

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

St. Peter's Special NS
Orwell Road, Rathgar, Dublin 6
Roll No. : 18904U

Date of inspection: 20 February 2013



1. Introduction

St. Peter's is a co-educational special school for pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties (EBD), located on the campus of the Lucena Clinic, Rathgar, Dublin 6. Founded by the St. John of God Order, the school operates under the patronage of the Catholic Archbishop of Dublin. The school has an enrolment of sixty pupils, ranging in age from four to eighteen years. Pupils are referred to the school following psychological or psychiatric assessment and applications generally outnumber the places available each year. The majority of the pupils avail of school transport provided under the Department of Education and Skills scheme. The board of management was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the report, and the board chose to accept the report without response.

2. Summary of Findings and Recommendations for Further Development

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

- The current and future development of the school is supported by a very dedicated and effective board of management.
- The principal and in-school management team display a high degree of commitment to the work and development of the school.
- The very committed and experienced staff of teachers, special needs assistants (SNAs) and the social-care team demonstrate high levels of skilled practice in supporting the learning and care needs of the pupils.
- The learning needs of the pupils are provided for in a welcoming, supportive and well organised school environment.
- A broad programme of curriculum activities and programmes have been developed to cater for the diversity of pupils' learning needs.
- School facilities are well maintained and resourced.
- Commitment to ongoing development and to engagement with school self-evaluation processes is in evidence.

The following **main recommendations** are made:

- In light of the recent changes in school management and to address emerging challenges, it is recommended that continuing professional development in school leadership and management be prioritised for all members of the in-school management team.
- It is recommended that within a whole-school collaborative process, the emerging needs of the school should be clarified and prioritised, and used to inform a review of in-school management functions and responsibilities.
- To further consolidate the pupils' experience of learning, opportunities to extend the existing and beneficial collaborative practices between the teachers, social care workers and SNAs should be explored
- The IEP process requires further development in relation to the writing of specific curricular and behavioural targets that are measurable and can be used effectively to track student progress; the function of the IEP and its role in assessment should be included in the new school policy for assessment.

3. Quality of School Management

- The board of management is properly constituted and comprises members with a wide variety of expertise and experience who are actively committed to the work and development of the school. The board carefully attends to its duties, considers and ratifies school policies, addresses school issues and effectively supports the work and mission of the school. The members of the board are praised for their dedicated and ongoing work on behalf of the school community. The board of management is supportive of the professional development of staff members. Opportunities for members of the in-school management team to address the board of management in relation to their areas of responsibility on an ongoing basis should be extended.

Significant changes at school management level have taken place in recent years. The principal fulfils his role in a highly committed manner and works conscientiously in pursuing the ongoing development of the school. The organisation and management of the school is supported by a capable and committed in-school management team. The principal and in-school management team have a key role in establishing effective systems of communication and team work, which will require further time for development. In light of the recent changes in school management and to address emerging challenges, it is recommended that continuing professional development in school leadership and management be prioritised for all members of the in-school management team.

The members of the in-school management meet regularly at the beginning of the school day to discuss priority issues and actions. While the team currently undertake a range of pastoral, organisational and curricular duties, a number of these require review. It is recommended that within a whole-school collaborative process, the emerging needs of the school should be clarified and prioritised, and used to inform a review of in-school management functions and responsibilities.

- The school staff comprises eleven class teachers, one of whom is employed in the outreach class in the Young Person's Unit, located on the Lucena Clinic Campus. The school also has an allocation of a part-time teacher for the area of Home Economics through the City of Dublin VEC. The staff team of teachers, who have a broad range of experience in relation to special educational needs, carefully attend to the learning needs of the pupils. This work is conscientiously supported by the SNA team. Important support for the pupils is also provided by the school-based social care team, funded through St. John of God Services. The good collaboration in evidence effectively facilitates the core activities of the school. With a view to prioritising the current and future professional development needs of school personnel, an audit of the continuing professional development needs of staff should be undertaken. Efficient secretarial and ancillary supports contribute to the effective running of the school.
- An open and welcoming school environment has been created. The assembly areas and grounds are well maintained and used flexibly to accommodate the recreational and support needs of the pupils. Classrooms are well-equipped and a range of information and communication technology (ICT) is available in classrooms. Classroom and school displays are attractively presented, highlighting the work of the pupils and aspects of curriculum activities undertaken. Good use is made of specialist rooms for curriculum areas such as Home Economics and for sensory activities.

