

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

St Michael's School
Glenmaroon
Chapelizod
Uimhir rolla: 17971H

Date of inspection: 17 January 2011



1. Introduction

Located in Chapelizod, Dublin and operating under the trusteeship of the Daughters of Charity, St Michaels's is designated as a special school for children with mild general learning disability. At the time of the evaluation, 153 pupils were enrolled. A significant number of pupils present with additional disabilities. 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.

2. Summary of Findings and Recommendations for Further Development

The following are the **main strengths** of the work of the school:

- The commitment and professionalism of the staff.
- The preservation of a caring environment that has created a thriving school community.
- The provision of a broad and relevant curriculum that considers the entitlement of pupils to access the general curriculum and to pursue suitable accreditation.
- The high standard of teaching that is evident across the school.
- The positive attitude displayed by students at all levels.
- The voluntary dedication of the board of management.
- The provision of an attractive, well-maintained, and well-organised school.

The following **main recommendations** are made:

- Further co-ordination of recording systems that clearly demonstrate pupils' achievement.
- Devising collaborative structures for the operation of in-school management.
- Further development of the current literacy strategy.
- Review of the admissions policy to ensure compliance with legislation and to reflect the existing positive practice.

3. Quality of School Management

- The board of management is very effective and members are very supportive of the work of the school. The admissions policy should be readjusted to reflect relevant legislative principles and the current positive practice in the school.
- The school day, as it is currently organised, does not fully conform to Department regulations. It is recommended that the school day be reconfigured to ensure compliance.
- The principal has a strong presence in the life of St Michael's. She provides firm leadership for the school. She has a deep commitment to the pupils and she exemplifies

high professional standards. She values the work of her colleagues in the school and she encourages staff members to avail of continuing professional development opportunities.

- The shared educational values and leadership provided by the principal and senior teachers are reflected in the dedication of the entire staff. The in-school management team fulfils important duties. The team possesses abundant commitment and capacity which should now be harnessed further for the benefit of the school. The convening of formal meetings of the middle management team is advised.
- Teachers have a wide range of experience and expertise in relation to special education. Staff's access to continuing professional development (CPD) should be monitored to identify future priorities.
- The physical resources are managed to a high standard. Significant refurbishment has been carried out and additional accommodation has been provided. Learning and teaching resources include commercially produced materials as well as resources creatively developed by staff. Good use is made by teachers of Information and Communication Technology (ICT).
- In addition to the teaching staff and special-needs assistants, specialist provision includes Woodwork, Home Economics, and Physical Education.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- A school development plan is available. It includes a wide range of developed policies and identifies priorities for future action. The school plan informs classroom planning. An information pack is available for substitute teachers and training is conducted in the management of attendance records and roll books.
- In addition to the Primary School Curriculum, suitable Junior Certificate subjects and Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC) modules are also provided.
- Class teachers engage in suitable planning and they compile informative monthly progress reports. Adopting a whole-school approach to the areas that are to be included in planning would further enhance practice. The individual education plan (IEP) process should continue to be developed, particularly in regard to ensuring learning targets are specific, measurable and time-bound.
- As part of the school's developmental planning process, the role of specialist teachers should be re-examined with a view to maximizing their potential contribution to the promotion of literacy, numeracy and social skills.

Child protection policy and procedures

School authorities provided evidence that, in compliance with Primary Circular 0061/2006, the board of management has formally adopted the Department's *Child Protection Guidelines for Primary Schools*. Evidence was provided to show 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.

