

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

St. Patrick's Special NS
Enniscorthy, Co. Wexford
Roll No. : 19240B

Date of inspection: 18 September 2013



1. Introduction

St. Patrick's is a co-educational special school catering for pupils of primary and post-primary age with special educational needs arising from moderate, severe and profound general learning disabilities, and autism. The school is located over two sites and has an enrolment of 125 pupils. The changing profile of the pupils attending in recent years has been identified as an emerging challenge for the school. A long-awaited new school building is scheduled for completion in 2016. Health Service Executive (HSE) funded ancillary services include nursing, physiotherapy, speech and language therapy, and occupational therapy. Overall attendance levels are very good. The majority of pupils avail of the Department of Education and Skills funded transport and travel from a wide catchment area across County Wexford. 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 work and development of the school are supported by a very dedicated and effective chairperson and board of management.
- The experienced staff of teachers and special needs assistants (SNAs), in collaboration with members of the multidisciplinary team, demonstrate high levels of commitment in supporting the care and learning needs of the pupils.
- The school provides a welcoming, supportive and structured environment in which the range of needs of pupils is addressed.
- A broad variety of programmes is provided to cater for the wide age and ability range of the pupils.
- The involvement and engagement of pupils in their own learning is noteworthy.
- The strong commitment of the principal, management and school staff is a key feature in the ongoing development of the school.

The following **main recommendations** are made:

- To address the emerging challenges and evolving needs of the school, the areas of in-school management (ISM) responsibility should be reviewed and ISM team processes should be further developed.
- Classroom planning and recording procedures should be strengthened. The individual education planning (IEP) process should be reviewed to increase, where appropriate, the participation of members of the school and multi-disciplinary team and parents, and to facilitate the setting of specific targets for pupils.
- The board of management should renew its efforts to establish a parents' association.

3. Quality of School Management

- The board of management is properly constituted and includes members who have wide experience and expertise. The board meets regularly and conscientiously attends to its duties, including the consideration and ratification of school policies, which provides important support to the work of the school. Fund-raising to assist the work and development of the school is a key area of activity and concern of the board of management. Substantial funds are raised annually towards the running of the school. The chairperson and members of the board are commended for their dedicated and ongoing work on behalf of the school community.
- The principal has a long-standing commitment to the school and is highly supportive of the school team. He has the challenging task of managing the school at a time of considerable change in relation to the profile of pupils attending and developments in relation to school accommodation. Within a collaborative approach, the principal is conscientious in attending to the organisational, supervisory and liaison duties of his role. He demonstrates concern for the care and welfare of the pupils and endeavours to provide an appropriate and safe environment for pupils and staff. The strong commitment of the principal, management and school staff is a key feature in the ongoing development of the school.
- The organisation and management of the school is supported by a capable and committed in-school management (ISM) team. The teachers' allocated duties address curricular, organisational and pastoral areas. A number of the areas of responsibility have developed strongly and this good practice should be shared across the ISM team. While team members meet on an ongoing basis, more regular, planned meetings of the team would contribute beneficially to school development and self-evaluation processes. In light of the emerging challenges and evolving school needs, it is recommended that current areas of responsibility be reviewed and that ISM team processes be further developed. Opportunities for post holders to inform the board of management in relation to developments in their areas of responsibility should be considered.
- The school staff comprises nineteen class teachers, three part-time teachers of Home-economics, Woodwork and Horticulture, forty-one and a half special needs assistant (SNAs) posts and a range of ancillary staff. Very good collaboration was in evidence between the HSE funded staff in the areas of nursing, physiotherapy and speech and language therapy. Staff members have broad experience, and a number have completed training, in the area of special education. The board of management is supportive of continuing professional development (CPD) for staff. In light of the changing profile of pupils, an audit of the CPD needs of staff should be undertaken. Effective secretarial and ancillary supports contribute to the efficient running of the school.
- The school is located over two sites, comprising junior and senior sections. A welcoming and open environment is in evidence and the classroom teams endeavour to make their classrooms appropriate and attractive. The school has also developed specialist rooms and areas, including a sensory room and facilities for Home Economics, Woodwork and Horticulture. The school is endeavouring to enhance the use of information and communication technology (ICT) with pupils and has recently introduced iPads to classrooms following a donation to the school. The school funds its own buses, enabling pupils to access local amenities such as the swimming pool.
- There is close collaboration between the teachers, SNAs and members of the multidisciplinary team in relation to the care and development of the pupils. Respectful and positive staff-pupil interactions were observed in classrooms. The school provides a

