

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

St. Augustine's Special NS
Uimhir rolla: 184990

Date of inspection: 20 May 2011



1. Introduction

St Augustine's is a special co-educational national school under the trusteeship of St. John of God Services and the patronage of the Archbishop of Dublin, catering for pupils with Mild General Learning Disabilities (MGLD). The majority of the 151 students on roll have associated or additional learning needs, including some students with autism. The school enrolment also includes twelve students of post-primary age attending St. John of God Hospital, Stillorgan. St. John of God Services funds a range of programmes and support services for the students, including psychology, speech and language therapy and social work. The majority of students are of secondary school age and the school provides a wide variety of post-primary programmes, including the Junior Certificate and the Junior Certificate Schools Programme (JCSP). Students also pursue programmes leading to FETAC awards and a range of vocational training programmes. Students attend from a wide area, with the majority attending from the southeast of County Dublin. Most of the students avail of the Department of Education school transport service. There is also residential support for approximately thirty students in six houses close to the school campus. An excellent range of facilities is available to the students, including a canteen, swimming pool, gymnasium and school garden. The board of management of the school was given an opportunity to comment on the findings and recommendations of the report; a response was not received from the board.

2. Summary of Findings and Recommendations for Further Development

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

- The excellent collaboration between and across the highly capable and committed school staff and the educational support team is the foundation of an effective, integrated, and holistic provision for the students.
- A very committed and effective board of management successfully leads and manages the school.
- The leadership of the principal and in-school management team demonstrates a proactive commitment to the provision of quality services in all areas of the school's work.
- Good and effective teaching was observed in classrooms across the school.
- The school has developed excellent facilities and resources which are used optimally for the benefit of the students.

The following **main recommendations** are made:

- The school should continue the professional development of the teachers in the writing of measurable IEP targets that can be linked to the assessment process.
- Building on existing good practice, the school should consider extending the use of methodologies such as co-operative learning and team-teaching.
- In order to support the further advancement of the self-awareness and self-management skills of individual students, consideration should be given to increasing the emphasis in their learning programmes on the development and use of self-regulation strategies.

3. Quality of School Management

- The board of management is properly constituted and comprises experienced members who demonstrate very good knowledge of the work of the school and who are actively engaged in its development. The members of the board work closely with the principal in the formulation and ratification of school policies. Comprehensive work has been undertaken in relation to the development of policies and procedures across all aspects of the operation of the school. The board is commended for its ongoing commitment to the school's development.
- The in-school management team comprises the principal, deputy principal, assistant principals and special duties post-holders. The principal demonstrates exceptional commitment and leadership and is highly respected within the school community. He works collaboratively with the school staff and the educational support team, to promote co-operative, student-focused approaches to meeting the needs of the students.
- The principal is supported by a highly capable deputy principal and in-school management team, which contributes substantially to the organisation, management and development of the work of the school. Post holders meet regularly and communicate frequently with staff members. Excellent developmental work, over a number of years, has been undertaken in relation to the important area of students accessing state certification through FETAC, the Junior Certificate and JCSP.
- The work of the committed, capable and conscientious staff team of teachers and SNAs is in evidence across the school. The teaching staff of twenty-one has a wide range of professional experience, at primary and post-primary levels. Many of the teachers have post-graduate training in the education of pupils with special educational needs. Part-time teaching posts for Music, Physical Education (PE), Information and Communication Technology (ICT) contribute significantly to the quality of provision available to the students. Most of the team of SNAs have undertaken training and attended courses relevant to their work. The board of management is highly supportive in addressing the continuing professional development needs of the staff. Effective secretarial, administrative and caretaking services contribute to the efficient running of the school and the maintenance of an orderly and attractive school environment. A wide range of resources and excellent use of the interactive whiteboard was observed in numerous classrooms. The school accommodation and grounds are maintained to a very high standard.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- St. Augustine's School successfully engages in ongoing processes of formal and informal school self-evaluation and development planning. Extensive and detailed work has been undertaken in relation to whole-school planning in the curricular, organisational and pastoral areas. Over a period of years the school has successfully planned and implemented a range of initiatives and projects, including the introduction of the Junior Certificate, JCSP, FETAC accreditation, vocational training, transition programmes, the development of ICT facilities, and programmes in the Arts, Physical Education and sport.
- Teachers conscientiously undertake classroom planning and complete monthly progress records to a high standard across the school. Extensive preparation and organisation is undertaken in relation to post-primary programmes for students pursuing FETAC awards

and the certificate examinations. Within the context of a commendable inter-disciplinary individual education planning (IEP) process, teachers prepare individual education plans for their students. The school has undertaken good work in this area and should continue the professional development of the teachers in the writing of measurable IEP targets that can be linked to the assessment process.

