

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

**Whole School Evaluation
REPORT**

**Scoil Mochua, Deansrath, Old Nangor Road,
Clondalkin, Dublin 22**

Uimhir rolla: 19590F

Date of inspection: 4 March 2010



**AN ROINN | DEPARTMENT
OIDEACHAIS | OF EDUCATION
AGUS SCILEANNA | A N D S K I L L S**

WHOLE-SCHOOL EVALUATION

This report has been written following a whole school evaluation of Scoil Mochua, Deansrath, Clondalkin, Dublin 22. 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, and representatives of the parents' association. 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

Scoil Mochua is a special school for pupils with physical disability aged three to eighteen years. The school was established in 1977 under the patronage of the Irish Association for Spina Bifida and Hydrocephalus and under the aegis of the Department of Education. The mission statement of the school states that it seeks to promote the self-actualization and empowerment of each individual and that a key aim is to provide an atmosphere, environment and services which enable all who participate in the school to develop to their full potential.

The school has been located on the present site since 1980. The current staffing allocation provides for principal and ten full-time teaching posts. At the time of the evaluation, the school also had the services of two part-time teachers: a music teacher for two days a week who is shared with the Central Remedial Clinic (CRC) School, Clontarf and a second post for fifteen hours per week for Physical Education and sports-related activities. There are also thirteen full-time and one part-time special needs assistant (SNA) posts to support the pupils' care needs. The school benefits from the services of a school secretary, a full-time caretaker, an assistant caretaker under the Community Employment Scheme and part-time grounds maintenance personnel. Both the school accommodation and grounds are maintained to a very high standard and are indicative of the care with which staff members carry out their duties.

The patronage of the school transferred in 1995 from the Irish Association for Spina Bifida and Hydrocephalus to the CRC. The school receives clinical support from the CRC. The services available to the pupils include medical, nursing, physiotherapy, speech and language therapy, occupational therapy, psychology and social work support. Good inter-disciplinary co-operation and collaborative work practices were observed during the evaluation. The commitment of the patron body to the work and development of the school is commendable.

Enrolment in the school follows a multidisciplinary assessment. The majority of the fifty six pupils have a moderate to severe level of physical disability. In addition to their physical disability, most of the pupils present with associated or additional conditions including intellectual disability, sensory impairments or emotional and behavioural difficulties. There has been a slight decline in enrolments in recent years as parents exercise a preference for more mainstream settings. Otherwise, enrolment trends continue to be strong. This may be due to the

availability at the school of a multidisciplinary preschool for children, whose parents choose this type of centre-based provision. Each year, a number of pupils transfer to mainstream settings at the preschool, primary and post-primary stages according to their individual needs. Many other pupils complete their primary and post-primary education at Scoil Mochua. Some pupils also transfer to Scoil Mochua from mainstream schools or other special schools at different stages of their education.

2. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT

2.1 Board of management

The board of management is properly constituted, meets on a regular basis and is very conscientious in its support of the school. Members of the current board have extensive experience in the areas of education, medicine and disability that have particular relevance to the educational service provided to the children and young people attending Scoil Mochua. Minutes of meetings are maintained and the items discussed include organisational matters, finance, staffing, school policies and procedures; accommodation issues, resources and staff training. There is evidence that the board is cohesive and effective in proactively addressing ongoing issues relating to the management of the school. A current key concern of the board is to progress planning for new school accommodation. The members of the board of management are to be commended for their ongoing commitment and active efforts in the development of this school over many years.

The board has facilitated staff training for teachers, both at in-service and post-graduate level. Training courses have been availed of by staff at both primary and post-primary level and courses provided by the Special Education Support Service in areas such as Autistic Spectrum Disorders (ASD) have expanded the range of teaching methodologies available within the school. An audit of the professional development courses completed by staff would be useful in planning for the identification and prioritisation of current and future in-service needs. This audit can help staff members to plan for the development of their specialist skills so as to meet the learning and care needs of pupils with physical and additional disabilities. The board has also been proactive in the training of SNAs to enhance their care role in working with the pupils. Training opportunities have been provided in first aid, manual handling, pool evacuation procedures and behaviour management, among others. Staff members often proactively identify training opportunities and the board is receptive to requests for assistance to meet these professional development needs where practicable.

2.2 In-school management

The principal is a long-standing member of staff and is highly committed, conscientious and effective in her management and leadership of the school. Her leadership is characterised by constructive working relationships with both colleagues and the board of management in addition to her positive relationships with pupils and their families. She promotes collaborative practices and demonstrates distributive leadership in her capacity to delegate to colleagues and to enable staff members to use their considerable and varied skills in the best interests of the pupils and the school community. The school has successfully come through a period of significant change and development over a number of years. Along with changes in the management structure, particularly in the area of school patronage, there have been positive developments in the liaison with clinical services, the introduction of new curricular programmes at primary and post-primary and the implementation of new policies and procedures. The principal has supported initiatives in outreach programmes to mainstream schools for curricular and pastoral linkages. The pursuit of productive partnerships with other schools is viewed as benefiting both schools by expanding the

knowledge base in relation to physical disability in local schools and by providing a wider range of experience for the special school pupils within the mainstream setting.

