An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

St Catherine’s Special N.S.Newcastle
Co. Wicklow
Uimhir rolla: 19522L

Date of inspection: 16 April 2010
WHOLE-SCHOOL EVALUATION

This report has been written following a whole-school evaluation of St. Catherine’s Special National School, Newcastle, Co. Wicklow. It presents the findings of an evaluation of the work of the school as a whole and makes recommendations for the further development of the work of the school. During the evaluation, the inspectors held pre-evaluation meetings with the principal, the teachers, the school’s board of management, the patron/trustees and representatives of the parents. The evaluation was conducted over a number of days during which inspectors visited classrooms and observed teaching and learning. They interacted with pupils and teachers, examined pupils’ work, and interacted with the class teachers. They reviewed school planning documentation and teachers’ written preparation, and met with various staff teams, where appropriate. Following the evaluation visit, the inspectors provided oral feedback on the outcomes of the evaluation to the staff and to the board of management. 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.

1. INTRODUCTION – SCHOOL CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

St. Catherine’s Special National School provides education and related services for children and young people with moderate general learning disabilities, severe to profound general learning disabilities, and autistic spectrum disorders (ASDs) in County Wicklow. The school operates under the patronage of St. Catherine’s Association Ltd, formerly known as the Co. Wicklow Association for the Mentally Handicapped Ltd. The teaching staff consists of the principal, eighteen full-time teachers and part-time teachers for Home Economics and Physical Education. The Department of Education and Skills funds forty-two special needs assistants (SNAs) and the patron body also funds SNA support for pupils. There were one hundred and three pupils enrolled at the time of this evaluation. The pupils range in age from three years, in the ASD preschool classes, to eighteen years in the classes for school leavers. Enrolment at the time of the last school evaluation in 2004 was sixty-six pupils. Since the establishment of the ASD pre-school classes in 2005, provision has grown to eight classes for pupils with ASD. The expansion of provision for pupils with ASD has been a major feature of the school’s development in recent years.

St. Catherine’s is located over three sites close to the villages of Newtownmountkennedy and Newcastle, Co Wicklow. Opened in 1983, the main school building is situated at Kilmullen Lane and accommodates pupils with moderate general learning disabilities and two post-primary classes for pupils with autism. The second section of the school, known as the EDC (Educational Development Centre) is located on the grounds of Newcastle Hospital. The majority of pupils attending this section of the school have severe to profound general learning disabilities. The third section of the school comprises the classes for children with ASD and is accommodated in a house known as “Barnacoyle” which is adapted for the purpose and located south of Newcastle village.

The patron, St. Catherine’s Association, provides essential support to the school through its funding of health-related personnel and ancillary supports. Services provided include nursing, psychology, speech and language therapy, physiotherapy, occupational therapy and behaviour specialists. Pupils attend St. Catherine’s National School following psychological assessment, and also, where appropriate, referral by other professionals. While some pupils attend directly from the St. Catherine’s early services and preschool programmes, other pupils are referred from local health agencies and schools. Transport to school for the majority of pupils is funded by the Department of Education and Skills.
2. **QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT**

2.1 Board of management

The board of management is properly constituted, and meets on a regular monthly basis during the school year. The board is conscious of and endeavours to fulfil its statutory responsibilities. The members of the board have extensive experience in a number of areas, including the education of children with special needs, disability services and community affairs. The board addresses a variety of school organisational issues, including staffing, policies and procedures, resources and staff training matters. At the present time, school accommodation is a central concern of the board and it is most anxious to progress the new school building project, which is at an advanced stage of planning with the Department of Education and Skills. Minutes of the school board meetings are maintained and accounts are audited annually. It is clear that the members of the board of management are firmly committed to the ongoing development of the school and the provision of a high quality of education for the pupils. The members of the board of management are commended for their commitment to the work and development of the school.