welcoming, supportive and structured environment in which the range of needs of pupils is addressed.

- While the school is under local denominational patronage, children of a variety of religious backgrounds and nationalities attend and the school endeavours to provide an inclusive environment for all pupils. The responses to the parent questionnaire indicate overall positive views of the work of the school. For many pupils the daily use of a school diary facilitates communication between home and the classroom. The school facilitates regular meetings with parents in relation to the changing needs and progress of the pupils. While parents are represented on the board of management, currently the school does not have a parents' association. Recognising previous efforts of the board of management to establish a parents' association, it is recommended that such efforts be continued in order to enable and support broader participation of parents in the life of the school.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- The principal, ISM and school team have undertaken a number of development planning and school self-evaluation activities over several years. In so doing, policy has been developed in relation to the organisational, curricular and pastoral areas of the work of the school. It would now be timely for a number of these policies to be reviewed. Building on the good work undertaken in previous years, the board of management should set out a timeframe for the regular review of all school policies, over a number of years.
- A variety of practice is in evidence in relation to classroom planning. A very high standard of planning and preparation was in evidence in the majority of classrooms and this good practice should be shared across the school. It is recommended that consideration be given to developing a school template for short-term, fortnightly classroom planning. A whole-school approach to monthly progress reports should be implemented and this documentation should be retained and stored in the school. While individualised education planning (IEP) is undertaken for all pupils, the school's IEP process would benefit from further development in relation to the writing of specific curricular and behavioural targets that are measurable. This process can in turn be used effectively to track pupil progress. Consideration should be given to strengthening the team approach to developing the pupils' IEPs. Strategies to support greater involvement of the relevant professionals and ancillary team members and to extend the involvement of the pupils' parents should be explored.
- In light of the changing needs of a number of pupils attending St. Patrick's School and utilising experience and expertise within and available to the school, it is recommended that consideration be given to setting up a positive behaviour support team, in order to provide guidance and support, where practicable, to classroom teams. Opportunities to liaise with schools with similar pupil needs and accommodation issues should be investigated.
- 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 is in evidence in classrooms across the school. A broad variety of programmes is provided to cater for the wide age and ability range of the

pupils. Classroom practice draws on the relevant NCCA guidelines for pupils with general learning disabilities. Where appropriate, specific approaches, such as TEACCH and PECS are employed with pupils who have special needs arising from autism. The teachers differentiate the learning activities to accommodate the needs of individual pupils and a range of approaches is in evidence in classrooms. In some instances, greater attention should be given to the age appropriateness of the materials presented to pupils. Lessons are implemented with a high level of competence and the pupils' interest and engagement are carefully supported in most classrooms. The well-organised learning environment of the classrooms facilitates pupils' participation and the involvement and engagement of pupils in their own learning is noteworthy. Where appropriate and practicable, consideration should be given to extending cooperative teaching and learning opportunities and the sharing of established good practice across classrooms.