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

- Good and effective teaching was observed in classrooms across the school. The students pursue primary, FETAC Level 3, Junior Certificate and vocational programmes. The teachers are conscious of the diverse range of learning needs and differentiate the lessons for individual students in relation to the learning process, content and tasks. Cross-curricular approaches were employed effectively in many of the classrooms observed. The students have achieved commendable results in the FETAC and Junior Certificate award programmes in recent years. Building on existing good practice in teaching, consideration should be given to extending opportunities for the use of co-operative learning strategies in classrooms. Team-teaching approaches would also provide ways for further sharing of good classroom practice.
- Good attention is given to the promotion of language and literacy at both primary and post-primary levels. The majority of students pursue a programme leading to certification in this curricular area. A variety of strategies is used, and approaches such as peer-tutoring have been employed successfully with some classes. Identified students also benefit from the learning support provided for those with particular difficulties in literacy. In tandem with the Junior Certificate and FETAC programmes, the school should continue to ensure that the *NCCA Guidelines for teachers of students with general learning disabilities* inform the programmes offered to students as they progress through the school. Consideration should also be given to consolidating existing practices in relation to literacy into a unified policy across the school.
- In Mathematics, the students pursue programmes based on the Primary School Curriculum, the Junior Certificate and FETAC level 3, and a good variety of approaches is employed in classrooms. Features of good practice observed include, clear explanation and demonstration, use of concrete materials and links to real life contexts. Students are grouped for mathematics in some areas of the school. The school is advised to document the rationale and procedures involved in grouping students in subjects such as mathematics. Approaches to grouping should be carefully and regularly monitored and sufficiently flexible to enable changes to be made in response to any negative consequences that may arise for individual students.
- A broad and interesting range of activities is undertaken in the area of Social, Environmental and Scientific Education (SESE). Both primary and post-primary students have opportunities to engage with the subjects of History, Geography and Science and very good use is made of ICT to foster active student involvement. Civic Social and Political Education (CSPE) is also skilfully undertaken with students of post-primary age.

A programme in Horticulture is available and the school has also participated successfully in the Green-Schools initiative. The school garden and grounds are a very useful resource in this regard.

- Very good opportunities are provided for students to participate in the area of the Arts. The varied and skilful approaches in the Visual Arts, Drama and Music enable students to express themselves through the Arts. The students' work is attractively presented throughout the school. The involvement and engagement of students in aspects of the music programme of the school was outstanding. Good work is also undertaken in Ceramics and in the area of Home Economics. In Physical Education, a very good variety of activities is undertaken and careful attention is given to the promotion of fitness, skill development and student participation in games and sport. The activities include football, basketball, swimming and athletics.
- Social Personal and Health Education (SPHE) is given careful consideration in classrooms and is also integrated into the activities of the school day. A broad programme of learning activities is implemented, including the Relationships and Sexuality (RSE) programme. A good variety of policies and procedures are in place to support students in relation to behaviour and to affirm positive student participation. There is very good collaboration between the school and the educational support team where required for individual students. In order to support the further advancement of the self-awareness and self-management skills of individual students, where appropriate, consideration should be given to increasing the emphasis in their learning programmes on the development and use of self-regulation strategies.

6. Quality of Supports for Pupils

St. Augustine's School provides a carefully structured and supportive school environment. The excellent collaboration between and across the highly capable and committed school staff and the educational support team is the foundation of an effective, integrated, and holistic provision for the students. A broad and balanced curriculum programme and extra-curricular activities aim to provide for the diverse range of needs of the students. Staff members engage in ongoing CPD in order that the school can increase its capacity to cater for students with additional needs, including students with autism, challenging behaviour and mental health issues. Class-based assessment effectively provides teachers with a range of information on student knowledge, skills and abilities. Consideration should be given to reviewing and integrating existing assessment practices across the school. As students progress through the school, impressive opportunities are provided for them to pursue vocational training and work experiences through structured activities and programmes. Very good liaison with the services is in place to support the students in their vocational activities. On completion of their schooling, effective systems are in place to facilitate students in their transition to further education, training or employment.

