

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

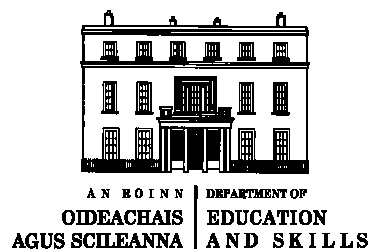
Department of Education and Skills

**Whole School Evaluation
REPORT**

**Scoil Chormaic School,
Golden Road,
Cashel,
County Tipperary.**

Uimhir rolla:19230V

Date of inspection: 03 May 2013



1. Introduction

Scoil Chormaic in Cashel is designated by the Department of Education and Skills as a special school for children with mild general learning disability. Enrolment has grown recently and currently stands at 181. During the whole-school evaluation, inspectors observed learning and teaching in eighteen classes. 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:

- Scoil Chormaic is a vibrant and welcoming community where the quality of teaching is very good, with several examples of excellent practice observed.
- The school is very well managed and outstanding leadership is provided by the principal.
- There are very good arrangements to support and include all pupils and to care for them.
- The school has a strong partnership with parents and carers and outside agencies.
- The special needs assistants support the teachers in promoting pupils' self-esteem and confidence.
- The school provides valuable age-appropriate education programmes that lead to national accreditation.

The following **main recommendations** are made:

- The teachers should engage further with the individual education planning process to describe more fully the adaptations that are made and the strategies employed to ensure successful differentiation.
- Consideration should be given, in some cases, to providing more opportunities for pupils to engage in creative and personal writing.
- The assessment of pupils' achievement in Drama should be developed further.

3. Quality of School Management

- The board of management succeeds admirably in fulfilling its duty to provide direction to the school. The board is well informed about ongoing school matters and the board has considered and approved a range of policy documents.
- The principal's very effective leadership is characterised by high professional standards. She is keen to empower colleagues and to include all stakeholders in developing a shared vision for the school. She engenders an enthusiasm for teaching and learning across the school.
- The deputy principal and the in-school management team provide highly competent and dedicated support. The team is made up of able and enthusiastic teachers who are well positioned to lead the school's self-evaluation process.

- The clear educational direction provided by the principal and in-school management team is reflected in the dedication and professionalism of the entire staff. Other teachers also take on key leadership roles in developing curriculum and in the organisation of activities.
- The school's accommodation provides an attractive and stimulating learning environment. The school provides wide corridors and spacious communal areas. Accommodation includes specialist subject rooms and rooms for health service professionals. All classrooms are bright and spacious and there are ample toileting and changing facilities.
- The teachers and support staff demonstrate commitment to availing of additional training relating to special educational needs.
- The school is generally well resourced with ICT facilities. Consideration has been given to pupils with additional needs and augmentative communication devices and electronic switches are available.
- In responding to questionnaires, parents were overwhelmingly positive about the quality of education being provided. Scheduled parent-teacher meetings take place and consultation meetings are convened for the development of Individual Education Plans. A regular school newsletter keeps parents informed of school affairs.
- A formal parents' association with affiliation to the National Parent's Council is not currently in place. Such an association could potentially add considerable value both for parents and the whole-school community.
- The pupils were managed effectively in a caring manner and the inspectors encountered a courteous cohort of pupils who were often keen to engage in conversation. Individual successes in projects, Art, and Music are celebrated. Results from pupil questionnaires indicate that pupils feel well supported by their teachers.
- A very good set of strategies has been put in place to promote school attendance. These include making the curriculum attractive to pupils and the availability of after-school activities.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- The practice of school development planning is well established. A range of administrative and curriculum policies provide guidance to the work of the school and useful direction for teachers' planning. The pursuit of post-primary accreditation for senior pupils is a creditable aspect of the practice.
- All teachers prepare high quality long-term and short-term planning and provide informative monthly progress records.
- 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