- The development of the pupils' communication, expressive and receptive language skills is given consistent attention across the school. The pupils are encouraged and supported in communicating their needs and wishes throughout the school day. Their language development is supported through well-planned lessons and cross-curricular activities linked to the experiences of the pupils. The learning activities undertaken include the use of circle time, story, rhyme and song, and drama activities. Visual schedules are used purposefully in some classes to guide the pupils' attention to the programme of activities. According to the needs of pupils, communication is supported with objects of reference, pictures, visual and tactile symbols, PECS and LÁMH. In classrooms where pupils have a high level of need, assistive technology, using switch access and interactive toys, are employed to support verbal and signed communication. Programmes and activities developed by speech and language therapists are incorporated into the learning activities. The development of skills in reading and writing is carefully promoted according to the needs of individual pupils. The teachers employ a range of approaches to cater for the diversity of abilities and needs in classrooms. In the senior and school leavers' classes, careful attention is given to the functional and life-skills elements of the literacy programme.
- Commendable work has been undertaken in relation to FETAC (Further Education, Training and Awards Council) and the achievement of certification for the senior students participating in the programme.
- In Mathematics, classroom practice provides for the wide range of pupils' needs and abilities. The activities observed were well-organised, differentiated and linked to the pupils' experiences. Concrete and visual materials are usefully employed to support pupils in the learning tasks. In the senior classes, there is an appropriate emphasis on the functional use of Mathematics and opportunities are provided to relate the learning activities to practical, real-life contexts, and to other areas of the school curriculum, such as Home Economics and Woodwork.
- In the area of Social, Environmental and Scientific Education (SESE), good pupil engagement was observed. A wide range of themes and topics was explored and these were linked to the experiences of the pupils. Seasonal occasions and significant events are employed to promote awareness of time, chronology, change and continuity. A range of resources, including ICT, is used to aid learning and the use of the digital camera and the recently acquired iPads can provide further support to learning in this curriculum area. Further consideration could be given to the potential of participation in the *Green Schools* programme.

In Home Economics, pupils clearly enjoy the regular, carefully structured lessons. The activities observed enable small groups of pupils to practice skills in relation to food

preparation, hygiene, and the safe use of utensils. Commendable emphasis on the life-skills' dimension of the programme was in evidence.

In Woodwork, the activities observed provided pupils with valuable opportunities to participate in this vocational area. Carefully structured lessons enable students to develop valuable skills in the use of tools and materials and to acquire an awareness of safety around such equipment.

In Horticulture, pupils acquire skills in gardening and related outdoor pursuits which can contribute to the development of useful vocational and recreational interests.

- Commendable attention is given to enabling pupils to experience their individuality through the Visual Arts, Music and Drama. Opportunities to support communication and language development are fostered. In classrooms across the school, pupils are provided with a variety of activities in which they can engage and express themselves.
- In the area of Physical Education (PE), despite the limitations of school facilities, teachers endeavour to provide their pupils with a beneficial range of activities. Pupils were observed participating in well-structured and enjoyable PE lessons. The school organises regular swimming lessons for pupils. Very good use is made of the multi-sensory room. A number of students are also involved in the *Special Olympics*.
- Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) is recognised as a key element of the school programme. The SPHE programme is supported through a broad range of activities undertaken as discrete lessons or integrated in cross-curricular themes and topics. School assemblies are a regular occurrence and provide opportunities to acknowledge the accomplishments of pupils.
- The monitoring of pupils' progress is recognised as an important aspect of classroom practice and school policy on assessment has been identified as an area for school review. Some good classroom-based practice was observed, including the use of checklists and pupil profiles. In further developing school policy, the rationale for the various aspects of assessment and the purpose of current instruments should be clarified. The use of baseline assessment and criterion-referenced testing should also be extended.

6. Quality of Supports for Pupils

- The pupils at St. Patrick's School access a well-organised, caring and supportive learning environment. A good range of policies and practices has been developed, over many years, to support the work of the school. Very good collaboration has been established between the teachers, SNAs and the HSE funded personnel in providing for the care and learning needs of the pupils. Pupils respond positively to the various programmes of activities provided. Useful links and inclusive activities have been established with the wider community. The school is committed to the ongoing development of its provision for pupils with special and often complex educational needs.

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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

Area 2: Follow-up actions planned or undertaken since the completion of the inspection activity to implement the findings and recommendations of the inspection

- (1) (ISM) is in the process and review
- (2) (IEP) school meeting to review same