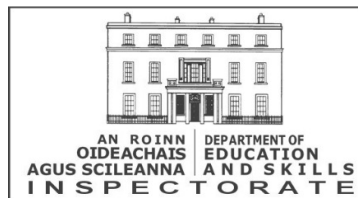


**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills**

**Whole School Evaluation
Management, Leadership and Learning
REPORT**

**Mater School
James Joyce Street, Dublin 1
Roll number: 19281P**

Date of inspection: 2 December 2015



Whole-School Evaluation – Management, Leadership and Learning Report

Introduction

A Whole-School Evaluation – Management, Leadership and Learning (WSE - MLL) was undertaken in the Mater School in December 2015. This report is based on a selection of lessons observed in the school, interaction with pupils and review of their work, meetings with the principal and with board and parent representatives, completed parent questionnaires, and a selection of school documents. 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.

The Mater School is a special national school for pupils with emotional behavioural difficulties. It operates under the patronage of the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Dublin and the trusteeship of the Congregation of the Sisters of Mercy. Most of the pupils have additional learning difficulties, of different types, alongside their emotional behavioural difficulty. Pupils are enrolled in the Mater School for a maximum period of two years, with the goal of returning to a mainstream primary school thereafter. At the time of this evaluation, the teaching principal and one special needs assistant comprised the staff of the school and six pupils were enrolled. The school attendance levels among the pupils are excellent.

The evaluation has found:

- Learning and teaching in the school are of a very good quality.
- The quality of the collaboration between the teaching principal and the special needs assistant is worthy of great commendation, and is a strength of the school's provision.
- The staff has a very good understanding of the pupils' primary learning and care needs. A child-centred ethos was strongly in evidence during the evaluation.
- The school is resourced very well for teaching and learning.
- The quality of supports provided by the school for the pupils is very high. The staff engages with the pupils in a positive, respectful and very supportive manner. It was evident during the evaluation, however, that the staff are challenged with providing for supervision during daily recreation breaks.
- The individual education plan (IEP) development process is commendable.
- Extensive assessment information is maintained on each individual pupil. There is scope to develop policy and practice in the use of photographic and video records.
- There is scope for a few aspects of the school's self-evaluation process to be developed.

The following **main recommendations** are made:

- School assessment processes should be augmented through using photographic and video records systematically to document learning achievements and progression in learning. School policy in this regard should be developed in close consultation with parents, and aligned with the school's child protection policy and procedures.
- Going forward, in the context of the early years' learning needs of the current cohort of pupils, the school should make use of the *Síolta* quality assurance framework in its self-evaluation process.

Findings

1. The learning achievements of pupils

- The overall quality of the learning experiences and the achievements of the pupils is very good. A good, broad curriculum appropriate to the context of the pupils' needs, and incorporating the *Aistear* curricular framework, is being implemented. The pupils are experiencing high-quality, enriching learning experiences through play.
- Pupils have very good experiences in developing language and communication skills and in making choices. All parents, who completed questionnaires as part of the evaluation, agreed that the school is helping their child to progress in language and communication.
- Pupils are developing a sound understanding of fundamental mathematical concepts through the frequent use of practical activities, the use of information and communications technology (ICT) and the use of concrete materials. A strong emphasis is placed on developing the pupils' understanding of mathematical language. Many of the pupils display a very good knowledge of number facts appropriate to their age and mainstream class level.
- Very good attention is paid to developing a sense of self and of relationship with others. External school trips are providing a valuable means through which the pupils explore the community and access education across the curriculum.
- Good paper-based records in respect of the assessment of learning are maintained. To augment practice, the use of photographic recording should occur more formally for all, and video records should be used to document the progression and achievements of pupils in their learning. This is especially useful in the context of pupils' early years' learning needs in both cognitive development and socialisation.

2. Quality of teaching

- Overall, the teaching in the school is effective and is targeted successfully towards meeting the priority needs of the pupils. The teaching of key concepts is very clear.
- Lesson duration and pacing are of a very good standard.
- During the school day intensive work and close attention to the pupils is required to ensure that they all engage in sustained learning activity. The principal and special needs assistant are commended for their enthusiasm and energy in ensuring this occurs.
- During the teaching of lessons, comprehensive emphasis on the modelling of language and on encouraging and supporting the contribution of pupils featured strongly.
- Regular consolidation, assessment, extension and transfer of learning for individual pupils, featured frequently in daily lessons.
- A very good range of carefully selected resources, including ICT and teacher-prepared resources, is used purposefully during different lessons.
- The individual education plans (IEPs) to support teaching and learning are developed well. They are in line with the principles outlined in guidance from the National Council for Special Education and the Department of Education and Skills, and contain specific and measurable targets, that match the identified priority needs of the pupils. Consideration should be given to defining achievement criteria for all targets or including provision in them for a number of dates upon which achievement should be assessed, to further enhance them.

