

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Cheeverstown School
Templeogue, Dublin 6W
Uimhir rolla: 20053J

Date of inspection: 07 February 2011



1. Introduction

Cheeverstown School is a seven teacher co-educational special school that is designated for pupils aged four-eighteen years with severe to profound general learning disability (GLD), including those with autistic spectrum disorders (ASD). There are thirty pupils on roll. Seventeen pupils are of post-primary age, and thirteen are at primary age. The school operates under the patronage of the governing body of Cheeverstown House and is located in a single storey building on the campus in Templeogue. The school has been involved in discussions with the Department in relation to the provision of a custom-built premises for the 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 staff display a high level of commitment to meeting the needs of individual pupils and to providing them with suitable programmes to address their range of educational, care and therapeutic needs.
- The work of the school is actively supported by its patron body, Cheeverstown House.
- Good interdisciplinary collaborative practices are in evidence, providing unified approaches to meeting the needs of the pupils.
- The school has access to a good range of facilities and services on campus, including a purpose built swimming pool, gymnasium and snoezelen facilities, and transport for pupils' outings.
- The classrooms are equipped with a good range of aids and resources to support the educational and care needs of the pupils.
- The school supports a process of ongoing professional development to meet the diverse range of needs of the pupils attending this school.

The following **main recommendations** are made:

- The school should review current arrangements with regard to school transport in order to ensure that all pupils have access to the full school day.
- The Board of Management should fill the post of deputy principal without delay. The range of duties allocated for the post should be such that they contribute to the capacity of the school to address current and emerging needs and priorities in relation to organisational, curricular and pastoral areas.
- The school should review existing procedures to monitor the implementation of the pupils' Individual Education Plans (IEPs) in classroom settings in order to facilitate more effective tracking of each pupil's individual goals.
- A framework for whole-school curriculum planning should be developed to support the implementation of the curriculum at all class levels through the school.

3. Quality of School Management

- The board of management is properly constituted, meets regularly, takes an active role in the effective management of the school and is committed to its ongoing development. The board has supported a wide range of continuing professional development (CPD) courses for the school staff. An audit of the CPD courses attended by staff should be undertaken with a view to the identification of training priorities for the future.
- The principal demonstrates a high level of commitment and dedication in her leadership and management of the school. The school has grown considerably in recent years and now caters for pupils with a wider range of special educational needs. A collaborative school community was in evidence. At the time of this evaluation, there was no in-school management team and the deputy-principal post has been vacant for some time. This has hampered the development of whole-school strategic planning initiatives in the organisational, curricular and pastoral care areas of the work of the school. The post of deputy principal should be filled as soon as practicable in order to support further and ongoing school development planning in these areas.
- There are six classes in the school with the two junior classes engaging in co-operative teaching programmes. The composition of the classes is informed by the level of pupils' individual needs in addition to their chronological ages. There are seventeen special needs assistant posts to support the care and educational provision across the school, on a class and individual basis. A number of pupils are not present at the time for commencement of tuition due to transport arrangements and this has resulted in a reduction of their classroom contact time. The school should review the arrangements with regard to school transport to ensure that pupils have access to the full school day.
- The school has access to a good range of shared facilities on the Cheeverstown House campus, such as the landscaped grounds, swimming pool, canteen, gym and snoezelen facilities, in addition to access to bus transport for weekly outings. A good range of commercial and teacher-designed teaching and learning resources are used appropriately to support the pupils' participation in a range of curricular areas. The teacher-devised resources reflect the teachers' commitment to engaging pupils in tasks and to maintaining their motivation during the learning activities.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- Substantial work has been undertaken in relation to school planning and individual teachers prepare carefully for the learning activities undertaken in classrooms. Consideration should now be given to devising a whole-school approach to the implementation of the curriculum from junior to senior classes throughout the school.
- IEPs are provided on an annual basis. While individual targets are set, they are generally broad in nature and would benefit from formulation in terms of identifiable short-term objectives and evaluation strategies. Consideration should also be given to commencing the IEP in the autumn term, in order to facilitate the implementation and monitoring of the programme during the school year.

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

- The teachers endeavour to stimulate the pupils' desire to communicate, and especially to communicate their needs and to make choices. The teachers make good use of visual materials, pictures, props and auditory cues to gain the pupils' attention and to develop their comprehension of oral language, particularly for communication purposes. Visual schedules are used effectively in many classrooms to guide the pupils through the daily programme of activities. Good use is made of communicative approaches including PECS, objects of reference and *Lámh* sign language. Assistive technology, such as Big Macks, is also used to augment verbal and signed communication approaches. Circle-time is used effectively across the school and provides a suitable forum for the implementation of story, drama, and music activities. Staff are conscious of the importance of employing age-appropriate activities and of having a spiral approach to the topics explored with the pupils as they progress through the school.
- In the area of Mathematics and through incidental opportunities during the day, the pupils' awareness and understanding of concepts such as "same" and "different", "large" and "small" and their ability to match, order and classify are fostered. A range of activities are also employed to cultivate the pupils' understanding of simple counting and early number concepts, time, shape and space. