An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Nano Nagle Special School
Listowel, Co. Kerry
Uimhir rolla: 19548G

Date of inspection: 28 February 2011
1. Introduction

Nano Nagle Special School is a twelve teacher co-educational school, designated for pupils with moderate, severe and profound general learning disabilities and also includes pupils with autistic spectrum disorders (ASD). Current enrolment is sixty-six pupils. The ratio of boys to girls is in excess of 2:1. Thirty one pupils are at post-primary age. The school is located in a recently extended and refurbished building adjoining a primary school. 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 school benefits from an enthusiastic staff who are committed to providing a pupil centred approach to learning with consideration given to individual needs.

- The school benefits from a committed and supportive board of management.

- The school presents as an attractive well-resourced learning environment.

- The school has established supportive linkages with other schools and makes good use of opportunities for learning within the local community.

- The range of curriculum experiences and activities on offer enables the teachers to engage the students at levels appropriate to their needs.

The following main recommendations are made:

- The board should establish a three-year development plan which should review the quality of the service provided, and evolve strategies for change over a defined timeframe.

- It is recommended that the assigned duties for the middle management team should be reviewed in line with identified priorities in pastoral, organisational and curricular areas. Mechanisms should be developed for reporting to management and staff.

- Planning formats need to be devised to support cohesion across the school regarding detail of planning required and ensuring a spiral approach to curriculum provision.

- The current system of developing Individual Education Plans should be reviewed and the knowledge and skills that pupils are to acquire within a defined timescale should be clearly indicated.

- The school should develop a whole-school policy to guide the ongoing development of a framework of assessment. The policy should describe the use of formal and informal modes of assessment, assessment intervals and reporting mechanisms.

- The school should continue to work on the development of curriculum plans across the range of subject areas taking account of the ages and learning characteristics of the pupils.
3. Quality of School Management

- The board is properly constituted and board members display a strong commitment to the school. Meetings are held regularly and minutes are maintained. The board has been proactive in progressing an impressive building project to its completion. The standard of maintenance is very high. Fundraising initiatives have resulted in the provision of high-quality resources. While the board has dedicated considerable time to organisational policy formation and review, whole school curricular plans have not received as much attention.

- The principal is highly regarded and she has forged a number of beneficial linkages with local schools to support inclusion programmes. She appreciates the work of colleagues and is instrumental in the acquisition of additional resources. There should be a review of the duties attached to the posts of responsibility. The in-school management team should, in consultation with colleagues, examine the organisational systems particularly in the area of planning and assessment.

- The principal, in consultation with the in-school management team, should develop a more systematic approach to the arrangement of continuous professional development opportunities for staff. A whole school audit of staff professional skills and development needs has been carried out. Opportunities for professional in-service in pedagogic methodologies should be prioritised for teachers working with pupils with particular learning needs.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- The school has developed policies on enrolment, code of behaviour health and safety, supervision and child protection. Slight adjustments need to be made in some policies to fulfil obligations under current legislation. As the school generates a considerable amount of documentation on each pupil, the development of a records management policy would be worthwhile. Plans for curricular areas of Music and Drama need to be constructed.

- It is recommended that the staff consults the Department of Education and Skills planning documents, "Developing a School Plan - Guidelines for Primary Schools". Future curriculum planning should ensure that the plan for each curriculum area includes overall objectives as well as appropriate content, a description of methodologies and organisational arrangements, reference to resources, and procedures for assessment of pupil progress in the particular area.

- There is considerable variation in individual teacher planning across the school. The school should develop whole school protocols in managing documentation. Common planning and recording templates would ensure continuity and cohesion in implementation of the various programmes, and delineation of topics across ability and age levels to avoid duplication and repetition of work.

Child protection policy and procedures

School authorities provided evidence that, in compliance with Primary Circular 0061/2006, the board of management has formally adopted the Department’s Child Protection Guidelines for Primary Schools. Evidence was provided to show that these child protection procedures have been brought to the attention of management, school staff and parents; that a copy of the procedures has been provided to all staff (including all new staff); and that management has
ensured that all staff are familiar with the procedures to be followed. A designated liaison person (DLP) and a deputy DLP have been appointed in line with the requirements of the guidelines.

