Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Marino School
Bray, Co. Wicklow
Uimhir rolla: 18281K

Date of inspection: 26 November 2010
1. Introduction

This school, located in Bray is a special school for pupils with physical disabilities. The catchment area ranges from Shankill, Co Dublin and Arklow and the greater Wicklow area. The school works closely with the patron, Enable Ireland, which provides a wide range of health-related services. The school provides for a diverse range of special educational needs, associated with conditions such as cerebral palsy, spina bifida, muscular dystrophy, and other medical conditions. There has been a notable decrease in enrolment. The last pupil was enrolled in 2008. The board of management was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the report; a response was not received from the board.

The following table provides an overview of the enrolment and staffing at the time of the evaluation:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pupils enrolled in the school</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers on the school staff</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrative Principal</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class teachers</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers working in support roles</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special needs assistants</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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2. Summary of Findings and Recommendations for Further Development

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

- Staff members demonstrate a high level of professionalism. They are knowledgeable about the implications for learning of various disabilities and medical conditions.
- The board of management is highly committed to the school.
- The patron body provides significant financial and therapeutic support to the school.
- A range of programmes to meet the educational needs of individual pupils is effectively implemented.
- The school accommodation is spacious and attractive.
- The school has established successful outreach and links programmes with other schools. The inclusion of pupils with physical disabilities in local mainstream schools is supported through these programmes.
- The school operates well as a welcoming community in which adults support each other in enabling the pupils to participate in a wide range of worthwhile activities.

The following main recommendations are made:

- The board should review the draft enrolment policy of the school and in particular the Admissions Protocol to ensure that it is in keeping with the spirit of the Education Act (1998) and with equality legislation.
- The practical collaboration undertaken between teachers and therapists in working with pupils should be strengthened.
- The school should continue in its efforts to work with parents and transport providers to ensure that all pupils access school for a full day.
3. Quality of School Management

- The members of the board of management are committed to providing a high quality of education to the pupils. The future development of the school is now its primary focus and the priorities include enrolment, linkages to the wider education community, and the promotion of collaborative practice between the school and the clinic.

- The current admissions policy for the school differentiates between existing users of the clinic services and other prospective pupils. Notwithstanding the complexities involved in relation to accessing the clinical services, the board should review this policy and in particular the admissions protocol to ensure that the arrangements are not at variance with the inclusive spirit of the Education Act (1998) or with equality legislation in regard to the rights of pupils with disabilities to attend the school of their parents’ choice.

- The acting principal has responded well to the challenging task of managing the school and she carries out her duties effectively. She displays a high degree of commitment to school improvement and she engenders enthusiasm for teaching and learning across the school. She endeavours to empower colleagues, and has succeeded in building a strong school team. The principal is supported by an acting deputy principal and it is evident that the in-school management team is made up of capable and dedicated teachers. Curricular, organisational and pastoral care duties are included as the areas of responsibility. Closer attention needs to be paid to maintaining the school register and roll books.

- The physical accommodation of the school is of a very high standard. Classroom furniture is adaptable for use by pupils with motor difficulties, facilitating them in maintaining appropriate and comfortable posture. Classroom and corridors are used to display and celebrate pupils’ achievements.

- A wide range of audiovisual aids is used to support the implementation of stimulating programmes. Teachers make good use of interactive whiteboards, and assistive technology which is a crucial resource for many pupils.

- Parents support the school through their involvement on the board of management and the parents’ association. In response to parental questionnaires the vast majority of parents believed that the school was well run, that the children liked school, that teaching was good and that the school helped the children’s social and personal development.

- A well-crafted Code of Behaviour has been drawn up which gives consideration to the particular circumstances of the pupils. In daily interactions the adults are supportive, and sensitive. A pupils’ council provides opportunities for pupils to give their views on school matters. Ninety-six per cent of pupils who responded to the pupil questionnaire thought that Marino was a good school.

- A small number of pupils also attend mainstream schools as part of the integration programme. The school has developed successful transition programmes to appropriate post-school placements.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- Whole school planning is collaborative and involves the principal and teachers. A strategic plan is in place with specific objectives in relation to enrolment policy, curriculum development, and developing the school’s Outreach and Links programmes.

- The Junior Certificate Schools Programme and FETAC programmes provide age appropriate learning and certification opportunities for older pupils.
• The school has developed innovative links and shared-placement programmes with local mainstream and special schools. These initiatives along with the school’s outreach programme support the inclusion of students in mainstream education.

• Good quality long-term and short-term written planning is provided by all teachers. Many of the teachers have special education qualifications and are experienced in dealing with pupils with special needs and with physical disability in particular.

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

• Teaching and learning activities observed were well organised. Teachers modify instructions and respond to any health needs that may arise. The teachers implement various types of instructional arrangements including individualised, small-group and large-group instruction.

• Baintear úsáid as an nGaeilge le linn comhrá ranga ó am go chéile. Tá diolúine ó staidéar na Gaeilge ag formhór na ndaltaí. Mar sin féin, d'fhéadfadh sé tárlú anois nó amach anseo go mbeadh ríocht daltai ag iarraidh an Ghaeilge a fhoghlaim agus ba chóir freastal orthu síud ag an leibhéil (Irish is used occasionally in classroom conversation. Most of the pupils are exempted from studying Irish. However, some pupils now or in the future may wish to study Irish and this should be provided for at the appropriate level).

• Language and communication skills are fostered through dedicated language activities. Pupils may use a combination of gestures or signs and some benefit from electronic communication devices. Speech and language therapy is sometimes incorporated into the class routines. LAMH signs are used and staff should adopt a whole-school signing policy to encourage signing pupils to learn incidentally. Further collaboration with therapists should endeavour to develop ways that targeted communication skills and functional life-skills are practised. In the promotion of literacy skills, attention is paid to building sight vocabulary, developing phonological awareness, reading fluency and comprehension skills. Large format reading material, class novels and supplementary resources are skilfully employed. Writing skills are developed with structured activities planned collaboratively with the occupational therapist. Some students in post-primary classes pursue English as part of the Junior Certificate Programme.

• The Mathematics lessons involve the use of concrete materials, discussion, and recording. Assessment in Mathematics includes the use of criterion-referenced assessments and these are used to monitor pupils’ progress, and help to ensure that the more able pupils are presented with sufficient challenge. The teachers have identified Mathematics as an area for development and the review should seek to ensure that sufficient opportunities to use mathematical skills in daily living are provided.

• A broad programme is provided in Social, Environmental, and Scientific Education. Key elements of the good work carried out incidentally by teachers should be formally recorded.

• In Visual Arts, the pupils take part in a variety of creative activities. In Music the pupils were observed engaging enthusiastically in whole-school activities. The school has the
support of a music specialist who plans collaboratively with the teaching staff. Drama activities are successfully integrated within some curriculum areas and teachers have identified Drama as an area for development.

- In Social, Personal and Health Education staff addresses the teaching of social skills, self-esteem and respect and care for others. The teachers strive to provide opportunities for each child to experience success and to develop individual talents. *Relationships and Sexuality Education Programme* is implemented in designated lessons involving collaboration between teachers and clinicians.

- A range of suitable assessment instruments has been assembled. The draft whole-school plan for assessment is at an advanced stage but requires further development. Building on current practice, particular attention should be given to monitoring communication and social development. In extending information available from clinical assessments, functional assessments should be carried out of pupil’s mobility, independence and sensory abilities where appropriate.

6. Quality of Supports for Pupils

- The characteristic spirit of this school is inclusive and pupils from all backgrounds participate actively. The special needs assistants provide important support to the work of the school in relation to the care, safety needs and mobility of the pupils.

- Well-designed individual education plans are drawn-up and the multidisciplinary team members make an important contribution to the planning process. Protocols for communication between the school and the clinic are in place and these relationships which support collaborative practice should be maintained and developed.

- Free, escorted, school transport is provided for pupils. Some pupils travel long distances on buses each day and some do not arrive at the school’s opening time or leave early. A few arrive late because of medical conditions or feeding problems which require attention at home. It is recommended that the school management continues in its efforts to engage with relevant parties to ensure that pupils receive their entitlement to a full day in school.

*Published June 2011*