The leadership and management of the school are very capably supported by the in-school management team that comprises a deputy principal and three teachers with special duties posts of responsibility. The team members individually and collectively display a wide range of experience and expertise and contribute significantly to the effective administration and management of the school. Team members meet frequently and hold formal meetings at least once a term after school. The duties attached to each of the posts are set out in the school plan and relate to curricular subject areas. These duties are reviewed every three to four years as the needs of the school change. The review process is generally initiated by the in-school management team and subsequently discussed at school staff level. In order to facilitate this process of school self review, specific organisational, curricular and pastoral duties should be attached to each post. Many of the existing posts cover these elements but this is not clearly delineated in school documentation. It is recommended that the members of the in-school management team develop goals for each term in relation to particular areas of responsibility. Feedback on progress towards implementing these goals in the various areas could be given to the school staff at the regular staff meetings

2.3 Management of resources

The teaching staff comprises of ten full time teaching posts. One post is currently being delivered by two experienced teachers who are job-sharing. The collaborative practices deployed by these teachers could profitably be drawn up into a school policy regarding job-sharing that would guide such practices in the future. Pupils are distributed evenly over the various class levels and they receive frequent opportunities for individual instruction and assistance during the school day. Teachers are conscious of the need to continuously engage in professional development and commendably, many have pursued further qualifications in the area of special needs education. Teachers rotate to different class levels throughout the school every two to three years and their preferences for the various class levels are taken into account as far as possible. The teachers participate in a mentoring system to assist new teachers.

The school currently holds monthly staff meetings on the first Friday of each month. Agendas are drafted and circulated to staff in advance of these meeting and minutes are maintained. However, more systematic records should be kept of the outcomes of these meetings to inform ongoing school development across the range of issues addressed. It is also important that the amount of school time scheduled for meetings is in line with the relevant Department circulars regarding time in school.

There are currently thirteen full time and one part-time SNA posts funded by the Department of Education and Skills in the school. The assistants are deployed across the class levels where significant care needs have been identified due to the pupils' level of physical disability, medical concerns or additional disabilities such as emotional or behavioural disturbance. The SNAs provide a valuable service in supporting the educational provision available in the school and their commitment to supporting the pupils is highly commended. They work under the guidance of the class teachers and the principal and are instrumental in creating a learning environment that proactively promotes pupil engagement.

The change in patronage for the school led to a number of improvements in the paramedical and ancillary services provided to the school through the patron body. Access to support services for the families of pupils has improved, as the contracts for these services have been upgraded from

part-time to full-time status. Additional access to educational psychology, social work and music tuition has significantly enhanced the educational service available to pupils.

The original school building is located in shared premises that also include the therapeutic, medical and clinical disciplines and various administration offices. A pre-school class and the six primary classes are located in this building around a landscaped internal courtyard. The school wing contains three units, each comprising a shared area with two classroom bases located off it. This type of school design was prevalent at the time the building was constructed but is not the optimum design for pupils with physical disability. The classroom bases are small and are restrictive when used for tuition with the whole class group. Many of the pupils attending the school have physical needs requiring frequent changes to supportive seating or standing equipment. This necessitates the movement of both pupils and equipment regularly during the day. As the classroom bases are small, other pupils often have to be moved to facilitate the exit or entrance of their peers.

The three classes comprising the senior section of the school are located in two temporary accommodation blocks across the car park area to the front of the school. Two of these classrooms are of a reasonable size, while the third experiences the same difficulty with lack of space as the primary classroom bases. The provision of information and communications technology (ICT) for independent work in these rooms necessitates the movement of pupils to and from workstations. Navigation around other wheelchairs or classroom furniture can be quite disruptive. The school borders a housing development but is located at a distance from shopping facilities, swimming pools or community facilities. The school accesses the swimming facilities at Cheeverstown, St. Raphael's and Stewarts Hospital on a regular basis. However, as these venues are located off site, transport gives rise to some ensuing loss of tuition time.

In addition to the classroom teaching spaces, the school has shared areas that include a general purposes room (hall), music room and multi-sensory room. The well equipped music room is in temporary accommodation at the main entrance to the school. It is used by the part-time teacher of music and is available as a meeting room outside of music tuition times. The multi-sensory room is located adjacent to a multi-sensory garden and is timetabled for access by the various classes. The multi-sensory room contains a range of equipment that can be used both for therapeutic relaxation purposes and for tuition purposes as it contains UV light that can be beneficial for some pupils with visual impairment.

The sensory garden has been particularly well developed and is frequently used for work in the Science area of the curriculum with the observation of seasonal changes. Sub-habitats have been provided in the garden for particular shrub types to encourage fauna propagation. To assist pupils with sensory impairments to understand their location in the garden and to benefit from the experience, careful consideration has been given to changes in height, ground coverings, auditory, olfactory and visual elements.

The school is well equipped with resources and supports for the teaching and learning of pupils with physical disabilities and complex learning needs. Teachers endeavour to use these resources to match learning activities with the ability and interests of the pupils. For many pupils assistive technology and ICT peripherals are successfully employed to facilitate access to the curriculum activities. Each subject area is supported by a wide range of textbooks and supplementary materials. These include computers, software packages, class libraries and reference materials, televisions, CD players, videos, DVDs, commercially produced illustrative materials, musical instruments, and subject specific resources. The available resources are well maintained and renewed on a regular basis and are easily accessible during lesson instruction. A recent

development has been the provision of six interactive whiteboards which are constructively deployed by the teachers to engage and maintain pupils' interest in various aspects of the curriculum both at primary and post-primary level. In the primary section of the school, these boards are installed in the shared areas so both teachers can access the resource. This has implications for the timetabling of the shared area to prevent distractions for pupils.

2.4 Management of relationships and communication with the school community

The school endeavours to communicate openly and supportively with the parents and guardians of the pupils and good channels of communication have been developed between home and school over many years. Parents have ready access to both the school principal and staff of the school whenever necessary. Parent-teacher meetings are held during the year and further meetings take place if requested. Annual written school reports are provided to the parents and guardians of the pupils. For many pupils the home-school journal is an essential element in maintaining ongoing communication between the classroom and home and keeping in touch with parents about the changing needs and interests of their children. The importance of this daily communication was emphasised by members of the parents' community who met with the inspection team during the course of the evaluation. Parents are also anxious to see further development of the school facilities and additional clinical and educational resources made available to the school.

The parents of the pupils have been proactive in support of the school over many years. The parents' association has recently been revitalised following a period when it was less active. Parents support the work of the school through practical assistance with events and outings. Considerable fundraising has also been carried out successfully by the parents and there are strong and beneficial links with the local community. Parents have also been active members of the board of management of the school since its foundation. The parents are to be commended for their ongoing work and support of the school over the years which have contributed significantly to the positive environment that is currently in evidence at Scoil Mochua.

The school has participated in a profitable "links programme" with the local primary school, St. Ronan's N.S. for religious occasions, and for some curricular programmes. At post-primary level, there has been an inclusion project with Deansrath Community College for curricular instruction in English and Mathematics. Considerable time and energy is invested during the summer term, preparing the senior primary pupils for transition to the mainstream post-primary school, when this is deemed appropriate and in the best interests of the individual pupil. Transition planning and arrangements between the pre-school and mainstream or special settings are also carefully undertaken.

2.5 Management of pupils

Throughout the school, the teachers have created classroom climates where the pupils are supported in communicating their views, opinions and preferences. The pupils participate constructively in the classroom activities and their enthusiasm, interest and involvement are commendable. Teachers use frequent opportunities to reinforce positive behaviour on the part of the pupils and attractive displays of work are evident in all classrooms and in the main corridor areas. There is individual differentiation for pupils' particular needs, such as visual timetabling for pupils with an additional diagnosis of ASD, and for sign language learning for pupils with hearing impairments. Pupils who present with additional behavioural challenges are sensitively provided with additional support through personnel, individualised timetables or the opportunity to work for a period in a quiet area. The shared areas are often used for this discrete withdrawal but this can sometimes impact on the other class utilising the area for tuition, underlining the limitations of the current school accommodation.

3. QUALITY OF SCHOOL PLANNING

3.1 School planning process and implementation

Extensive and important work has been carried out in relation to the school plan as required by the *Education Act* (1998). A comprehensive range of policies addressing organisational, curricular and pastoral areas of the work of the school has been developed, including policies on challenging behaviour, attendance and anti-bullying. The school has also undertaken good work in the development of policies in the curriculum areas. Useful planning has been carried out in relation to the development of the senior programme for pupils of post-primary age. The planning undertaken provides for the effective organisation of the school and implementation of relevant and appropriate programmes of teaching and learning across the curriculum areas. Careful attention is also given to the pastoral areas of the work of the school. The board of management involves itself in policy formation particularly in relation to administrative and pastoral areas. Some of these policy areas are informed by existing policies within the patron body such as health and safety and child protection areas. The board has recently ratified the curricular policies that have been devised and developed. Maintaining and further developing this process of school self review will facilitate the ongoing development of policy and practice to support the introduction of new methodologies, resources and curriculum, pastoral and organisational initiatives.