2.2 In-school management

The in-school management team is made up of the principal, deputy principal and teachers with special duties posts of responsibility. The principal is highly professional, committed and diligent in carrying out her responsibilities and the school has developed significantly in recent years. The principal facilitates the development of an open and collegial school environment and addresses the curricular, organisational, and pastoral needs of the school in a proactive and effective manner. She works closely with the staff and aims to ensure that the educational needs of the pupils are catered for in a safe and caring environment. She supports staff in the implementation of a number of programmes across the curriculum areas to ensure that all pupils are appropriately challenged and enabled to achieve their own potential. The principal communicates effectively with the parents and guardians of the pupils and is commendably collaborative in liaising with the wider school community and the various agencies with which the school interfaces.

The principal is supported in a highly capable manner by a conscientious and productive team of deputy principal, assistant principal and four teachers holding special duties posts of responsibility. These in-school management team members carry out their duties in a committed and professional manner. The team meets regularly, formally and informally, and works impressively in collaboratively and proactively addressing the ongoing developmental organisational, curricular and pastoral concerns of the school.

A comprehensive array of duties in relation to the curriculum, school organisation and pastoral concerns are undertaken by the in-school management team. Current areas of responsibility include: curriculum development for specific groups of pupils, communication and language, Mathematics, Visual Arts, SESE, information and communication technology (ICT), IEP co-ordination, FETAC co-ordination, mentoring of new teachers, and the development of resources for teaching and learning. The responsibilities of the post holders are reviewed on an ongoing basis and duties are amended to take account of the changing needs of the school.

2.3 Management of resources
The teachers in St Catherine’s have a good range of professional experience and their expertise and strengths are taken into consideration when classes are being allocated. Many of the teachers have undertaken in-career development training and postgraduate courses in special needs education. Specialist training includes the areas of Applied Behavioural Analysis (ABA), the Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS) and Treatment and Education of Autistic and related Communication Handicapped Children (TEACCH). Staff members have also taken courses in LAMH, Positive Behaviour Support, Primary Movement, ICT, literacy, and assessment. Over the years, the school has worked closely with the school development planning and special education support services.

Arrangements are in place to support the induction of newly qualified teachers and new members of staff into the work of the school. Newly appointed teachers and other staff in the ASD classes are provided with an extensive locally-organised, structured induction programme. The programme covers the use of ABA, PECS and LAMH signs. This valuable programme has developed and broadened over the years, both in terms of the content covered and the range of professional disciplines involved. Future developments should focus on establishing a firm foundation in the understanding of autism and its implications for teaching and learning, and an understanding of both the rationale and the practice of the main teaching approaches currently in use in Irish schools that cater successfully for pupils with ASD. The Special Education Support Service (SESS) could be asked to provide assistance in this regard. Building on the extensive professional development and training undertaken to date, an audit of training needs should be undertaken with a view to prioritising the current and emerging professional development needs of the staff.

There are forty two special needs assistants (SNAs) funded by the Department of Education and Skills and a further eight SNAs funded by St. Catherine’s Association Ltd. The SNA team plays a valuable role in meeting the needs of the pupils and team members demonstrate dedication and commitment in their work. Very efficient secretarial and administrative support is provided to the school.

Planning for a new school building is at an advanced stage. Most of the classroom and ancillary accommodation is in temporary buildings. Notwithstanding this, the school authorities and staff have made good use of the buildings and prefabricated accommodation available to them. The teachers have access to a good range of resources to support the teaching and learning programmes and they use classroom space effectively. The work of the board of management in progressing the planning of the new school building is commended.

2.4 Management of relationships and communication with the school community

The school endeavours to promote positive and supportive relationships with the parents and guardians of the pupils and good channels of communication have been developed between home and school. Parents’ and guardians’ access to the school principal and teaching staff is readily facilitated. Annual individual education planning meetings are held during the year and additional meetings are arranged as necessary or on request. A written report is provided at the end of the school year.

