

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

**Whole School Evaluation
REPORT FOR SCHOOL RESPONSE**

**St. Michael's House Special School
Baldoye**

Uimhir rolla: 18210K

Date of inspection: 10 December 2010



**AN ROINN | DEPARTMENT OF
OIDEACHAIS | EDUCATION
AGUS SCILEANNA | AND SKILLS**

1. Introduction

St Michael's House Special School, Baldoyle caters for pupils with severe to profound learning disabilities and associated difficulties. The school is now under the patronage of St Michael's House and is located on the campus of the former St Mary's Hospital. The successful transfer of patronage from St Mary's to St Michael's House took place in 2007 and the school has developed significantly since that time. While a small number of pupils are residential, the majority of pupils avail of the school transport service of the Department of Education and Skills. There were 52 pupils enrolled at the time of this evaluation. The board of management of the school 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 board of management is highly effective and actively committed to the development of the school.
- The principal and other members of the in-school management team demonstrate purposeful and concerted leadership in the work and development of the school.
- The principal, teachers and SNAs, nursing staff and multidisciplinary team demonstrate very high levels of commitment and professionalism in their work.
- Valuable and collaborative whole-school planning has been undertaken involving staff in the development of policies and programmes to guide practice across many areas of the work of the school.
- A warm and nurturing school atmosphere is in evidence where staff interact with pupils in a positive and supportive manner.
- Impressive multidisciplinary cooperation is in evidence in addressing the needs of the pupils.
- There is a clear whole-school focus on meeting the learning, developmental and care needs the pupils.

The following **main recommendations** are made:

- In light of the complex needs of the pupils an audit of staff training needs should be undertaken to identify emerging professional development priorities.
- Building on existing good practice, is recommended that suitable systems are developed to track more discrete levels of progress in areas of the pupils IEPs.

3. Quality of School Management

- The board of management is properly constituted, with experienced members and functions in a highly effective and collaborative manner. It meets regularly, records minutes, maintains finances, ratifies policies, and is conscientious in relation to its duties. The board is commended for its commitment to the development of the school and the successful manner in which it managed the transfer of patronage.
- The principal demonstrates highly committed and effective leadership of the school. He works collaboratively with staff and promotes co-operative approaches with the multidisciplinary team. The principal is supported by a highly capable and effective deputy principal and in-school management team. This team undertakes its work in a collaborative and focussed manner. It contributes effectively to the school's development in the organisational, curricular and pastoral areas. The post-holders meet on an ongoing basis and communicate frequently with the whole staff. Duties are reviewed regularly and a number of laudable initiatives have been incorporated into the work of the school.
- The twelve teachers have a wide range of professional backgrounds, and a number have postgraduate training in special education and extensive experience of working with pupils with severe to profound learning disabilities. Many of the twenty-five special needs assistants have undertaken training and attended courses relevant to their work. Very good use is made of the available accommodation in the original school building and the purpose-built temporary classrooms. The school has acquired a wide selection of resources to support the pupils' programmes and classrooms are well equipped with relevant aids and equipment to address the care needs of the pupils. With the emerging profile of pupils with complex needs, an audit of training should be undertaken and further opportunities for staff development should be accessed through the Special Education Support Service.
- Parents have ready access to the school, the principal and teachers. Frequent contact between home and school is facilitated by the use of home-school diaries and regular parent-teacher meetings. The recently formed parents' association has also become actively involved in the school community.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- School planning and policy development of a very high standard is undertaken. The school adopts a consultative approach to the development of its school policies. The staff have engaged in an ongoing process of development planning in relation to areas such as adapting the curriculum to the needs of the pupils and the development of IEPs. School policy documents are carefully constructed, clear and accessible. A comprehensive range of whole-school policies addressing organisational curricular and pastoral areas have been formulated and implemented. Recent examples of the successful planning and implementation of projects include the introduction of the communication passport and the transition year programme.
- A very effective framework is in place in relation to Individual Education Plans (IEPs). This facilitates a beneficial collaborative process involving the multidisciplinary team and the parents of the pupils. Building on existing good practice in the development of the pupils' IEPs, it is recommended that suitable systems are developed to track more discrete levels of progress in relation to the agreed goals and targets for each pupil.

- Teachers plan carefully for the classroom incorporating long and short-term programmes to cater for the particular needs of their pupils and in relation to the implementation of their IEPs. There are regular interdisciplinary meetings with regard to planning for individual pupils and this contributes to the ongoing monitoring and adjustment of the pupils' programmes according to changing requirements.
- This school has engaged in extensive policy formulation and review in the context of the change of patronage and the profile of the pupils attending the school. Numerous policies have been developed which are beneficial in enabling the school to adapt and succeed in its mission as a school for pupils with severe to profound learning difficulties.