5. Quality of Teaching, Learning and Pupil Achievement

- Across the school, teachers recognise how pupils learn through practical and first-hand experiences. Activities are well structured and serve to successfully stimulate pupil interest and involvement. A range of teaching resources is used very effectively,
- While all pupils have an exemption from Irish, the school recognises the value of providing pupils with experience and knowledge of Irish culture and a suitable programme is in place.
- The teaching of English is very good. The development of students' receptive and expressive language is addressed across all classes. Pupils are provided with opportunities to write in a variety of genres. Emphasis on phonological awareness, phonics and sight-vocabulary support the development of literacy skills. Further development of the current literacy strategy in the context of creating a whole-school approach should be considered.
- The teaching of Mathematics is very good. A commendable emphasis is placed on functional Mathematics.
- In Social, Environmental and Scientific Education, good use is made of the local environment as a basis for learning. The work is imaginatively integrated with Visual Arts. Teachers exploit the vast resources that are available on the internet.
- Impressive work is achieved in Visual Arts and the school is proud of the pupils' accomplishments. Communal areas around the school are used for display.
- The Woodwork room is well equipped and maintained. Students have completed an impressive range of projects. Further liaison with class teachers could enhance the reinforcement of mathematical and literacy objectives.
- Pupils clearly enjoy their music-making activities and the impressive school choir was observed singing with enthusiasm. Musical and dramatic activities in which pupils engaged are recorded.
- Drama is frequently used to explore important themes in a range of imaginatively constructed situations. During the evaluation, the pupils demonstrated considerable skill in the use of drama conventions such as role play.
- Physical Education is provided for in a systematic and organised manner. Most pupils engage in lessons with energy and enthusiasm. Particular attention should be directed at the participation and inclusion of pupils who lack social skills or who are reluctant to participate in games.
- Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) is acknowledged by staff as a critical area of learning and activities focus on elements such as self-identity and awareness of others. Attention is also paid to the development of pupils' social skills during the lunch period. Pupils participate in a variety of activities which serve to raise their awareness of charitable causes.
- Active participation is emphasised in well-organised Home Economics lessons. Valuable opportunities are provided for the development of practical and social skills. Literacy, numeracy and scientific knowledge, as well as elements of health education are reinforced.
- Assessment has already been identified by the staff as a priority area for review. Building on current practice, particular attention should be given to monitoring communication and

- social development. A wider variety of assessment tools should be developed and should be used to inform IEP objectives and underpin the formation of instructional groups. In particular, pupil profiles in English and Mathematics should be developed to facilitate the tracking of pupils' progress over time.
- The school should address concerns regarding pupil behaviour by developing a process to record, analyse and understand the function of the behaviours and then implement suitable interventions.
 - The procedures for allocating pupils to particular post-primary certification programmes should be delineated in a policy statement.

6. Quality of Support for Pupils

- Pupils from all backgrounds participate actively in the life of this inclusive school. Many of the pupils avail of the school-transport scheme which is funded by the Department of Education and Skills. Special needs assistants provide important support in relation to the care, and safety needs of the pupils.
- The school receives some multi-disciplinary support from the Daughters of Charity Services, and agencies such as the Health Service Executive and the National Educational Psychological Service. The preservation and the enhancement of these supports remain an important priority for the board of management especially in relation to pupils' mental health.
- A significant number of pupils present with Autistic Spectrum Disorders (ASD) and the board has encouraged teachers to avail of continuous professional development in this area. Pupils' needs associated with ASD are addressed through a withdrawal model of additional teaching support. Consideration should be given to including structured in-class support in order to assist in the generalisation of pupils' skills. The procedures of the school in relation to addressing the needs of pupils with ASDs should be documented.
- Currently, some Traveller children, and a number of children of minority backgrounds for whom English is not their first language are supported in various ways including individualised tuition. Teachers have accessed resources for teaching English as a second language. The school should review current practices and develop whole-school policies on inter-culturalism and the provision for pupils with English as an additional language.
- Staff members are aware of pupils' family circumstances and provide sensitive support where necessary. The contribution of parents is valued and the school has developed procedures for dealing with parents' concerns. Parent-teacher meetings are convened as well as IEP meetings. Forms of communication include end of year reports and the informative and well-managed school web site. A dynamic parents' association supports fund-raising and other social events. To date the parents' association has not affiliated to the National Parents' Council and the board should encourage the association to do so.
- According to responses to questionnaires, the vast majority of parents consider the school to be well run. They report that pupils like school and that the teaching is very good. However, results of the questionnaire indicate that a number are not fully aware of some school policies. Therefore, the school should continue in its efforts to develop communication systems to further involve all parents in the review and development of policies.

- The school has developed successful transition programmes to appropriate post-school placements. An over-arching policy statement as regards transition from school should be prepared.

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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. Michael's School express appreciation and thanks for the courteous and professional manner in which the Whole School Evaluation was conducted.

The Community of St. Michael's School welcomes the affirmation of the "high professional standards", dedication and commitment of all the staff which is reflected in "the positive attitude displayed by students at all levels".

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 school's continuing evaluation and development of policies and practices are in-line with the recommendations of the Whole School Evaluation.

In particular, the Board of Management has ratified the amended Admissions/Enrolment Policy as outlined in the CPSMA's Enrolment Policy Review and approved the new ASD and EAL policies.

Formal weekly meetings of the In-School Management Team initiates, implements and evaluates policies and strategies as part of the whole school collaborative structure.