

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

**Whole School Evaluation
REPORT**

**St. Michael's House Special School
Grosvenor Rd
Rathgar Dublin 6
Uimhir rolla: 18671A**

Date of inspection: 7 April 2011



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

1. Introduction

St Michael's House Special School, Grosvenor Rd., Rathgar, is a special coeducational national school catering for pupils with a primary diagnosis of moderate, severe or profound general learning disability, some of whom also have a diagnosis of autism. The school operates under the patronage of St Michael's House. The school has a staff of thirteen teachers and twenty-three special needs assistants (SNAs) and caters for a wide catchment area of South Dublin. The majority of the sixty-five pupils avail of the school transport service. Support services funded by St Michael's House, include speech and language therapy, occupational therapy, psychology, psychiatry and physiotherapy. The main school building is currently located in two former residential houses. Three of the school's classes are located in temporary accommodation in a mainstream national school in Ballinteer. The provision of new school facilities, to be located in Ballinteer, has been agreed by the Department of Education and Skills. 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 comprises experienced and knowledgeable members, who are highly committed to the development of the school and work actively and effectively on its behalf.
- The principal, teachers and SNAs demonstrate high levels of commitment in their work with the pupils.
- The school provides a caring and supportive environment in which pupils engage in a wide variety of beneficial learning experiences.
- An impressive multidisciplinary team approach has been developed to integrate the educational and health-related programmes for each pupil.
- Praiseworthy work is undertaken in relation to the social and personal development of the pupils and in the area of the Arts.
- There is positive parental support for the work of the school

The following **main recommendations** are made:

- A whole-school approach should be adopted for school planning across the curriculum areas.
- The IEP process developed by the school should be consolidated in light of the recent extension of the multidisciplinary team approach.
- Consideration should be given to the introduction of a system of certification, such as FETAC, at the appropriate levels for individual pupils.



3. Quality of School Management

- The board of management is properly constituted with experienced members who demonstrate knowledge of the school and are committed to its development. The board meets regularly and is highly conscientious and effective in relation to its duties, including the development and ratification of policies. School finances are managed with the assistance of St Michael's House and accounts are audited annually. The board is actively seeking the provision of suitable temporary facilities pending construction of the new school accommodation. The board is commended for its ongoing commitment and work on behalf of the school.
- The in-school management team comprises the principal, deputy principal, one assistant principal and five special duties post-holders. The recently appointed principal demonstrates highly committed leadership of the school. Mutually respectful and supportive relationships have been established. The principal is strongly committed to the performance of her role and is concerned to motivate and involve staff in whole-school collaborative planning and practice. The principal is supported by the deputy principal and the other members of the in-school management team, who make an important contribution to the organisation and management of the school. As a means of supporting this whole-school development process, it is recommended that the in-school management team plays a leading role in reviewing and revising school planning across the curriculum areas. Post-holder responsibilities for specific curricular areas could be reviewed as part of this process. The services of the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST) and the Special Education Support Service (SESS) should be accessed to support such school development processes.
- The teaching staff have a wide range of professional experience and a number have post-graduate training in the education of pupils with special needs. The majority of the twenty-three SNAs have undertaken training and attended courses relevant to their work. It is evident that the staff is committed and capable. They demonstrate caring and supportive awareness of the needs of the pupils. The staff make good use of the available school accommodation despite its limitations. The classrooms are equipped with a range of useful teaching aids and resources.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- The school has engaged productively in a review of a number of areas of school policy, practice and curriculum. A commendable system of multidisciplinary meetings for individual pupils has been established and this collaborative process can contribute beneficially to individualised education planning for pupils. It is recommended that the IEP process developed by the school should now be consolidated and formalised in light of the recent initiatives in the multidisciplinary team approach.
- School planning documents address the organisational, curricular and pastoral areas of the work of the school. A review of the school plan has recently been undertaken in relation to the area of language and literacy. This process of review of curriculum

planning should now be extended to address each of the curriculum areas. The in-school management team should lead this as a collaborative and whole-school process.

- Long-term planning and monthly progress records, organised to a high standard, were observed in classrooms. Consideration should now be given to devising a whole-school approach and template for short-term planning in order to support the organisation and provision of a broad and balanced curriculum and the tracking of the continuity and consolidation of the pupils' learning experiences through the school.