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

- A good range of teaching and learning approaches, involving individual and group work, and the skilful use of resources were observed. The programmes aim to enable each pupil access a broad and balanced curriculum and to address their holistic needs. Teachers differentiate the activities to cater for individual pupils. Learning goals incorporate aims developed in consultation with the multidisciplinary team in areas such as language and communication, personal care, mobility, behaviour and diet. Staff observe and monitor the participation and progress of the pupils and this informs classroom planning and contributes to the IEP process.
- Very good attention is given to the development of receptive and expressive language. The teachers endeavour to stimulate the pupils' desire to communicate, to indicate their needs and to make choices. Effective use is made of pictures, props and auditory cues to gain pupils' attention and to promote comprehension of oral language, particularly for communication purposes. Staff aim to implement consistent communication approaches, using objective reference, pictures, visual and tactile symbols, hand over hand, LAMH, and PECS. For some pupils assistive technology including, switch access, Big Mac and interactive toys is used to augment verbal and signed communication approaches. Activities undertaken include the use of circle time, story, song, rhyme, music, drama and tactile books and pictures. Visual schemes are used effectively in classes to guide the pupils through the daily programme of activities.
- The mathematical activities undertaken are related to the experiences of the pupils and the school environment. The pupils' understanding of concepts such as time, shape and space are promoted through specific activities and through the activities of the school day. The diversity of pupils' learning needs is provided for. The use of rhyme, song, and the daily and weekly sequence of activities, preparation for lunchtime and the organisation of materials in the classroom are in evidence.
- In the area of SESE, the activities are linked to the environment and to the experiences of the pupils. The themes explored in History, Geography and Science are made relevant to

the lives of the pupils. Regular and important events, together with seasonal occasions are used to foster a sense of time, chronology, change and continuity. In exploring aspects of the environment, good use is made of the local community for trips, walks and visits. Very effective use is made of the digital camera and ICT to record activities and to facilitate further exploration in the classroom. Seasonal and weather-related displays are a feature of classrooms. The school has participated in the Green school programme and the pupils are involved in activities such as recycling.

- The Arts provide pupils with positive and enriching learning experiences, often multi-sensory, where pupils have sufficient time to engage and respond to a wide range of activities. The visual arts, music, drama provide pupils with particular opportunities to express themselves. Activities in this area are also used to create and reinforce links across the curriculum, especially in language and communication. The pupils' art work is attractively displayed and very good practice in music was observed in a number of classrooms.
- In the area of Physical Education, care and attention is given to the mobility needs of the pupils. Staff are conscious of the importance of physical and motor activity and a good range of activities is undertaken according to the needs the pupils. The use of movement to music activities and games were observed in classrooms. Most pupils access a regular swimming session and horse-riding through the course of the school year. The school also has a much used multi-sensory room.
- Staff are aware of the key role of Social Personal and Health Education (SPHE) in the context of the particular learning needs of individual pupils. SPHE is given careful consideration in classrooms and integrated into the activities of the school day. Life and independence skills are actively promoted and opportunities taken on occasions such as mealtimes, daily routines, cooking, school trips, to reinforce self-help and social skills.

6. Quality of Supports for Pupils

- St Michael's House School, Baldoyle provides an environment in which the care, learning and therapeutic needs of the pupils are conscientiously attended to. In the short number of years since it became a school for children with severe profound learning needs, the school has progressed strongly. The school has the support of a range of services provided under the auspices St Michael's House. Many staff have undertaken training in special education and in the education of pupils with severe to profound learning needs. Effective multidisciplinary collaborative practice is a mark of the work of the school and this has contributed beneficially to the programmes provided to the pupils. The school has acquired useful facilities and resources to enable it to work effectively with the pupils. The school is committed to ongoing development in serving the needs of its pupils.

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 House Special School, Baldoyle wish to commend the inspectorate on their professionalism and courtesy during their comprehensive evaluation of our school.

We welcome the affirmation in the report of the commitment and dedication of the Board and all staff working in the school. We also welcome and acknowledgement of the important work of the multi-disciplinary team and the reference to a "clear whole-school focus" on meeting the needs of our pupils.

We believe that the inspectorate captured very well the overall atmosphere, ethos and work of our school.

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 welcomes the valuable recommendations made in the report in relation to undertaking an audit of staff training needs and developing systems to track progress in areas of the pupils IEPs.

We wish to confirm that staff have commenced working towards the implementation of these recommendations.