The parents of the pupils have been active in their support of the work of the school over many years and in a range of activities including assistance with school events and outings, and in fundraising. The parent representatives on the board of management also facilitate the communication of the views of parents to the board of management. The parents of the pupils
attending the ASD classes located in Barnacoyle have formed a parents’ group which liaises productively with the staff team in that setting. While parents are clearly active in the life of the school, currently there is no formal parents’ association for the whole school. It is recognised that the wide catchment area of the school is a significant factor in sustaining an active parents’ association. Nonetheless, an active parents’ association, affiliated to the National Parents Council, could further enhance the role of parents in the school community and provide a broader platform for communication between parents and the school among the parents of pupils from all sections of the school community. It is recommended that the board of management continue its efforts to re-establish the St. Catherine’s School parents association.

2.5 Management of pupils

The behaviour of the pupils is carefully managed. Teachers and SNAs display high expectations in relation to pupil behaviour and are consistent in implementing a range of behaviour management strategies appropriate to the needs of the pupils. Suitable pupil behaviour is supported by effectively organised classroom routines and a well-managed school environment. The use of visual structure in the classroom environment and within tasks was observed widely throughout the school. This form of guidance and support, which is considered particularly useful for pupils with autism, can be developed further to good effect. Positive pupil interaction is encouraged and supported and group activities along with pair work are skilfully fostered in many classrooms. Expectations of appropriate behaviour are effectively communicated to the pupils verbally and through the use of LAMH signs and gesture. A comprehensive whole-school code of behaviour guides staff in addressing behavioural issues when they arise. Support in managing challenging behaviour of a serious nature is also available through the interdisciplinary team. The teachers, SNAs and clinic team members work collaboratively, and in consultation with parents, in addressing the issues involved. Across the school, supportive affirming classrooms are in evidence. Purposeful curricular activities, visual schedules, work and reward systems, opportunities for pupil choice and decision-making and constructive feedback, all contribute to fostering a positive learning environment for the pupils.

3. Quality of School Planning

3.1 School planning process and implementation

Commendable, extensive and high quality work has been undertaken in relation to whole-school planning, and the outcome contributes significantly to the work of the school. Comprehensive policies have been developed to guide practice across the range of organisational, curricular and pastoral areas of the work of the school. A flexible, effective and enabling school planning process has been developed and the in-school management team and individual teachers are proactively addressing policy issues and responding to the emerging needs of the school.

Organisational policies address a variety of areas, including, enrolment, code of behaviour, health and safety, challenging behaviour, employee training, and child protection. Curriculum planning provides for a developmental and differentiated approach to teaching and learning in relation to the needs of the pupils. Plans for specific curriculum areas outline aims, objectives and a summary of content, methodologies and approaches. Development of curriculum policy is guided by the Primary School Curriculum and to the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) Guidelines for Teachers of Students with General Learning Disabilities.
The board should revise the enrolment policy of St. Catherine’s School. The revised policy should refer appropriately to the designation granted to the school by the Department of Education and Skills, and to the categories of special education needs the school provides for, i.e. moderate general learning disabilities, severe to profound general learning disabilities and autism. Consideration should be given to extending access for parents to the extensive policy development work that has been undertaken by the school. A reactivated parent's association could facilitate opportunities to disseminate relevant school policy documents to the wider parent community of the school.

The St. Catherine’s school child protection policy is incorporated in the “Trust in Care” policy of the St. Catherine’s Association Ltd. This policy states that the Association subscribes to, and abides by the guidelines of *Children First, National Guidelines for the Protection and Welfare of Children* (Department of Health and Children, 1999). This “Trust in Care” policy has been adopted by the board of management. Confirmation was also provided that these child protection procedures have been brought to the attention of management, school staff and parents; that a copy of the procedures has been provided to all staff (including all new staff); and that management has ensured that all staff are familiar with the procedures to be followed. A designated liaison person (DLP) and a deputy DLP have been appointed in line with the requirements of the guidelines. In addition, Child Protection Training has been provided by both the education and health agencies, for all school staff over a number of years.

