the in-school management team (ISM) monitor the quality of learning carefully and promote a strong culture of innovation and continuous improvement through the effective implementation of school self-evaluation processes.
- There is scope to strengthen the wider parent voice in school matters and to further support the voice of the pupils.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- The joint managers and patron should continue to work towards the re-establishment of a board of management; once re-established, the board, constituted in line with the *Governance Manual for Primary Schools 2015 – 2019* (DES, 2015), should hold a minimum of one meeting per term and not less than five meetings in any school year, seek relevant training for members from the National Association of Boards of Management in Special Education (NABMSE), manage the school in a spirit of partnership and keep the school community informed about its work.
- School management should review the morning arrangements for the reception of pupils and oversee the development and ratification of whole-school policies: organisational and curricular.
- School management should seek to facilitate the establishment of a parents' association to strengthen the wider parent voice in school matters.
- Teachers should explore ways to further facilitate pupil leadership in the school through, for example, the development of a pupil council.

## DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### 1. THE QUALITY OF PUPILS' LEARNING

- Pupils' overall learning achievements are very good. They were observed participating meaningfully in well-structured, suitably differentiated and age-appropriate lessons linked to their needs and interests. In every classroom, use of visual schedules supported pupils to manage the range of learning activities undertaken on a daily basis. Pupils demonstrated the ability to work independently and collaboratively. In parental questionnaires administered during the evaluation, almost all parents agreed that their child is doing well in school.
- Pupils in the pre-school and junior classes access much of their learning through appropriate play-based approaches. Learning in *Language and Communication* in all classes is very good with some highly commendable experiences observed in daily circle-time activities. Information and communications technology (ICT) was seen to be used very well by pupils with communication difficulties. They are also developing skills in LÁMH signing to support functional communication. Reading and writing skills are developing in accordance with individual abilities. Numeracy skills are developed through the use of concrete materials in lessons as well as in real-life contexts.
- Much learning is accessed through the medium of music. Beautifully displayed art work, including highly praiseworthy three-dimensional constructions, indicate very good skill development across many strands of the visual arts curriculum. Senior pupils' photographic work, including film production, is highly commendable. During this inspection, a production, based on the rights of the child, was evidence of how very effectively Drama is used to support self-esteem. Horticulture and woodwork further enrich learning experiences.
- Whole-school emphasis on Social, Personal and Health Education and the promotion of life-skills supports pupils' holistic development. High-quality physical education lessons, a carefully designed playground, an adventure area and an in-school gymnasium support physical development. Pupils also utilise external facilities to access horse riding, swimming, and bowling, and exercise at a local gym.

- Pupils are supported to access community amenities such as shops, cafes and the local park. They periodically visit other local schools for seasonal events and pupils from local schools come to this school for various activities. Furthermore, as part of the preparation for life modules in the Junior Cycle Level 2 programme, senior pupils undertake work experience in a number of local businesses. This very important aspect of provision should continue to be developed.

## **2. THE QUALITY OF TEACHING**

- The quality of teaching is very good overall with some exemplary practice observed. Teachers organise orderly, attractive, pupil-centred learning environments. They have high expectations of their pupils and enthusiastically motivate them to engage in a wide range of learning experiences. Transitions are managed skilfully with the support of the SNAs. Responses from questionnaires indicate very high levels of parental satisfaction with the quality of teaching in the school.
- Classroom practice draws from *Aistear, the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework*, the Primary School Curriculum and from the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) Guidelines for Pupils with Moderate and Severe and Profound Learning Disabilities. Senior pupils as appropriate are being supported to achieve external certification through the Junior Cycle Level 2 Learning Programmes. The Junior Certificate Level 1 Programme will also be a useful resource for this school.
- The commitment of teachers to further academic study and to the sharing of expertise has a very positive impact on pedagogy. Recent continuous professional development has improved teachers' capacity to monitor progress and achievement in terms of targets set in individual education plans (IEPs).
- Overall, the quality of planning and preparation for teaching is very well contextualised to individual learning needs. Assessment practices support progress in learning. Innovative practices in some classrooms—for example, self-assessment and the regular sharing of digital and scrapbook evidence of learning with the pupils and their parents—could be progressed across the school.