- The teachers, SNAs and social care team collaborate closely in the effective care and management of the pupils. Respectful and constructive staff-pupil interactions were observed during the period of evaluation. A range of behaviour programmes along with aspects of the Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) programme are implemented consistently across the school day. In the questionnaires, most of the pupils indicated positive views of their school experience. To further consolidate the pupils' experience of learning, opportunities to extend the existing and beneficial collaborative practices between the teachers, social care workers and SNAs should be explored. Consideration should also be given to facilitating the pupils' participation in the *Green Schools* and the *Active Schools* initiatives, providing further opportunities for active pupil learning and engagement. The conscientious team approach and skilful attention to the support and management of the pupils is praised.
- There is ongoing communication between home and school and regular meetings with parents in relation to the needs and development of the pupils. The parents' association engages positively with the school on a range of activities and the parents' questionnaires indicate overall positive views of the learning environment and teaching provided in St. Peter's School. These positive relationships are praised and should continue to be developed, through, for example, further consultation with parents in areas of school policy formulation.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- School management and staff have initiated a number of development planning and school self-evaluation processes. A broad programme of curriculum activities and programmes to cater for the diversity of pupils' learning needs at primary and post-primary has been developed. A range of policies has been developed and policy development work is ongoing in the organisational, curricular and pastoral areas. Greater emphasis on team approaches in the development and implementation of school policies should be employed in order to strengthen collaborative practice across the school.

Classroom teachers undertake long-and short-term planning and prepare conscientiously to provide for the range of curriculum areas. While individualised education planning is undertaken for all pupils, the school's IEP process requires further development. Specific curricular and behavioural targets that are measurable and can be used effectively to track student progress should be identified and recorded. The function of the IEP and its role in assessment should be included in the new school policy on assessment.

- Confirmation was provided that the board of management has formally adopted the *Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools* without modification and that the school is compliant with the requirements of the *Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools*

5. Quality of Teaching, Learning and Pupil Achievement

- Good quality teaching and learning was observed across the school and the pupils' interest and participation were skillfully promoted in classrooms at both the primary and post-primary levels. The classroom environments were carefully organised and good use was made of the shared areas for group and individualised activities. Consideration should be given to the use of team-teaching approaches in relation to specific aspects of the class and pupils' programmes, such as SPHE, in order to bring greater cohesion to the learning experience of pupils during the school day.

- The work of the pupils is regularly monitored and their progress is tracked using assessment approaches which include classroom observation, checklists, pupil profiles and standardised tests. Future development of the school's policy on assessment should aim to clarify the rationale and purpose of the various aspects of the assessment process. This should include review of the current instruments and the use of baseline and criterion-referenced testing.
- There is a clear priority given to the development of language and literacy in both the primary and post-primary classrooms of the school. Lessons are differentiated to cater for the variety of learning needs. Classroom approaches include the use of circle-time and the use of whole-language activities, involving story and cross-curricular themes. Curriculum activities are suitably integrated to support language development across the school day.

The teaching staff has responded positively to the *National Literacy and Numeracy* strategy through whole-school discussions about literacy development across the school and the appointment of a literacy link teacher is in hand. It is recommended that this whole-school approach be extended to the development and implementation of a school policy which focuses on the identification of individual pupils' literacy needs and the provision of specific reading instruction.

- Classroom practice provides for a range of learning needs in Mathematics at both the primary and post-primary stages. A positive approach to Mathematics is fostered. Good use is made of concrete materials and visual aids in the learning activities and useful links are made to the environment and the pupils' experience. Due attention is given to the development of the language of Mathematics and constructive cross-curricular links are pursued.
- At both the Primary and Post-primary stages, a wide range of topics are undertaken across the area of Social, Environmental and Scientific Education. A project-based thematic approach is prominent in classrooms and the pupils participate constructively in the activities provided. Careful attention is given to the language and literacy component of this work. Good use is made of resources, including ICT, in supporting the pupils' engagement in these curricular areas.

Pupils participate beneficially in the programme of activities provided in the Visual Arts, Drama and Music. The school has good facilities for the area of Physical Education and a broad range of activities is provided to accommodate the wide age range and abilities of the pupils. Provision is made for swimming in a local pool. The area of Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) is addressed through discrete lessons and incorporated across the school day. Pupils participate in a highly structured and beneficial programme in Home Economics.

The Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP) provides a supportive framework for junior cycle students, while the FETAC programme has also provided useful opportunities for pupil progression at the post-primary level. Across the range of school activities, the social care co-ordinator and team provide valued additional support to foster development in a range of areas including, personal development, social and communication skills, behaviour, self-management and self-esteem.

6. Quality of Supports for Pupils

- St. Peter's school has put in place a range of policies and practices to support the learning and development of the pupils presenting with emotional and behavioural difficulties who attend this school. There is very good collaboration between the school

team and the social care team which contributes to the provision of a supportive environment where the needs of the pupils can be addressed. There is commitment to addressing the holistic needs of the pupils. Clinical support services also contribute to this process.

Differentiated teaching approaches catering for individual differences were in evidence across the school. The team approach incorporates an awareness of the range of issues arising from the special educational needs of individual pupils. The school has developed useful links with a number of external agencies. Important links have also been developed with mainstream primary and post-primary schools, enabling pupils to access regular school settings on an incremental basis. Where practicable, consideration should be given to extending such opportunities for pupils in mainstream settings. The school is committed to the ongoing development of its provision for pupils with special educational needs arising from emotional and behavioural difficulties.