3.2 Classroom planning

The process of whole-school planning contributes to effective classroom practice. Classroom planning of a high standard is in evidence and long and short term teacher plans refer to the primary curriculum guidelines and the NCCA *Guidelines for Teachers of Students with General Learning Disabilities*. Suitable records of progress are maintained along with folders of samples of the pupils’ work across the curriculum areas. The introduction, within the ASD classes, of curriculum planning formats that are commonly used in other areas of the school is a positive development. Likewise, aspects of the assessment, planning and recording practice developed within the ASD classes have potential benefits for pupils in other classes. Teachers in both settings are commended for their willingness to share practice in this regard.

A commendable and carefully structured individual education planning process facilitating a collaborative approach and involving the pupils’ parents, school staff, and members of the interdisciplinary team has been established. The process also provides for the participation of the individual pupil where this is feasible and appropriate.

4. Quality of learning and teaching

4.1 Overview of learning and teaching

A high quality of teaching and learning was observed in classrooms. Pupils are supported in developing a positive attitude to learning, and activities and tasks are suitably differentiated to cater for individual needs and abilities. Staff endeavour to provide the pupils with stimulating and relevant opportunities for learning. A wide variety of teaching approaches is used across classrooms and good practice in the use of circle time, group and pair work, and individual activities were observed. Suitable attention is given to the promotion of independence and the fostering of language and communication, functional and social skills. Development in literacy and numeracy is fostered and due attention is given to the practical application of skills during the
school day. Throughout the school the pupils are encouraged to be responsible and active in the learning activities and they are provided with supportive feedback as they engage purposefully across the curriculum areas.

Teachers use a range of methodologies in teaching pupils with ASD. Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA) is well established within the school. It is commendable that there is evidence of breadth and flexibility in the school’s use of ABA. Communication approaches, including picture-based and signed communication (PECS and LAMH) are also well established. The use of visual structure, cues and schedules in the classroom layout and within the presentation of tasks and activities is emerging as a positive and growing feature of practice that has further potential to build on the learning styles of the pupils, to develop independence through adult-free task completion, and to promote pupil self-management. There is scope for further development of interactive learning approaches that involve staff taking the lead from the pupil, partnering the pupils in play and exploiting intrinsically meaningful situations to promote social interaction, communication and imagination.

In the ASD classes, learning takes place in a range of contexts, including one-to-one instruction, classroom based group activities, play, community settings, visits and incidental interactions. There is a strong emphasis on individual learning tasks and direct staff support. Group contexts frequently involved pupils completing tasks alongside or in proximity to other pupils. This may reflect the current stage of social development of many of the pupils. Staff will be aware of the importance of creating, where possible, opportunities to promote pupil to pupil interaction within activities.

Reflecting an emphasis placed on ABA methodology and the assessment instruments used to identify pupils current level of functioning, learning targets, are typically outlined in terms of behavioural repertoires and specific, measurable skills to be developed. There is evidence in all classes of concern to align skill development objectives to the areas, subjects and strands of the Primary School Curriculum. In this context, some very good examples were seen of the successful use of activities linked to curricular subjects and cross-curricular themes to create rich learning contexts, within which communication, social interaction and imagination can be promoted. The sharing of such practice across classrooms will enhance the quality of curriculum delivery.