The school and clinic personnel have evolved a combined Individual Education Plan (IEP) to create a unified child-centred plan for each pupil. The IEP meetings are held in the autumn term following an evaluation of the current level of pupil performance. At the team meeting, the goals for individual pupils are drawn up in respect of their priority learning needs along with the goals for the clinicians and family members. Following the meeting, the targets, strategies and resources are identified and recorded, and this information is forwarded to each pupil's parents to facilitate their involvement in implementing the plan. Targets are reviewed in the summer term and the completed review is sent to the parents offering them the option to meet with the coordinators. The collaborative development of these IEPs has been instrumental in the development of positive working relationships and valuable dialogue between the clinical staff and the school staff.

Further consideration could now be given to how the longer-term IEP goals and targets can be integrated into existing short-term planning and review arrangements, in order to provide a cohesive plan that addresses each pupil's individual targets and learning goals. Consideration should also be given to enabling the senior pupils to participate as far as practicable in setting some of their own learning goals. As part of the post-primary and FETAC programmes provided in the senior classes, pupils have a role in reflecting on their attainment of short-term objectives using portfolio formats. This self-monitoring and reflection by the pupils in relation to their own learning could profitably be extended to aspects of the IEP process for some of the pupils of post-primary age, in order to promote greater capacity for self-regulation and the development of a sense of personal responsibility and ownership of their own learning goals and targets.

Confirmation was provided that, in compliance with Department of Education and Science Primary Circular 0061/2006, the board of management has formally adopted the *Child Protection Guidelines for Primary Schools* (Department of Education and Science, September 2001). 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 was provided during the 2008-2009 school year for all school staff and for members of the supporting paramedical team.

3.2 Classroom planning

Across the school teachers demonstrate a very high level of commitment to their work and evidence of this can be seen in the careful planning and preparation undertaken in relation to the teaching activities in classrooms. Some excellent, regular and systematic classroom planning was observed with reference to the school plan, the Primary School Curriculum and relevant post-primary programmes. School documentation refers to fortnightly planning and this is provided in most classrooms. Teacher planning provides for suitable differentiation of the learning tasks in order to address the wide range of the individual learning needs. Impressive cross-curricular resources have been developed by individual teachers to facilitate the differentiation of the curriculum and the provision of interesting learning experiences for pupils.

In the post-primary section, the planning undertaken aims to provide relevant, age-appropriate experiences for pupils across a range of curriculum areas. Good use is made of ICT in school and classroom planning. In order to build on some of this very good practice, consideration should be given to further strengthening professional collaboration and opportunities for teamwork and co-operative teaching in the various sections of the school.

4. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

4.1 Overview of learning and teaching

A positive and inclusive learning environment was in evidence across the school. The teaching and learning activities were well organised and presented in classrooms. Activities were suitably differentiated to cater for the range of learning needs of the pupils and good use was made of ICT and assistive technology in many classrooms. Good knowledge of the curriculum areas and the use of suitable methodologies and teaching resources were observed. Cross-curricular thematic approaches were successfully employed in classrooms and staff were successful in identifying opportunities to extend the learning experience of the pupils. Across the school, the majority of the pupils participated purposefully in the programme of learning activities provided in classrooms.

At post-primary level, a number of secondary school subject options is available to pupils. Where a pupil demonstrates a particular interest in an area, Scoil Mochua endeavours to link with a local community college in order to enable the pupil to pursue his or her subject of choice. A school-leaving programme is provided in preparation for pupils approaching their final years at the school.

4.2 Language

Gaeilge

Tá polasaí forbartha ag an scoil maidir leis an nGaeilge. Tá sé luaithe sa phlean scoile go gcothófar dearcadh dearfach i measc na ndaltaí i leith na teanga agus i leith cultúir na tíre. Cé go bhfuil díolúine ón nGaeilge ag formhór na ndaltaí, baintear úsáid as an nGaeilge neamhfhoirmiúil ó am go h-am i roinnt ranganna. Chomh maith leis seo, tá líon beag daltaí ag iarradh an Ghaeilge a fhoghlaim. Tá cumas maith Gaeilge i measc na foirne múinteoireachta agus tugtar faoi na

ceachtanna Gaeilge ag an leibhéal cúl. Ina theannta sin, tugtar deiseanna do na daltaí blas a fháil ar oidhreacht agus cultúr na Gaeilge.

