

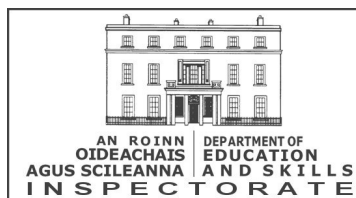
**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**  
**Department of Education and Skills**

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

**REPORT**

**Phoenix Park Special School**  
**Phoenix Park, Dublin 8**  
**Roll number: 19500B**

**Date of inspection: 16 October 2015**



## Whole-School Evaluation – Management, Leadership and Learning Report

### Introduction

A Whole-School Evaluation – Management, Leadership and Learning (WSE - MLL) was undertaken in Phoenix Park Special School in October 2015. This report is based on a selection of lessons observed in a range of learning settings in the school, interaction with pupils and review of their work, meetings with the principal and with board and parent representatives, completed parent and pupil questionnaires, and a selection of school documents. The board of management of the school was given an opportunity to comment on the findings and recommendations of the report; the board chose to accept the report without response.

Phoenix Park Special School, under the patronage of the Health Service Executive (HSE), provides education to pupils with severe emotional and behavioural difficulties. Eighteen pupils are enrolled, of whom three are attending for a reduced school day. Average attendance is generally good, while attendance for a number of pupils is fair only, and could be better. An attendance strategy should be implemented. The school has experienced a very significant amount of change within the teaching staff and leadership up to, and including, the time of this evaluation.

The evaluation has found:

- Weakness in the operation of the board of management in the recent past and its cessation entirely for a lengthy period has impacted detrimentally on the school's functioning.
- The principal of the school demonstrates the characteristics of strong and capable educational leadership. The quality of her work is very good.
- The overall quality of learning is good. The pupils have access to a suitable, broad range of curriculum experiences, but there is need to develop provision for Irish formally.
- The quality of assessment of learning is very good.
- The quality of teaching observed was commendable overall although potential for improvement exists in specific areas.
- Comprehensive and highly praiseworthy classroom planning practices were evident.
- Respectful and supportive engagement towards the pupils was strongly in evidence in the work of the staff evaluated.
- The whole-school plans developed to date and the school's self-evaluation (SSE) process are of a good quality. There remains need to develop plans for a few subject areas and for existing curricular plans to provide more guidance regarding differentiation in the delivery of subjects.
- In the work of the special needs assistants (SNAs) observed, a clear understanding of the behaviours and needs of the pupils was demonstrated.

The following **main recommendations** are made:

- There is need for the patron body to ensure stability in the constitution and operation of the board of management.
- There is need for the situation surrounding pupils attending for a reduced day to be reviewed.
- Further support for differentiation in curriculum delivery and in addressing different needs in multi-grade classrooms should become a focus of staff development.
- Moltar soláthar do theagasc agus d'fhoghlaim na Gaeilge a fhorbairt. *Provision for the teaching and learning of the Irish curriculum should be developed.*

## Findings

### 1. The learning achievements of pupils

- The overall quality of the pupils' learning is good. The pupils have access to a suitable, broad range of curriculum experiences. There is need, however, to develop provision for Irish formally and to further extend provision for different areas in Music, Visual Arts and Drama to ensure balance of experience across the strands of those subjects.
- Many lessons evaluated were paced and structured well and were suitably stimulating and engaging for the pupils. Many pupils read with fluency and ability and demonstrated good phonemic knowledge. The provision for the use of individualised reading books is commendable.
- Pupils displayed satisfaction and pride in their work.
- The quality of assessment of learning is very good. A range of high-quality diagnostic testing materials is used. Consistent use of the school's very good mathematics' observational checklists is advocated in each of the settings.
- The quality of the school's communication with the home is very good overall.

### 2. Quality of teaching

- The quality of teaching observed was commendable overall although potential for improvement exists in specific areas. More use of differentiated visual resources on the interactive whiteboard early in all lessons and the use of individual whiteboards by pupils during the phase of concept acquisition in lessons are advocated.
- During the evaluation, many lessons developed well with clear questioning by the teachers and with structured small-group work. In one setting, a number of lessons did not develop due to classroom management issues. Further attention to relating the planning and delivery of lessons to the exact content for the class levels in which pupils would be enrolled if in a mainstream school, and then differentiating the level of challenge, is advocated.
- There is need for a plan for continuous professional development to be developed and implemented, with a clear emphasis on developing skills around multi-grade class teaching and differentiation.
- Ní dhéantar soláthar cuí do theagasc na Gaeilge sa scoil, cé go léirítear i bpleanáil na n-oidí aonaracha go ndéantar soláthar éigin di. Toisc go mbíonn sé mar sprioc lárnach formhór na ndaltaí a scafláil chun dul ar ais chuig ghnáth-bhunscoileanna, agus nach mbeadh díolúintí ón nGaeilge ag an gcuid is mó díobh, b'fhiú é seo a fhorbairt. *Appropriate provision for the teaching of the Irish curriculum is not being made in the school, even though teachers' planning shows that some provision is made. As it is a central aim that most pupils will be scaffolded to return to mainstream primary schools, and most of the pupils are not eligible for an exemption from Irish, provision should be developed.*
- The quality of individual education plan (IEP) development is commendable overall. Priority learning needs are identified clearly. Many targets are specific and measurable and linked clearly to priority needs. Some others are presented more as strategies. There is scope, also, to include discrete sections in the plan to record the achievement, or otherwise of targets, and to review the duration of IEPs.
- Teachers' commitment to providing high-quality classroom planning is highly praiseworthy.