4.2 Language

Language/Communication

Practice in classrooms is guided by a carefully considered and detailed whole-school policy for the area of language development and literacy. School staff endeavour to promote communication and to enable all pupils to understand and to communicate their needs. In most classrooms, visual timetables and schedules are employed effectively to provide guidance and structure to the pupils on the organisation of their day at school. The staff give careful attention to the development of the receptive and expressive oral language skills of the pupils. Augmentative communication approaches, including LAMH and PECS, are used with consistency in classrooms to support communication and purposeful engagement in the learning activities. Language-experience approaches are used effectively and staff are skilful in their use of daily classroom and school activities to foster meaningful interaction and oral and written communication. Teachers provide effectively for dedicated language lessons, and for the promotion of language and communication across the curriculum areas and throughout the school day. Activities such as circle time and group work are well managed and enable pupils to interact and engage beneficially in
communicative opportunities. Where appropriate, there is good collaborative practice in relation to the work of the speech and language therapist to promote the language and communication skills of individual pupils. Good use is made of ICT, including digital photography to support the language development work in classrooms. A wide variety of activities is undertaken in reading and writing. The programme is promoted across the school and caters for pupils at the early stages of literacy through to pupils with more advanced literacy needs. In the senior and post-primary classes many pupils are working on functional literacy activities and developing social sight vocabularies. The pupils are provided with relevant, stimulating and suitably differentiated activities with reference to their needs and abilities.

4.3 Mathematics

Classroom practice in Mathematics is guided by a whole-school policy that provides for the diversity of needs, abilities and ages of the pupils. The learning activities are carefully structured and a wide selection of useful resources is employed. Concrete materials, visual aids, and activity-based learning approaches are all employed at a level suited to the needs of pupils. In the junior classrooms there is an appropriate focus on early mathematical activities. Good use is made of mathematical materials and number rhymes are skilfully employed to consolidate awareness and understanding of numerals, number recognition and sequence. The activities in Mathematics are usefully linked to other curriculum areas, reinforcing the development of concepts and providing further opportunities to practise skills, particularly in areas such as Home Economics. Individual and group activities are well organised and pupils are supported in progressing according to their abilities and interests. In the senior and post-primary classes, mathematical activities have a suitable social and life skills orientation. Pupils practise activities, such as those related to managing money, shopping, eating out, planning time, and using television guides and timetables. Staff provide opportunities for pupils to practise Mathematics skills during planned activities in the community.

4.4 Social, Environmental and Scientific Education (SESE)

A broad, interesting and enriching range of activities is undertaken in the area of SESE. The classroom programmes are guided by useful and well-documented school policy. Lessons provide for specific activities in History, Geography and Science, along with thematic activities and projects. A suitable emphasis on active and experiential learning approaches is in evidence. Curriculum activities are differentiated to meet the needs, interests and ages of the pupils. Good use is made of ICT and digital photography is employed in recording activities and providing opportunities for further discussion and language development. There is also an appropriate emphasis on using the local and outdoor environment. Most classrooms have a suitable selection of visual and concrete resources to support teaching and learning activities and the pupils engage positively in the learning experiences.

Home Economics

Pupils have access to a regular lesson in Home Economics. The activities are organised in a suitably equipped and resourced home economics room. A carefully planned programme is provided to the pupils who attend in small groups. They are provided with well-supported opportunities to practise skills related to the preparation of food and to develop an awareness of essential hygiene and safety skills. The pupils clearly enjoyed and participated actively and beneficially in the lessons observed. Through their active and purposeful engagement in the lessons, pupils are enabled to develop relevant independence and practical life skills. Useful
cross-curricular linkages are made, particularly in relation to areas such as Social, Personal and Health Education, and Mathematics. Important personal and social skills are also facilitated through the home economics activities.

**Horticulture**

A number of pupils access activities in Horticulture. In the lesson observed, pupils clearly enjoyed participating in the outdoor pursuits and were provided with opportunities to develop useful skills related to their areas of interest. This area has significant recreational and vocational potential for the pupils.