- The quality of teaching is very good throughout the school with several examples of excellent practice observed. Successful methodologies include circle time, one-to-one instruction, and guided-discovery learning.
- In English, particular emphasis is given to the development of oral language and communication skills and a strong emphasis is placed on thematic discussion in group situations. Visual schedules, LÁMH and Picture Exchange Communication System are all actively used with pupils where appropriate. Print-rich environments are created in all classrooms and class libraries are well stocked. Due attention is paid to the development of spelling, punctuation, and handwriting skills. Pupils apply their reading and writing skills in other areas of the curriculum especially in social, environmental, and scientific education. In some cases, pupils should be provided with further opportunities to engage in more personal and creative writing.
- Differentiation in planning is very much in evidence and in English. Teachers maintain individual profiles on pupils. With the senior classes the emphasis is on developing functional reading and writing. Very good practice was observed in the integration of English skills in FETAC programmes.
- The standard of teaching and learning in Mathematics is very good. The teachers ensure that pupils are given access to a broad range of mathematical experiences. The whole-school plan is laid out according to the strands of the primary curriculum and later linked to the relevant post-primary programmes. At senior level, there is an emphasis on reinforcing mathematical skills that are associated with daily mathematical applications and leisure activities. Stimulating and well-organised lessons are taught and practical work with concrete materials is very much in evidence. Basic numeracy targets and measurement areas are given adequate attention and due attention is devoted to the practical application of all concepts. Work is neatly recorded and ICT software is used to support learning. There is an emphasis on collaborative work and mathematical concepts are explored further in activities related to other areas of curriculum.
- A school plan has been provided for Drama and, in observed lessons, pupils collaborated well and actively participated in activities. Warm-up activities include group social games and topics are chosen with care to reinforce the enjoyment aspect of the subject. Pupils' skill in the use of drama conventions such as mime, role play, improvisation, and freeze-framing are expanded as they progress through the school. Staff members with particular expertise enhance the provision at senior level. Imaginatively constructed scenarios increase the pupils' ability to develop strategies for coping with potential real-life situations. The pupils devise script outlines and they discuss character development. The formal assessment of pupils' progress in Drama could be now developed further with a view to building on the very good work already being done at senior level.
- In Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE), lessons are underpinned by a warm, nurturing atmosphere that pervades all school activities. Individual, class and school achievements are celebrated. Staff members endeavour to make the pupils as independent as possible. In SPHE lessons, pupils encounter a wide range of personal and social issues. Personal skills are developed with younger pupils in the context of daily routines and curricular activities such as swimming. With older pupils, there is a focus on the development of skills for adult life and the staff organise out of school experiences for the pupils which include visits in the local community and work

experience. A Relationships and Sexuality Education programme is addressed through the general content of the SPHE programme as well as in dedicated lessons.

- A range of suitable assessment approaches is used and include teacher observation, monitoring of pupils' activities, checklists, and photographs of pupils at work. Standardised tests are sometimes used. Video recordings could be used more extensively in assessment. Some pupils present with sensory disabilities and functional assessments of vision and hearing would provide the staff with the knowledge to create the optimum learning environment for those pupils. Where appropriate, and in a small number of cases, functional assessments of behaviour could assist in identifying triggers for particular behaviours and situations that may cause anxiety for pupils.

6. Quality of Support for Pupils

- All of the teachers approach their work in a professional manner. Teachers possess extensive knowledge of the special needs within their classes and they develop Individual Education plans (IEPs).
- In general, pupils present with mild general learning disabilities. Some pupils have additional needs related to sensory or physical disabilities or to Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD). There are twelve special classes for pupils with ASD including two pre-school classes.
- Very good provision is made in the early-intervention ASD pre-school. Baselines in communication and social development are established and pupils benefit from well organised learning activities and daily school routines.
- A range of ASD specific teaching approaches is used and reflects a differentiated child-centred approach. Pupils are provided with opportunities to engage in individual and group activities and the inclusion of pupils with ASDs with their non-ASD peers in daily school life is a welcome feature of practice. Pupils are also supported in developing communication skills through direct and incidental teaching.
- An awareness of the sensory difficulties for pupils with ASDs permeates learning and teaching activities although the adaptations and strategies that are made to address sensory or co-occurring special educational needs are not always described in IEPs. In some cases, the instructional adaptations that are used effectively should be stated more clearly. It is recommended therefore that the staff engages further with the individual education planning process to more fully describe the successful differentiation that takes place.
- Scoil Chormaic benefits from its close links with a number of health service professionals who visit regularly. Psychological support, once a feature of provision, is no longer available. The board has acquired the services of a nurse for the school.
- On completion of their schooling pupils generally avail of adult training provided by a number of services. The school has well-developed practices to support pupils at transition times.
- The school's special-needs assistants (SNAs) make a valuable contribution to the care of pupils. They attend to the immediate physical care needs of individual pupils and help pupils in accessing particular activities. SNAs are aware of the importance of promoting pupils' independence.
- Scoil Chormaic promotes an inclusive ethos that facilitates the access, admission and participation of pupils from all backgrounds. Practical arrangements are in place to

support pupils who come from less advantaged backgrounds to participate in a broad range of worthwhile extra-curricular activities.

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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 on behalf of the Whole School Community wish to thank the Inspectors for the professional, courteous and supportive manner in which they conducted a thorough evaluation of the work in our school.

We appreciate acknowledgement of the high professional standards, and enthusiasm for teaching and learning across the school.

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 B.O.M. welcomes the recommendations made by the inspectors and the following is now implemented/planned.

The I.E.P. document has been revised to include a section to describe more fully the adaptations that are made and strategies employed to ensure successful differentiation.

The Drama assessment tool used at senior level is now adapted to be used at junior level.

A review of creative & personal writing will be undertaken next academic year.