

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**

**Department of Education and Skills**

**Whole School Evaluation  
REPORT**

**Our Lady of Lourdes Special NS  
National Rehabilitation Hospital  
Uimhir rolla: 18815V**

**Date of inspection: 05 October 2011**



## 1. Introduction

Our Lady of Lourdes is a two-teacher special national school located in the National Rehabilitation Hospital (NRH), Dun Laoghaire, Co. Dublin, under the auspices of the Sisters of Mercy. The majority of the pupils have an acquired brain injury (ABI) or spinal injury. Established in 1962 for children of school-going age attending the hospital as in-patients, the school is now an integral part of the service provided at the NRH. Support services include paediatric medicine, psychology, physiotherapy, speech and language therapy (SLT), occupational therapy, nursing and social work. A significant change in recent years is that the typical length of stay of children at the NRH has decreased considerably. Generally pupils are now enrolled in the school for periods ranging from a number of days to approximately two months. Pupils present with a very wide range of educational requirements and learning needs from early primary school to senior cycle at post-primary. 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 development of the school is actively supported by the commitment of the chairperson and members of Board of Management.
- The teachers demonstrate high levels of dedication and professionalism in their work with and on behalf of the pupils.
- The staff of the school demonstrate flexibility and creativity in the development of programmes to address the complex educational needs of the pupils.
- The conscientious implementation of the pupils' individualised education programmes is commendable.
- Collaborative, inter-disciplinary planning of a high quality is undertaken in relation to individual children.

The following **main recommendations** are made:

- The role of in-school management should be strengthened to support ongoing school planning activities.
- It is recommended that the school's development planning processes should be enhanced. An action-planning approach should be considered to address the identified needs and emerging priorities of the school in its changing context.
- It is recommended that the use of ICT should be extended in working with the pupils and the wider school community.

### **3. Quality of School Management**

- The Board of Management is properly constituted, and comprises experienced members who work collaboratively and effectively on behalf of the school. The Board meets regularly in relation to school business and maintains records, manages finances and is conscientious in relation to its duties. A comprehensive range of policies has been considered and ratified by the Board. Positive communication with the hospital is also facilitated through the Board. In light of a changing school context and building on existing good practice further development planning should be undertaken to guide its future work.
- The principal is highly committed to the work of the school and successfully promotes a positive climate and productive working relationships among school and hospital colleagues. The principal is ably supported by the deputy principal in the efficient operation of the school and the promotion of an affirming and supportive learning environment for pupils. While there is frequent sharing of information in relation to school related matters, it is recommended that specific in-school management meetings should be scheduled to address identified school needs and changing priorities.
- Both teachers have post-graduate qualifications and considerable experience in working with pupils who have special education needs. Two special needs assistants provide important support in relation to the care needs of the pupils. A part-time school secretary contributes to the effective administration of the school. The school area is attractively presented and well maintained. The classrooms are equipped with a good variety of resources for the curriculum areas, along with a range of ICT and one of the classrooms has an interactive whiteboard. While the school has made progress in using technology as a resource for teaching and learning, it is recommended that the use of ICT should be extended, where appropriate, in working with the pupils and the wider school community.
- The importance of effective communication with parents and with the members of the NRH interdisciplinary team is recognised by school personnel and ongoing constructive relationships are in evidence. Parents are welcomed in the school classrooms and have easy access to the teachers, to discuss matters in relation to their child's current educational programme or their preparation for transition from the NRH School to a school closer to his or her home. Communication with the school to which the pupil will be returning is also undertaken conscientiously to support the young person's return to her or his own community.

### **4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation**

- The school has developed a wide range of policies across the organisational, curricular and pastoral areas. There is evidence of a good understanding of the learning needs of the pupils in the approach of the staff in the planning and organisation of the work of the school. The teachers work closely with members of the clinical team in relation to the planning of individual programmes. The programmes of education provided for pupils take account of the nature of their medical needs, educational priorities, therapy programmes and the expected length of stay at the NRH.
- Detailed planning of a high quality is undertaken in relation to the pupils' educational programmes. On first attendance, priority learning needs are identified through observation, teacher prepared tasks and standardised and diagnostic tests, as necessary. Contact is made with the pupil's previous school, as necessary. Where appropriate, the use of materials and approaches for the baseline assessment of individual pupils should be extended. A detailed educational profile and individualised plan is prepared and the pupils' progress is carefully monitored and recorded. The

teachers also plan to support pupils who are preparing for Certificate examinations, where this is required.