### 4.5 Arts Education

The programme of activities for Visual Arts, Music and Drama is guided by well developed whole-school policy. The staff place a commendable emphasis on giving pupils opportunities to express their individuality and creativity. Good practice was observed as pupils engaged in imaginative and expressive activities. In the Visual Arts, the pupils are provided with a variety of occasions to explore and experience a range of materials and approaches. The fostering of language development and the raising of the awareness of emotions are facilitated through the teaching approaches adopted. The pupils’ efforts are affirmed and their work is prominently displayed in classrooms and circulation areas. Music is used successfully to support learning across the curriculum areas. Pupils are provided with good opportunities to listen and to respond, and to take part in music-making activities, in relation to their needs and abilities. The social dimension of music is successfully provided for, and the pupils enjoy singing, particularly, as part of a larger group activity on occasions such as school assemblies, special occasions and at seasonal events. Drama is used across the curriculum areas to support pupil participation and engagement in the learning activities. Teachers employ drama activities to facilitate language development opportunities, and to explore social and emotional contexts relevant to the pupils experience. The pupils are supported and affirmed in their participation.

### 4.6 Physical Education

Conscientious attention is given to Physical Education across the school and the work of the classroom teachers is further supported by a specialist teacher. A comprehensive programme of activities is provided and pupils engage purposefully and clearly enjoy the physical education sessions. Lessons incorporate a range of activities to include school development and participation in games and sport. Good use is made of the space available in the school hall and of the equipment and materials employed during the lessons. Appropriate attention is given to the social and recreational dimensions of Physical Education. The lessons observed were well structured to cater for the needs of individual pupils, and skilfully delivered. Opportunities are also provided for swimming and horse-riding on a rotational basis. Commendably, the school also participates in local and national sports programmes and events.

### 4.7 Social, Personal and Health Education

Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) is a key aspect of the school curriculum. A broad range of opportunities is provided to support pupils in their personal and social development. Teaching and learning in SPHE is facilitated through specific lessons, the integration of themes and topics across the curriculum, and through the promotion of a positive classroom and school climate. A good selection of methodologies is in evidence, as pupils take part in activities to promote awareness of themselves and others. Circle-time activities are usefully employed in
exploring pupils’ concerns and interests in a social context. The daily activities of the classroom, school routines and interactions provide regular opportunities to address SPHE-related themes and issues. Appropriate pupil interaction and co-operation is fostered. Important cross curricular links are made, particularly with the areas of Home Economics and Physical Education. Pupils are encouraged to develop a sense of responsibility and to make safe and healthy choices. Independence and self-help skills are fostered. In most classrooms pupils are, from time to time, allocated particular tasks and duties for which they are responsible. The Relationships and Sexuality Education programme is incorporated within the wider SPHE programme and is differentiated to cater for the pupils’ diverse learning needs. In the activities undertaken, staff endeavour to promote the development of skills which will enable the pupils to become independent and to participate in their communities to the greatest extent possible.

4.8 Assessment

St Catherine’s takes a positive behaviour approach that is concerned with the factors that influence behaviour and with establishing a multi-element approach with the goals of reducing challenging behaviour and increasing skills and independence. A variety of informal assessment instruments are in use. These include teacher observation, monitoring of pupils’ activities, checklists, projects, teacher-devised tests, work samples and photographs of students at work. Teachers carefully observe, assess, monitor and record the progress and achievements of the pupils in their classes across all areas of their school work, behaviour and personal development.

The school is exploring the introduction of suitable elements of the Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC) programmes to the post-primary programme of St. Catherine’s School. It is recommended that this approach be developed as it would provide routes to formal certification of achievement, within a national framework, for those pupils for whom this would be relevant and appropriate.

A range of standardised tests are used to check pupil progress in a number of areas including literacy. Some teachers, particularly those in the pre-school autism classes, have begun using formal protocols of verbal behaviour analysis to identify a baseline of learning, language and social skills which can be used to inform planning and guide intervention. All of the assessment procedures currently in place effectively support individual planning for pupils.

An admirable process is underway to develop the use of assessment practices in the school. The deputy principal has a remit to develop a whole-school assessment policy as part of her post of responsibility and, at the time of the evaluation, she was engaged in an examination of the assessment processes within the school, conducting research into assessment, creating a school inventory of tests, and consulting with therapists, psychologists and teachers. She had recently led a staff day on assessment which presented information on tests and encouraged teachers to pilot their use for consideration for use by the whole school. This is commendable practice.

5. Quality of Support for Pupils

5.1 Pupils with special educational needs

This school which is designated as a school for pupils with moderate general learning disability, also has classes for pupils with severe to profound learning disabilities and ASD. The majority of these pupils present with complex special educational needs. The teachers and SNAs work capably and in a committed manner to address the diverse of needs of the pupils. Many staff
members have accessed continuous professional development and training relevant to the needs of the pupils. Important support is provided to the pupils of the school through the nursing, therapy and other departments funded by the St. Catherine’s Association. Good collaborative practice between teachers, SNAs and other professionals is in evidence as all staff endeavour to address the variety of needs of individual pupils. A good individualised planning process supports this collaborative approach and facilitates parents in their involvement in the education programme of their child. This school has developed a comprehensive range of policies and programmes which aim to cater appropriately for the learning needs of its pupils.

5.2 Other supports for pupils: disadvantaged, minority and other groups
The characteristic spirit of this school is inclusive and the positive and caring school culture facilitates the participation of pupils from all backgrounds in the school community.

6. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- The board of management is highly supportive of the development of the work of the school.
- The principal is highly committed and effective in her leadership of the school and is supported by a very effective in-school management team.
- The teachers and staff demonstrate high levels of commitment, enthusiasm and professionalism in carrying out their duties.
- Interdisciplinary collaborative practice of a high standard was in evidence across the school.
- Very effective teaching practices across a range of curriculum areas were observed in classrooms.

As a means of building on these strengths and to address areas for development, the following key recommendations are made:

- Building on the extensive training undertaken to date, an audit of training needs should be undertaken with a view to prioritising the current and emerging professional development needs of the staff.
- Consideration should be given to providing routes to formal certification of achievement for those pupils for whom this would be relevant and appropriate, for example through the FETAC award system.
- The board of management should continue its efforts to re-establish a parents association to represent parents from all sections of the school community.

Post-evaluation meetings were held with the staff and board of management where the draft findings and recommendations of the evaluation were presented and discussed.

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Appendix

School response to the report

Submitted by the Board of Management

Area 1: Observations on the content of the inspection report

The Board of Management and Staff of St. Catherine’s Special School welcome the Whole School Evaluation Report and wish to commend the Inspectorate for the professional and courteous manner in which the WSE was undertaken. The report is thorough and comprehensive and acknowledges the many significant developments which have taken place in the school in recent years.

The Board of management is particularly pleased that the report recognised and commented positively on the following.

- Whole school planning
- The work of the In-school management team
- The high standards in classroom planning and curriculum planning formats in the ASD classes.
- The range of teaching methodologies used throughout the school.
- Assessment procedures and individualised planning for pupils.
- The positive learning environment for the pupils.
- The high standard of collaborative practice between teaching staff, SNAs and the multidisciplinary team.

Area 2: Follow-up actions planned or undertaken since the completion of the inspection activity to implement the findings and recommendations of the inspection
The Board of Management accepts the conclusions and key recommendations made in the report. The Board will endeavour to facilitate the implementation of the recommendations and these will form the basis for future school development planning. The school is currently engaged in planning for and developing the following areas,

- **Professional Development**: The current professional development needs of staff will be identified and a programme of training to meet these needs will be put in place.

- **Enrolment Policy**: The school’s enrolment policy will be reviewed and will make reference to the categories of special education needs that the school now provides for.

- **Formal Certification**: The school will endeavour to provide a curriculum which will afford pupils the opportunity to achieve formal certification in recognition of the work they have completed in school.

- **Parents Association**: The Board will consider how to build on the strengths of the parent’s committee and will explore how best to develop a parents association.

- **Assessment**: The school plans to further develop the use of assessment at all class levels throughout the school. In particular the school will focus on assessments for use with pupils who have severe and profound learning disabilities and functional life skills assessments for post primary aged pupils.