

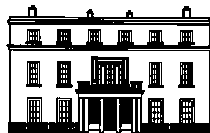
An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

**Whole School Evaluation
REPORT**

**St. Francis Special School
Beaufort,
Co. Kerry
Uimhir rolla: 19547E**

Date of inspection: 8 November 2013



**AN ROINN | DEPARTMENT OF
OIDEACHAIS | EDUCATION
AGUS SCILEANNA | AND SKILLS**

1. Introduction

St. Francis Special School is situated in Beaufort Co. Kerry. The school is co-educational and is designated for pupils with moderate and severe and profound general learning disabilities (GLD). The number of learners presenting in the high moderate range of GLD has reduced in recent years and the number of learners with more complex needs including autistic spectrum disorder (ASD) has grown. There are fifty-two pupils on roll. 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:

- The board members and parents are very supportive of the school.
- The principal is an effective leader.
- The in-school management team (ISM) fulfil their duties with a noted enthusiasm and dedication.
- The quality of teaching and learning throughout the school is highly commendable.
- Staff members work in a professional manner and devote their energies to caring for, supporting and enabling pupils.

The following **main recommendations** are made:

- Management is advised to review ISM duties routinely and to convene formal meetings.
- Staff should engage further with the individual education programme (IEP) process and develop a more consistent approach across the school to setting specific targets.
- Teachers are advised to issue an end of year report to parents.
- An agreed school-wide system to track the pupils' progress should be developed in key areas.

3. Quality of School Management

- The members of the board of management give generously of their time in supporting the work of the school. The chairperson visits the school regularly and is proactive in addressing issues that relate to individual learners, parents and teaching and support staff. Members of the board are allocated specific tasks and have undertaken diocesan training to equip them in their roles. Financial accounts are presented routinely and these accounts are audited annually. Policies presented to the board are discussed and ratified.

The board demonstrates a clear commitment to ongoing staff development and makes funds available to those who wish to undertake additional professional development.

The principal displays effective leadership, he is most sensitive to the needs of the pupils and staff. He fulfils his duties in a whole-hearted and efficient manner and succeeds in creating a warm and welcoming environment for staff, parents and pupils. The in-school management team (ISM) provide effective support and each member fulfils her duties with noted enthusiasm and dedication. The ISM team is advised to convene formal meetings and to review designated duties routinely with the support of the board and colleagues. The challenge going forward is to develop the instructional leadership role of the ISM team that will address consistently the changing circumstances of the school. ISM personnel should consider compiling a short report on the completion of their management duties and present this to the board on an annual basis. There is a commendable generosity of spirit among other members of staff which is demonstrated by a willingness to undertake additional responsibilities. This contributes in no small way to excellent capacity building among staff.

- The Board has invested generously in providing school accommodation and in the acquisition of educational resources. Staff is commended in their development of classroom resources to support the pupils' learning. The access to additional on-campus facilities supports pupils' learning most effectively. Staff members carry out their duties in a professional manner and devote their energies to caring for, supporting and enabling pupils. Management is advised to conduct an audit of staff training that will identify the current skill-base within the school and also assist in the identification of future developing needs. A formal staff rotation policy should be developed to facilitate a range of educational and care experiences for all staff. A formal mentoring system should be developed to support newly qualified teachers. School administration is addressed in a competent and efficient manner by the school's secretary.
- Parents are supportive of school initiatives. This is a welcoming school and communication with parents is good. A school newsletter is issued periodically and parents are routinely kept informed of the progress of their children through the annual parent-teacher meetings. Staff is advised to issue an end of year report to further inform parents. The results from parent questionnaires demonstrate a very high number of parents are happy with the running of the school and with the quality of teaching and learning and with care provision.
- The school provides a caring and supportive environment for all pupils. Induction and transfer procedures are effective. The school's code of behaviour is written and implemented sensitively. Further training in the management of challenging behaviour and in the understanding of the functions of behaviour should be considered.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- Valuable and collaborative whole-school planning has been undertaken by staff. These plans are informative and serve as a useful guide to classroom practice. Further detail should be compiled which lays out the core curricular content and the arrangements that pertain to the various specialised class settings. The teachers' short-term schemes of work are generally useful and informative. The quality of short term planning varies and in some cases the description of pupils' learning activities lacks sufficient detail. Staff should adopt an agreed approach to include: clear objectives, learning activity, resources and a record of pupil attainment.

Many strategies within individual education programmes (IEP) are suitable but some short-term objectives are not sufficiently specific and do not clearly identify learning outcomes. Staff should engage further with the IEP process and develop a more consistent approach across the school to setting specific targets.