5. **Quality of Teaching, Learning and Pupil Achievement**

- Proficiency in oral language, reading and writing are developed within a broad language-experience approach. All classrooms provide a language-rich source for the pupils’ development of English and communication. Pupils’ language competence is fostered through the provision of multi-sensory experiences using effective methodologies across curriculum subjects. Opportunities for language development are successfully exploited through the use of news sessions, circle time, games, and sensory stories. Augmentative and assistive methodologies include PECs and Lámh. These methodologies could be extended to use Canaan-Barrie on-body signs and assistive technology options. A school wide policy that the staff sign when in view of any pupil communicating using ‘Lámh would support incidental learning. 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 to create individual reading texts. Commercial schemes and information and communication technology are used to support literacy development. Reading material is provided from a wide range of sources including library books, internet and classroom-created texts. Younger pupils develop fine motor control through activities such as tracing, colouring, drawing, and letter formation exercises. More able pupils record their work and express themselves through writing and other means when appropriate. The staff has identified the need to develop the whole school plan for literacy as recommended in the last school evaluation by the Inspectorate. The inclusion of Moon as a methodology for accessing literacy for visual impaired pupils might be considered.

- Mathematics is identified by staff as a key curricular area and as a vital life skill. Across the school, pupils are provided with opportunities to develop their understanding of the basic mathematical concepts. Pupils with severe to profound learning disabilities work on object permanence and one-to-one correspondence and on skills of classifying, matching, comparing and ordering. An experiential approach is employed to develop concepts in measurement areas while links are made to reinforce practical real-life mathematics experiences during environmental mobility sessions. The lessons that were observed were well planned and structured. The frequent reinforcement of mathematical language, concepts and number work through the practical subjects is commended.

- In observed SPHE lessons circle-time was frequently used to focus on elements such as self-identity and awareness of others. As pupils with ASD have significant needs in the area of social interaction, consideration should be given in planning as to how ASD methodologies such as Social Stories, and Pivotal Response Training might be used to assist them. Home Economics provides students with important opportunities to practice and acquire a range of life skills. Much of the focus in this area is on the development of independence in the area of cookery.

- Pupils routinely access community facilities on a weekly basis to generalise skills. It would be beneficial to form a policy on this environmental mobility programme with an associated risk assessment on safety. A programme should be devised for assessing progress in community social skills.

- There is currently no whole school policy for Drama and aside from planning provided by a specialist teacher it is underrepresented in classroom planning. Teachers use Drama occasionally to enhance learning but it could be exploited further to provide role play opportunities in the context of SPHE, especially as the development of flexibility of thought is a specific area of challenge for pupils with ASD. The school should pay particular attention to the development of supportive structures to assist these pupils to
understand dramatic devices such as mime and improvisation. Additional use of Social Stories and visual scripts could enable pupils to enter into imaginative situations based on real life experiences. Consideration should be given to incorporating Parten’s seven areas of play into a school drama curriculum to scaffold pupils’ involvement in the make believe process.

- Wide variation in assessment and record keeping practices across the school was noted. An agreed school wide system to track the progress of all pupils’ should be developed. Additional detail is required regarding pupils’ learning outcomes to monitor progression of skills and acquisition of concepts. It is recommended that the school undertakes a formal review of its policy on assessment. The review should inform the acquisition of appropriate assessment materials and the compilation of baseline assessment information against which the pupils’ progress can be measured. The school should consider acquiring resources to facilitate assessments of functional vision, and hearing. The school should develop a capacity to conduct functional assessments of behaviour with a view to the recording, analysis and understanding of the function of behaviours, and the implementation of suitable responses and interventions.

6. Quality of Supports for Pupils

- The school welcomes pupils from all backgrounds and nationalities. There is a commitment to promoting the full inclusion of the diversity of pupils in the school. However, given the wide range of needs in the school, collective whole school occasions such as assemblies could be enhanced further to support the inclusion of pupils with sensory sensitivities or ASD during such events.

- The staff members of the school are keen to provide opportunities for pupils to integrate in the community. The school has developed mutually beneficial innovative links with local primary and post-primary schools and these along the school’s ‘Environmental Mobility’ and work-experience and life-skills programmes support the inclusion of pupils in mainstream education and in community life.

- It is timely to review the whole school approach to Individual Education Plans (IEPs). These plans do not clearly identify the learning outcomes in terms of the knowledge, skills and understanding that pupils are to acquire within a defined timescale. The priority goals in the IEP should be delineated into short term targets with recording systems to monitor pupil progress.

- Home/school communication is well supported using parent-teacher meetings and newsletters. The questionnaires administered during the evaluation to parents indicated that all respondents were happy with the school and felt that it had a good reputation in the community. The principal reported that parents did not regard the format of the questionnaire as being suitable for this particular school.

Published June 2011
Appendix

SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

Submitted by the Board of Management

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

Drama, Music and Environmental Mobility Policies have now been completed and are incorporated into the curriculum. We are presently compiling checklists for Whole School Curriculum Planning.