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

- The school staff have succeeded in creating classroom environments that are supportive and which provide conscientiously for pupils who have a wide range of complex learning needs. Good teaching and pupil engagement were observed in classrooms across the school. A variety of teaching approaches, involving individual and group work, and the effective use of resources was in evidence. For pupils with ASD, visual timetables and schedules are used effectively and individualised pupil work-stations and autism specific approaches, including TEACCH and PECS are beneficially employed. For particular classes and pupils, consideration should be given to extending the range of methodologies available, to include approaches such as Applied Behavioural Analysis (ABA). Across the school, a good emphasis is given to the promotion of the pupils' capacity to make choices and to the development of daily living and independence skills. Teachers are conscious of the importance of assessing, recording and monitoring the pupils' progress and some good work has begun in this area. Further assessment resources should be identified to support teachers in tracking pupil progress in relation to their identified priority learning goals. The ASDAN programme has recently been piloted with pupils in a number of senior classes. Consideration should now be given to the introduction of a nationally recognised system of certification, such as FETAC, at the appropriate levels, for individual pupils of post-primary age.
- In the area of Language and Communication, staff conscientiously attend to the promotion of the pupils' receptive and expressive skills. Language activities are based on the needs and interests of the pupils. Circle-time, story, drama and music activities, and cross-curricular projects are beneficially employed to support learning. The use of LAMH and PECS is actively promoted with individual pupils, along with the use of assistive technology for a number of pupils. The teachers, SNAs and speech and language therapists undertake important collaborative work in relation to the language and communication needs of the pupils. Early reading and writing activities are undertaken conscientiously with the pupils of primary-age. In the senior and post-primary classes, the pupils, according to their individual needs, participate in a range of activities promoting the development of functional literacy skills.

- With the primary age pupils, the activities in Mathematics are linked to the classroom and school environment and good use is made of concrete and visual materials. The approaches adopted in classrooms recognize the diverse range of the pupils' learning needs. In the senior and post-primary classrooms due attention is given to the practical application of skills and social mathematics, according to the capacities of individual pupils.
- A variety of interesting activities is undertaken in the area of Social, Environmental and Scientific Education (SESE). A sense of time, chronology, change and continuity is fostered through the exploration of significant events in the lives of the pupils, and due attention is given to seasonal occasions. Good use is made of local and community amenities. The digital camera is used effectively as a teaching resource. Consideration should be given to further developing the school's involvement with the Green-School programme.
- The activities undertaken in the Visual Arts, Music and Drama are a significant strength of the school. A wide range of activities and approaches are employed proving pupils with positive and enriching learning experiences Opportunities are taken to reinforce other curriculum areas, especially language and communication. Attractive displays of pupils work in the Visual Arts were observed, and good practice was observed in Music and Drama. In Physical Education, due attention is given to the health benefits of exercise, with activities to promote the fitness and mobility of the pupils. Swimming and football are actively promoted in the school.
- Social Personal and Health Education (SPHE) is given careful consideration in classrooms and integrated into the activities of the school day. Independence and social skills are actively promoted and opportunities are taken on occasions such as mealtimes, daily routines and school outings to reinforce self-help skills. A regular assembly is organised where the work and achievement of the pupils and classes are acknowledged and affirmed. Commendable links have been established with schools in the wider community.

6. Quality of Supports for Pupils

- St Michael's House School staff provide a secure and supportive environment for pupils where they are enabled to participate in a wide and beneficial range of learning activities. A collaborative multidisciplinary approach has been developed to support integrated approaches to addressing the education and health-related needs of the pupils. On a continuing basis, staff members access a range of training and professional development concerned with meeting the needs of the pupils. A wide variety of programmes has been developed and implemented across the school. Regular contact is maintained between the school and home. The school is committed to the ongoing development of its policies, planning and programmes to address the complex learning needs of the pupils in its care.

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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

We are delighted that since the WSE took place in April 2011, the school has moved to a new temporary accommodation in Leopardstown, which is more suitable for our needs. We are currently working on building new community links, and have started a green school project/ We are pleased that the high level of commitment of the education partners was recognised. We will continue to build on the quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievements and we are pleased that these strengths were identified in the report. We will continue to support and build strong collaborative relationships between school, home and the clinical Multi-Disciplinary Team of St Michael's House.

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 In School Management team is actively working on revision of the school plan, SESS have been consulted for guidance. Two teachers are currently undertaking A.S.D. training.

Since the WSE took place the IEP process has been completed and is working well. In relation to certification the school is currently in year 2 of a pilot scheme with A.S.D.A.N. In consultation with St Michael's House FETAC is being explored