- Where best practice was observed in the provision of monthly progress records, the work covered with individual pupils was recorded clearly. The benefits of adopting a single whole-school format should be considered.
- The quality of the whole-school curriculum plans prepared to date and the planned schedule of review are worthy of commendation. It is indicated that the process of review and implementation of the full range of school policies did not proceed satisfactorily during the recent past due to the interruption of the work of the board. As review moves forward, further guidance on how to differentiate in curriculum delivery should be included in whole-school curriculum plans.

### 3. Support for pupils' well-being

- Effective practice overall is in evidence in respect of pupils' well-being. Pupils, in the school as a whole, are being managed with good success through the Management of Actual or Potential Aggression (MAPA) programme. However, teachers and SNAs reported inconsistencies in behaviour management in the past year that affected the maintenance of successes experienced previously. Some instances of unsuccessful classroom management were also seen during this evaluation. The anticipated implementation of a further evidence-based, whole-school behaviour management programme should contribute to behaviour management.
- The pupils demonstrated very good awareness of the rules of the school. Almost all parents, who completed a questionnaire, indicated that they were confident the school would act promptly and effectively were their child to experience bullying. It is noteworthy, however, that almost a quarter of the pupils, who completed a questionnaire, indicated they did not feel safe in class and in the playground.
- In the work of the SNAs observed during the evaluation, a clear understanding of the behaviours and needs of the pupils was demonstrated. Engagement with the pupils was very respectful and highly commendable.
- The school should strongly consider engaging with the National Parents Council-Primary to promote further involvement of the parent body in supporting the education of the pupils in this particular type of school setting.
- 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 quality of overall school management structures has scope to develop and improve. This is due to the board ceasing to operate in the past year, which has impacted detrimentally on school operation and the strategic implementation of policies. At the time of this evaluation, the board was not constituted properly. During the post-evaluation meeting, the chairperson of the board raised the difficulty of constituting a full board in the context of the national responsibilities of the school's patron body, and this was discussed. While acknowledging this, the patron body, in accordance with its role under the Education Act 1998, should ensure stability in the constitution and operation of the board going forward. The board should ensure that school policies are reviewed on a cyclical basis and that their implementation is monitored thoroughly.
- The principal demonstrates the characteristics of strong and capable educational leadership. She articulates an insightful and evaluative approach to school development. The quality of her work in leading the school is very good. With the current vacancy for deputy principal, all in-school management responsibility has fallen on the principal. There is need for a strategic action plan to be prepared to

support the future development of the school and continuity of practice in support of pupils' learning.

- The quality of the management of physical resources is good and a broad range of appropriate resources is in place. There is scope for policies for the human resources of the school to be developed.
- There is need for the board to review the situation surrounding pupils attending for a reduced day. The operation of a reduced school day for any pupil should only be carried out with a view to reintegration in education on a full-time basis as early as possible. At least one pupil has now been on a reduced day for a significant duration of time. The educational welfare service within Túsla should be notified of all available data where a pupil has not been attending school for the full school day in the past and current school years.
- Most parents, in questionnaire responses, agreed that they are happy with the school, it is well run, it helps children to interact with others and that children are treated fairly and respectfully. Almost all agreed that there is a good atmosphere in the school and that they feel welcome. A representative from the parent body acknowledged the commitment and enthusiasm of the staff and its effectiveness in rewarding pupils' hard work. Parent questionnaire responses indicate slightly more mixed responses, however, in respect of matching work to pupils' levels of ability and progression in learning at school.

#### **5. School Self-evaluation**

- The principal and staff have engaged productively in the school self-evaluation (SSE) process. Appropriate evidence has been analysed carefully. The anticipated focus on developing pupils' well-being as the next step of SSE is very praiseworthy.

#### **Conclusion**

The school's capacity to develop further and to engage in school improvement is good, in light of the strong leadership of the principal and the hard work of the teachers and the SNAs observed during the evaluation. If the stability in management structure and procedures, which this report identifies as necessary, were not assured the capacity of the school to develop further would likely be impeded.