Irish

The school has developed a policy for Irish. The school plan indicates that positive attitudes towards the Irish language and culture will be promoted among the pupils. While most of the pupils are exempted from studying Irish, nevertheless, Irish is used informally from time to time in some classrooms. Along with this, a small number of pupils are learning Irish. There is a good level of competence in Irish among the teaching staff and they present Irish lessons at the appropriate level. Along with this, the pupils are provided with opportunities to experience aspects of Irish heritage and culture.

English

A comprehensive and very well thought-out whole-school programme has been prepared for English. The programme provides for the specific needs of pupils with difficulties arising from physical disability and associated conditions. Language and communication, reading and writing are well provided for in classrooms. The work undertaken in English is informed by the *Primary School Curriculum* (1999), the *NCCA Guidelines for teachers of students with general learning disabilities* and the Junior Certificate programme guidelines. The guidelines for schools participating in the Early Start programme guide the approach undertaken in the preschool class and some very good work was observed in this classroom. The importance of the development of language and communication is recognised by the teachers across the school. Very good practice was observed in a number of classrooms where highly focused approaches were employed in promoting the language, communication and literacy skills of the pupils. Effective use is made of teacher-made and commercial visual and concrete materials to promote and facilitate the engagement of the pupils in the language experience activities. In the primary section of the school, the programme is guided by the relevant curriculum strands and strand units. The learning activities are suitably individualised and the programme undertaken provides for pair and group work, *circle time* activities and whole-class lessons. Pupils using communication aids are carefully supported and enabled to participate purposefully in the classroom activities. In most classrooms, there is ongoing and useful liaison between the classroom teacher and the pupils' speech and language therapist. In the majority of classrooms, good thematic projects were observed, providing pupils with opportunities to explore and share their interests, develop vocabulary and communicate their ideas. In the senior and post-primary classrooms, good practice was observed as pupils were guided in exploring, discussing and engaging actively in topics and issues relevant to their age and interests.

Development of the literacy skills of the pupils is a key concern of the school. Some excellent practice was observed in a number of classrooms, in relation to the promotion of literacy. Very effective collaborative practice was in evidence among some members of the teaching staff and it is recommended that these strategies for sharing successful classroom practice, such as collaborative planning and team teaching, be extended as far as practicable across all levels of the school. An extensive range of resources, including ICT applications, has been acquired to support the literacy programme. The work undertaken endeavours to provide for the broad range of abilities and particular needs of pupils.

In the junior classes, activities focus on the promotion of visual and auditory perception, hand-eye coordination, phonological awareness, phonic skills and sight vocabulary. Good use was made of resources such as Big Books and *Boardmaker*, and story, poetry and rhyme were all used well in engaging the pupils in the literacy activities on a regular and consistent basis. Programmes such as *AcceleRead* and *AcceleWrite* were also employed. The pupils are encouraged and enabled to

use a variety of reading skills including visual, phonic, grammatical cues and context in accessing different forms and levels of printed material. Print-rich environments and class libraries are a feature of classrooms. Paired reading activities are also undertaken collaboratively between some classes.

Careful attention is also given to the promotion of the pupils' writing. Teachers in most classes endeavour to scaffold the writing process to facilitate the successful participation of the pupils in the learning tasks. A broad range of writing activities was observed in classrooms in the primary classrooms and the teachers are effective in sensitively acknowledging and affirming the pupils' efforts, work and creativity. Due attention is given to the development of the pupils' use of word-processing and handwriting skills, as appropriate. The development of functional reading and writing skills is given due attention in the senior and post-primary classes. Very good practice was observed in the use of ICT, enabling pupils to access and explore relevant, age appropriate and interesting topics and materials. Pupils gain practice in using the internet for educational purposes. They develop word-processing skills and learn to organise files and documents on computer. "Read, Write Gold" assistive technology was also employed to help pupils read scanned pages.

The approach to teaching and learning and the curriculum provided in the post-primary classes contributes significantly to the extension of the pupils' knowledge and capacity to use language. The appreciation of ideas and feelings, critical thinking and lively discussion among the pupils are all successfully promoted. Opportunities for cross-curricular linkages are pursued effectively. The teachers carefully monitor the progress of the pupils. Throughout the school, praiseworthy samples of the pupils' work in English were seen in classrooms and some examples of work are attractively displayed in the classrooms and circulation areas, often produced through the effective use of ICT. At the post-primary level, some pupils follow the English syllabus as part of the Junior Certificate and FETAC programmes. Many pupils have achieved commendable success in these nationally accredited and certified programmes.