- 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 teachers demonstrate high levels of skill and knowledge of the individual learning needs of pupils and provide support across a range of curriculum areas and age profiles. The school staff are flexible and creative in their approaches to teaching. The skilled and sensitive manner in which the teaching programmes are provided supports the pupils' participation in beneficial learning experiences. While many of the activities are undertaken on a one-to-one basis, opportunities for pair work and group work are also provided to facilitate social interaction among the pupils and a more typical classroom setting. Where appropriate, the school aims to support individual pupils in maintaining progress in relation to the programme undertaken in the class to which the pupil will return.
- In the area of English, the teachers are conscious of the importance of language and literacy for all children and careful attention is given to this area. The staff aim to support the use of the pupils' receptive and expressive language and communication skills across their time at school. A good variety of resources and ICT materials has been acquired and teacher-made and commercial materials are capably employed to support the pupils involvement in the learning activities. There is ongoing and beneficial liaison between the teachers and SLTs in relation to individual pupil's changing needs. Where appropriate, for example in the area of language and communication, aspects of an individual child's programme, developed through the interdisciplinary team, are included in the learning activities during the school day. Consideration should be given to further extending such collaborative practice, where practicable, in the classroom context.
- In Mathematics, the teachers provide activities to foster the development of positive attitudes and the successful acquisition of skills. The learning tasks provided aim to stimulate the pupils' interest and their confidence in their abilities. The activities in Mathematics are carefully planned and are pitched at an appropriate level for individual pupils. The approach taken enables the pupils to experience a sense of achievement and progress. The pupils have access to a good range of materials and IT resources in this area.
- In Social Environmental and Scientific Education, the effective use of thematic projects and of cross-curricular approaches is in evidence. There is a suitable emphasis on active learning methodologies through which pupils are encouraged to practice the use of a variety of skills, including those in the areas of language and fine motor co-ordination. A range of materials, including ICT resources, is available to accommodate the range of age and interest levels of the pupils. Curriculum linkages are imaginatively pursued, particularly in relation to opportunities for language development.
- Through their participation in the Arts, the pupils are involved in a range of beneficial activities providing them with opportunities for creative activity and self-expression.

Provision in the Visual Arts is supported by the work of an Art teacher, funded under the Department scheme for additional hours and the school has acquired a good range of resources in this area. Pupils were observed participating purposefully and with enjoyment in lessons, and samples of the pupils' work are attractively displayed.

- The area of Social, Personal and Health Education is undertaken with care and sensitivity. The school staff are conscious that the pupils experience significant additional challenges in learning as a consequence of their illness or injury. A positive school environment is promoted where the staff endeavour to support the pupils in building confidence in their abilities and to provide opportunities to enhance their self-esteem during their time in the NRH

## **6. Quality of Supports for Pupils**

- School personnel work in an effective, conscientious, and collaborative manner with their NRH colleagues and the educational, therapeutic and care needs of the pupils are carefully attended to. The teaching staff have undertaken a wide range of training in the education of pupils with special needs and have considerable experience in working with pupils who have an ABI. Detailed planning is undertaken in relation to the pupils' individual programmes. There is ongoing collaboration with members of the interdisciplinary team in support of the pupils' programmes. Parents have ready access to the school to discuss their child's current education programme and emerging issues and concerns. The school has acquired a range of useful resources, including ICT, to support its work. Important links are made with the schools to which the pupils will return in order to share information and provide advice. The NRH special school is committed to the development of its work on behalf of the pupils it serves.

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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 welcomes the very positive and affirmative report on the evaluation of our school. We thank the inspector for the professional and sensitive manner in which the inspection was carried out and for the courtesy that was expended to all. The Board of Management acknowledges the dedication, conscientiousness and expertise of the staff in maintaining the exceptionally high standards in all areas of the school life.

**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 Board of Management acknowledges the practical recommendations from the inspector and steps have been taken to implement them for the good of the school.