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

- The in-school support for pupils' well-being is excellent overall. Teachers and the support staff work very well together to provide happy learning environments, to ensure very high-quality care and support and to progress independence. Within the teaching staff, expertise in behavioural analysis is a critical support for pupils. Interventions in place to reduce and eliminate challenging behaviours are having a very positive impact in the early intervention classes and in the junior classes in particular.
- The high-quality, multi-sensory environment is very supportive of pupils' needs. Objects of reference, creatively displayed on the doors, support pupils when moving independently to different learning environments.
- Weekly whole-school assemblies celebrate pupils' achievements. Involvement in the Active Schools programme, healthy eating and other sporting initiatives supports physical well-being. Some successful efforts have been made in the senior classes to enhance pupil identity and voice through the introduction of pupil leadership roles in the Green Schools' committee. Teachers should explore ways to further facilitate pupil leadership in the school through, for example, the development of a pupil council.

- Many pupils travel significant distances with a large number of buses arriving at the school each morning. During this inspection, some pupils were observed to wait on the buses in unsuitable conditions prior to the official commencement time.

#### **4. THE QUALITY OF LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT**

- Since January 2018, two joint managers have overseen the governance of the school and do so in an effective manner. The joint managers and the patron are working towards the re-establishment of a full board of management; the school has not had a fully operative board of management since 2015.
- The absence of a fully operative board of management for that period of time impacted negatively on the governance of the school. The joint managers have worked earnestly to ensure that appropriate measures are being put in place to ensure that appropriate governance and accountability measures are re-established.
- The in-school leadership provided by the principal has been highly effective in promoting progressive pedagogical practice; this in turn is resulting in high-quality learning outcomes. High expectations regarding teaching and learning are communicated clearly to teachers, resulting in very positive learning experiences. The transition of pupils in and out of the school is managed carefully in consultation with relevant professionals.
- The work of the deputy principal and the other post holder contributes to the very efficient day-to-day operation of the school. Going forward with an enlarged in-school management (ISM) team, regular formal meetings of the team are advised. Leadership training should be sought for new members of the ISM team.
- There is regular, on-going communication with parents through a system of home-school diaries, regular phone conversations and the school website. There is no parents' association. In questionnaires, all parents agreed that there is a good atmosphere in the school and almost all agreed that their child feels safe and well looked after. Almost all parents agreed that the school is well run. However, less certainty was indicated with the statement *'the school regularly seeks the views of parents on school matters'*.

#### **5. THE QUALITY OF SCHOOL SELF-EVALUATION**

- The school has engaged very well with school self-evaluation (SSE). A number of key areas have been identified for targeted improvement in a development plan, which requires board approval.
- Going forward, if the whole-school community—management, staff, parents and pupils—determines to work together in a spirit of co-operation and commitment, then there should be very good opportunity for school improvement and further development.

# **Appendix**

School response to the report

**Submitted by the Board of Management**

## **Part A: Observations on the content of the inspection report**

We joyfully welcome the report's findings which identify:

- The high-quality holistic experience for our pupils which results in very high-quality care and support in a happy learning environment.
- The exemplary quality of teaching observed.
- The celebratory approach towards our pupils' achievements.
- The excellent support for our pupils' well-being reinforced by a high-quality multi-sensory environment.
- The highly effective leadership which promotes progressive pedagogical practices resulting in high-quality learning outcomes.

## **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 excellent in-school support for our pupils will be further enhanced by ensuring that issues with Bus Éireann regarding the reception of our pupils each morning are addressed within the constraints of the current physical limitations of the school site.
- While many initiatives e.g. whole school assemblies, the Green Schools Committee etc. enhance pupil identity, voice and leadership roles, we will seek further innovative ways to facilitate student leadership perhaps through the development of a form of pupil council.
- We look forward to the establishment of a parents' association which has always been a deeply held aspiration of the school. We seek to further strengthen "the wider parent voice" as an extension of our already highly effective home/school communication system.
- The existing organisational and curriculum policies which have been informed by D.E.S. policies and circulars and the changing needs of the school will now be ratified by the board of management.
- We highly commend the in-school management team who very successfully organise and co-ordinate the large cohort of ancillary staff to meet the complex needs of our pupils.



## 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
<b>Very Good</b>	<b>Very good</b> 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 <b>outstanding</b> 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
<b>Good</b>	<b>Good</b> 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 <b>very good</b> standard.	Good; good quality; valuable; effective practice; competent; useful; commendable; good standard; some areas for improvement
<b>Satisfactory</b>	<b>Satisfactory</b> 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
<b>Fair</b>	<b>Fair</b> 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
<b>Weak</b>	<b>Weak</b> 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;