- The school's commitment to engage in reflective practice at whole-school level is in evidence. The teachers have participated in the process of school self-evaluation and communication and literacy were identified for further development.
- 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

A high standard of teaching is evident across the school and excellent practice was observed in several classes. Staff members have developed some innovative teaching practices, with an emphasis on activity based learning. Teachers maximise the use of support staff for the benefit of pupils. A range of teaching resources, including information and communication technology (ICT) and the local environment are used effectively to enrich teaching and motivate and support pupils in their learning. The quality of teaching of the four specialist teachers in Music, Home Economics, in Physical Education and in the Visual Arts is impressive and adds considerably to the skill base of pupils. The school would benefit from the development of a whole-school policy for the organisation of specialist subject teaching.

The teachers have identified assessment as an area to be developed. There is considerable variation in assessment and record keeping practices across the school. An agreed school-wide system to track the pupils' progress should be developed in key areas. In addition, some pupils may be capable of participating in externally accredited programmes and these possibilities should be explored.

- Tá cead ag na daltaí a fhreastalaíonn ar an scoil seo, gan Gaeilge a dhéanamh, de bharr raon mhíchumais fhoghlama.

(The pupils in this school present with a range of learning disabilities and are entitled to exemption from studying Irish.)

- All classrooms provide a language-rich source for the pupils' development in English. Pupils' language competence is fostered through the provision of multi-sensory experiences using effective methodologies and opportunities for language development are successfully exploited. The teachers in the classes for pupils with Severe and Profound GLD provide responsive and interactive environments where pupils' communicative efforts are encouraged. Teachers recognise that waiting for the child to respond is a critical feature of a responsive environment. Reading skills are addressed from an initial to a more advanced level depending on individual ability. Foundation and emergent reading activities are implemented in all classes. The Language Experience Approach is used effectively to create individual reading texts. A small amount of pupils learn to spell carefully chosen child-centred words. In writing activities, emphasis is placed on developing pupils' fine motor control.
- The quality of teaching and learning in Maths is very good. Particular consideration is given to the social importance and relevance of Mathematics. The use of visual and

concrete material is widespread. Differentiated learning activity is suitably matched to the varying ability levels of pupils and is implemented either in group or in individual work. Mathematics is linked productively to a variety of curricular areas. In the further development of Mathematics in the school, staff is advised to document mathematical language for all levels. An increased use of mathematical software is also recommended to complement pupils' learning. Staff should consider developing mathematics and sensory trails.

- The teaching of Geography in this school is very good. The programme is suitably tailored to the ability levels and to the everyday experiences of pupils. Aspects of the home, the classroom and the school environment are investigated with purpose. Fieldwork and visits to places of geographical interest are used to stimulate pupils. The pupils gain an appreciation and understanding of the lifestyles of people who work in the community. Active discovery learning is utilised through an enjoyable engagement in project work. The pupils' work is recorded in photographic and in written format and is celebrated with attractive displays in classrooms. There is good emphasis on skill development through mapping activity. The pupils' knowledge of aspects of growth is developed successfully through work in the school garden.
- In their daily interactions in class, pupils are treated with dignity and respect by teachers and special needs assistants (SNAs). In Social Personal and Health Education (SPHE) circle-time activities focus on elements such as self-identity and awareness of others. Social stories are used effectively to help pupils manage their own behaviours. Teachers seek to build relationships between classes through cooperative games and through shared art and writing activities. Displays of learners' work serve to celebrate and value their individual and collaborative efforts. Developing the learners' self-esteem, their social and communication skills are noted examples of good practice. Educational outings are organised and it is recommended that checklists should be in place for monitoring behaviour in the community. While attention is paid to the development of pupils' social skills, the practice of assessing pupil social development could be extended. Teachers are aware that close consultation with parents is an essential element in the school's planning and review process for SPHE. Close collaboration ensures that the pupils are provided with a consistent experience at school and at home. Resources for Relationship and Sexuality Education (RSE) which have been specially developed for use with pupils with autism should be sourced and could be provided for parents to be used when dealing with pupils' personal issues. It is recommended that links with mainstream schools be further extended in order to further promote the inclusion of the pupils into general society.

6. Quality of Support for Pupils

In St Francis' the pupils are well cared for. Successful collaboration is evident between the SNA's and members of the teaching staff. The SNA's play a significant role in meeting the needs of pupils in their care. There is evidence also of ample cooperation and collaboration between the school staff and members of the multi-disciplinary team and with the visiting teacher service for learners with sensory disabilities. New arrangements for the provision of clinical support are to be established shortly and the school is keen to maintain access to high quality therapeutic support.

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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 (BOM) welcomes the Whole School Evaluation (WSE) report. The BOM is very pleased that the dedicated and professional services provided to pupils by school staff is both recognised and highly commended. The BOM is also very pleased that the warm and welcoming environment that has been created in the school for staff, parents and pupils is noted and applauded.

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 BOM is fully committed to continue to incrementally improve the education and care services made available to pupils. Consequently, we welcome the findings and recommendations contained in the WSE report and plan to implement them with a view to improving the educational service while building on the many strengths that exist in the school as outlined in the WSE report.