4.3 Mathematics

A carefully formulated whole-school plan has been prepared for Mathematics, which takes account of the particular learning needs the pupils. The programme is based on the *Primary School Curriculum* (1999) and the *NCCA Guidelines for teachers of students with general learning disabilities* and relevant post-primary programmes. The teachers are conscious that Mathematics can be a challenging area for some pupils. The school's approach aims to promote positive attitudes to help all pupils achieve to their level of ability. There is a suitable emphasis on active learning, practical tasks, problem solving and the application of Mathematics to real-life contexts linked to the experiences of the pupils. The classrooms in general are well equipped with a good range of resources, including concrete materials, visual aids, equipment for measuring and mathematical games. In some classrooms, more use could be made of ICT, employing suitable software to reinforce numerical skills and practice in the use of mathematical processes. In the junior classes, due attention is given to the early mathematical experiences of the pupils. A good range of concrete materials is employed to enable the pupils explore colour, shape and size. As pupils progress through the primary years, attention is directed to the development of the basic number concepts, computational skills and the application of these to meaningful situations. There is an appropriate emphasis on pair and group work, and the use of games and co-operative learning approaches in a number of classrooms is commended.

In the senior and post primary classes there is a suitable emphasis on social mathematics and the practical application of skills including the management of money, time and the use of skills in

practical tasks such as cooking and shopping. Opportunities to link aspects of Mathematics to subject areas across the curriculum are also carefully planned. A number of pupils are also accommodated and supported in their preparation for the Certificate Examinations and in completing FETAC modules.

4.4 Social, Environmental and Scientific Education (SESE)

A broad and interesting programme of activities is undertaken in SESE.

In History, the pupils are enabled to develop an understanding of time and chronology, change and continuity and cause and effect. Topics and activities are suitably differentiated and made relevant to the age, abilities and interests of the pupils. Good use is made of story in the junior classes and beneficial attention is given to fostering the pupils' sense of identity, family and community. The use of personal family books was observed in classrooms and the pupils were encouraged to engage in activities, such as listening to the childhood experiences of their grandparents. Seasonal and special occasions are appropriately marked. Very good use is made of visual materials including photographs and materials accessed through careful use of ICT. In the senior and post primary classes, an impressive range of projects was undertaken and the pupils enjoyed participation in exploring aspects of the work they had done.

The programme pursued in Geography endeavours to foster the pupils' appreciation of the individual, communities and the natural environment. Good attention is directed to developing the pupils' awareness of and familiarity with the natural and local environment. Very good work has been undertaken in the school in relation to the development of the Suntower sensory garden and related activities. Tables of interest and visual displays are also a feature of many classrooms. In the senior and post-primary classes, a wide range of activities is undertaken to foster greater understanding of concepts concerned with national and global contexts, including current affairs. The interactive whiteboard is used proficiently and this facilitates the engagement of the students. Impressive collaborative practice among the post-primary teachers contributes to the effective differentiation of the curriculum for the students preparing for the Junior Certificate. Very good samples of work completed by the pupils were in evidence.

In Science, good planning was observed in relation to the primary programme. The attention of the pupils is directed to the changes in the natural environment through practical activities and investigations. Good use is made of displays and materials to engage the pupils in observing and exploring aspects of the environment. Very good work is undertaken in the senior and post-primary classes across a wide range of themes and topics and as part of the Junior Certificate programme. Highly commendable work has also been undertaken across the school in relation to the *Green Flag* award scheme promoted by An Taisce.

4.5 Arts Education

A wide range of activities is provided across the area of Arts Education.

In the Visual Arts, the programme undertaken is supported by a carefully formulated whole-school plan. The pupils participate in a wide range of art activities that provide important opportunities for self-expression. The pupils also have opportunities to experience the work of well-known artists. All strands of the curriculum areas are explored across the school. A good supply of resources is available to support this work. The work of the pupils is acknowledged and affirmed. Opportunities to foster receptive and expressive language and to raise awareness of

emotions and feelings are explored. Samples of the pupils work are attractively displayed in classrooms and in circulation areas across the school.

In Music, pupils are provided with a wide variety of activities to promote positive experiences for all pupils. The music programme in the school is informed by a school plan based on the *Primary School Curriculum*. The specialist music teacher shared with the CRC School, Clontarf is an important additional resource to the school in relation to the provision of music. The pupils are provided with good opportunities to listen and respond to a range of musical traditions and styles are to participate in music-making activities including the use of percussion and singing. In the classrooms, music is constructively linked to other curriculum areas and the pupils' interest in current trends in music is explored beneficially in discussing themes and topics and promoting language development. The social aspect of music is carefully fostered across the school, particularly in relation to seasonal events and special occasions. It is important that the ongoing collaboration between the specialist music teacher and the classroom teachers is maintained and developed in relation to the implementation of the whole school-plan for music across the school.