3. Support for pupils' well-being

- A wide range of supports and complementary therapies has been implemented in the school to support the pupils' well-being. These are very clearly of value to the pupils, who engaged in

them with eagerness during the evaluation. All parents who completed questionnaires as part of the evaluation felt that the school is helping their child's social and personal development.

- The care of the staff and therapists towards the pupils, and their engagement with them, are worthy of very great commendation.
- The day-to-day management of the pupils in the school building is of a high standard. The school has no recreation space of its own, which impacts somewhat upon the ability of the school to access the breadth of the physical education curriculum, although records show that pupils receive swimming lessons, when possible. Daily recreation during lunch recess takes place in adjacent public parks. The staff and pupils also have access to recreation space in a local primary school for one period per week. The importance of frequent external educational walks and trips for the pupils, for developing key socialisation skills and improving tolerance to sensory inputs was strongly evident during the evaluation. A school policy in respect of recreation and trips external to the building should be devised.
- It is evident that the staff faces ongoing difficulty in providing appropriately for supervision during daily recreation breaks, due to the school not having on-site play space in its rented accommodation. Supervision has not been at all times exercised in accordance with regulations outlined in circular SPED 07/02, with the special needs assistant being left in sole charge of part of the class, separate from the principal teacher. In the context of the enrolment of pupils being at its maximum level, the observable complexity of behaviours, and the significance of providing external learning experiences and regular school trips for pupils' priority learning and socialisation needs, the board should pursue the issue of ensuring sufficient adult supervision during recreation time and trips. The board should also explore possibilities with regard to the provision of outdoor recreational space.
- A home-school communication diary is in operation, which is very valuable in supporting home-school communication and consistency of approaches between home and school. All parents who completed questionnaires as part of the evaluation agreed that they are happy with the school, it is well run and welcoming of parents, and there is good communication with the home.
- 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*.

4. Leadership and Management

- The board of management displays a keen interest in and enthusiasm for the varied aspects of school life. It is properly constituted and meets at appropriate intervals. The board has played an active role in reviewing school policy and in the ratification of plans. In interviews carried out during the evaluation, board members, the trustees and a representative from among the parents commended the school staff for the support of each pupil's individual needs and reported significant satisfaction among parents and past pupils.
- Leadership of learning in the school is very effective and is characterised by a clear commitment to meeting the core needs of each individual pupil.
- The principal teacher is progressive in her approach to the operation of the school and displays very good organisational skills. The collaboration between the teaching principal and the special needs assistant is worthy of high commendation.
- Whole-school planning is very comprehensive.
- The school's accommodation is maintained to a very high standard. The classroom and other spaces in the school are warm, orderly and clean and are prepared carefully to support pupils' learning and meet their range of needs. Very good use is made of all available internal space.

- Examples of the pupils' work, and their involvements in a range of educational and recreational activities, are celebrated through display in the school.

5. School Self-evaluation

- The school has engaged in a good way with the school self-evaluation (SSE) process. The school, however, outlined its targets mostly as targeted areas for the actions of adults in support of pupils' learning, rather than in terms of learning outcomes. Going forward, targets should be expressed in terms of pupils' learning outcomes, while targeted actions to impact positively on pupils' learning can be outlined separately. Given the particular needs of the current cohort of pupils in respect of their early years' learning, the school should make use of the *Síolta* quality assurance framework in its self-evaluation process.
- Questionnaire responses indicate that it would be profitable for the board of management to engage with parents further with regard to the content of the policy for Relationships and Sexuality Education, and explore different ways to report to the school community on the work and achievements of the school.
- Given its particular context the school has no parents' association. The school should consider engaging with the National Parents Council-Primary to seek support for involving the parent body, in this particular type of school setting.

Conclusion

The school has strong and good capacity to engage in ongoing improvement, as a result of the commitment of the staff and the high-quality teamwork in evidence in the school.

Appendix

School response to the report

Submitted by the Board of Management

Part A: Observations on the content of the inspection report

The Board of Management welcomes the publication of this overwhelmingly positive WSE-MLL report and warmly endorses its findings. The board welcomes the report's recognition of the high quality of teaching and learning which are possible due to the recognised teamwork of the Principal and Special Needs Assistant. The board notes the Inspector's endorsement of the positive and respectful relationships between staff, pupils and parents.

The board and school staff found the WSE-MLL process to be a positive and affirming one for all members of the Mater School community.

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

The board notes the recommendations regarding the use of photographic and video records and is including this in the planning process.

The *Siolta* framework is currently being studied by school personnel and will be incorporated into the school self-evaluation process.

A policy regarding school outings is currently being developed.