The approach to Drama is guided by the whole-school plan. Drama activities are used to support the pupils' engagement across a range of curricular areas and particularly in relation to the promotion of language and communication. In the junior classes, this is profitably linked to story and language activities exploring social and emotional contexts. Effective use of props and costume was observed. In the senior and post-primary classes, good use of role-play scenarios related to the experience of the pupils was observed. These activities provided good opportunities for pupils to engage in receptive and expressive communication. The contributions of the pupils were affirmed and they gained important opportunities to express themselves and to communicate their ideas through the activities undertaken.

4.6 Physical Education

The Physical Education (PE) programme carried out across the school is guided by a well planned, whole-school policy. Suitable adaptations are made so that pupils with limited mobility can participate purposefully. The school also has valuable specialist teacher support in PE. Commendable practice was observed during the period of evaluation. Appropriate emphasis was given to the involvement of all pupils in a broad range of PE activities. A good variety of resources and equipment is available and these are used successfully to engage the pupils and to encourage the active participation of all pupils. A large general-purposes room (hall) is used for class and group activities. Lessons incorporate a range of elements, which are well structured and carefully matched to the abilities and needs of the pupils. Good attention is given to promoting the pupils active participation in games and sport and their involvement in team activities. Opportunities for swimming in a pool off campus are available to the majority of pupils. Useful links have also been made with national sporting bodies enabling a number of pupils to extend their involvement in sport. Aspects of the PE programme are linked to other relevant curricular areas, including Social Personal and Health Education (SPHE). The PE programme provides good opportunities to support pupils in acquiring positive attitudes and habits in relation to their participation in exercise and physical activities, games and sport.

4.7 Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE)

The programme undertaken in SPHE is informed by the Primary School Curriculum and a carefully considered whole-school plan. SPHE is approached as a key area of the curriculum and a broad range of activities is undertaken across the school. Attention for the individual pupil is an important concern of the school. Positive social interaction and co-operative learning are

encouraged. Positive relationships were observed between pupils and staff; and between the pupils themselves. The aims for SPHE are addressed through the development of a positive school climate, specific lessons on aspects of SPHE; and the integration of SPHE themes and topics across the curriculum. A good range of methodologies is employed, including *circle time*, drama and discussion; and the use of a range of visual and auditory resources that have been made available to support the programme. The school programme for Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) is an integral element of the SPHE programme. Due provision is also made for the implementation of the Stay Safe and Walk Tall programmes. A broad SPHE programme supports pupils in acquiring greater awareness of themselves and others. It also supports the pupils in exploring issues and gaining greater understanding of the factors involved in making safe and healthy choices, contributing to this sense of responsibility and capacity for independence. Across the school, the activities undertaken in SPHE are suitably differentiated to cater for the learning needs of individual pupils.

4.8 Assessment

Conscientious work has been undertaken in relation to the school assessment policy and a draft document is included in the school plan. Assessment of learning and assessment for learning are both well developed in classrooms. A wide range of assessment approaches is emphasised to cater for the age range and abilities of the pupils from the preschool years to school leaving age. The assessment approaches employed include teacher observation, curriculum checklists, pupil profiles, teacher-designed tasks and tests, monitoring and filing of pupils' work samples and portfolios; screening instruments, standardised tests and diagnostic tests. The school has access to a psychologist (shared with the CRC School). This collaboration contributes beneficially to the work of the school by addressing the needs of the pupils and their parents. The range of assessment information gained by the teachers contributes to the individualised education planning process. At post-primary level, the Junior Certificate Schools Programme (JCSP) statements and FETAC checklists of specific objectives provide a mechanism for continuous assessment. Each year a number of pupils sit the Junior Certificate examination. The whole school policy for assessment provides for the pupils to have opportunities for reflection and self-assessment in relation to their long-term aims. This approach is commended, particularly in relation to the post-primary age pupils as it promotes a sense of independence and individual responsibility for setting and reaching specific learning goals. While most teachers maintain folders of pupils' work and assessment records of pupil progress, a mechanism to assess and track pupils' progress in relation to their individualised education plans should also be considered as a way of providing evidence of each pupil's ongoing progress.

In order to plan and implement appropriate programmes for areas of sensory disability, the school could profitably include functional assessments for vision and hearing as part of the range of assessment instruments available in the school. The prevalence of sensory sensitivities among pupils with ASD is well documented. The school should consider putting in place baseline assessments for sensory modalities, particularly relating to the construction of programmes deployed in the multi-sensory room.

5. QUALITY OF SUPPORT FOR PUPILS

5.1 Pupils with special educational needs

While designated as a school for physical disability, the majority of pupils have additional and associated conditions which contribute to the complexity of their special educational needs. Most of the pupils attending the school have a diagnosis of cerebral palsy. Other conditions prevalent among pupils include spina bifida, hydrocephalus, muscular dystrophy and other syndromes. In

common with the other schools designated for pupils with physical disability, Scoil Mochua has a pupil-teacher ratio based on the needs of individual pupils. As many of the pupils have another disability along with their physical disability, the pupil-teacher ratio for multiple disabilities has been applied. This has allowed for the formation of classes with up to six pupils and enabled a high level of individual, pair and small group work suited to the needs of these pupils. The teachers and SNAs are highly committed in addressing the range of needs of the pupils. The majority of staff members have participated in continuing professional development related to the needs of the pupils. Many of the teachers have pursued postgraduate qualifications in special education. School personnel work closely with colleagues in the clinical team and good relations were observed during the period of evaluation. The multidisciplinary process in individualised planning for pupils is commendable. Building on this good practice, consideration should be given to the development of mechanisms to strengthen collaborative practices, involving teachers, therapists and SNAs in the classroom context.

5.2 Other supports for pupils: disadvantaged, minority and other groups

Staff members are sensitive to instances of disadvantage among pupils and they ensure resources are provided to allow all pupils have access to the full range of school activities. The school provides a school breakfast, where appropriate, particularly for pupils who must travel long distances by bus before arriving in school. Lunches are also available if required. The majority of pupils are provided with school books. There are a number of newcomer pupils attending the school. As none come from backgrounds where English is an additional language, the need for a translation service has not arisen.

6. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- The board of management proactively supports the development of the work, resources and facilities of the school.
- The principal, teachers and staff demonstrate very high levels of commitment, enthusiasm and professionalism in carrying out their duties.
- The engagement and initiative of the staff in the development of a range of programmes and processes in many areas, is highly impressive.
- There is a high level of interdisciplinary collaborative practice in relation to developing IEPs
- There is a high level of commitment to meeting the needs of individual pupils and to providing them with an appropriate learning programme encompassing education and therapy.
- Highly effective teaching approaches across a range of curriculum areas were observed in many classrooms.

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

- Procedures to implement and monitor the success of IEPs in classroom settings should be further developed.
- Consideration should be given to extending the effective interdisciplinary collaboration between clinic and school to the classroom context.
- The in-school management team should review its responsibilities in the light of current and emerging school priorities.

- An audit of training needs and courses should be undertaken with a view to prioritising emerging professional development needs of the staff.

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.

Appendix

SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

Submitted by the Board of Management

Area 1: Observations on the content of the inspection report

The Whole School Evaluation Report has been carefully considered by members of the Board of Management and Teaching Personnel. We thank the inspectors for their very positive report which we consider to be very fair and balanced. We have carefully noted the general advice and recommendations contained therein.

We particularly welcome the Inspectors' observations on the very high levels of commitment, enthusiasm, professionalism and interdisciplinary collaborative practice demonstrated by all staff. We are very pleased to note inspectors' comments on the efficacy of our teaching approaches, the development of an appropriate learning programme which encompasses education and therapy and their strong endorsement of the range of programmes and processes which have been developed. We are also delighted to note the comments concerning the significant and ongoing support we have received from; our parents through the years.

The Inspectors' clarification of the rationale for our current Pupil Teacher ratio (6:1) is particularly welcomed by the Board of Management at this juncture. Our existing ratio for physical/multiple disabilities was established with approval from the DES to take cognisance of the special education needs of the 'the majority of our pupils who have additional and associated conditions contributing to the complexity of their special educational needs '. It is essential to maintain this ratio in order to meet these complex and diverse needs.

(WSE Report p.12, 5.1.)

We would also like to acknowledge the valuable contribution of the Deputy Principal, since retired, to the development of the school over many years.

Area 2: Follow-up actions planned or undertaken since the completion of the inspection activity to implement the findings and recommendations of the inspection

School Accommodation

We welcome inspectors' comments about the significant inadequacy of our existing buildings. The Board of Management will increase its efforts to achieve a building programme through the DES which will fully address the needs of our physically/multiply disabled students. This will include a small swimming facility which will help reduce additional tuition time loss for our students.

IEPs

The implementation and monitoring of the success of the IEP is being developed in the classroom through continuous review and revision, if necessary of the learning goals and targets. The current practice of consultation and collation of the goals and learning targets for post-primary students will now be formally incorporated into both IEP meetings and the written plans.

Interdisciplinary Collaboration

We have increased both the number and frequency of interdisciplinary team meetings throughout the school in accordance with individual children's needs as they arise. Further development of shared inservice is also planned.

In-school Management Team

The team will continue to respond to the changing needs of the school with a review of duties and responsibilities on a regular basis. School documentation will be updated accordingly with the specific organisational, curricular and pastoral duties which are attached to each post. Term goals and feedback on progress for staff also in progress.

Professional Development:

Priority areas for continued development have been identified and will be fully supported by the Board of Management.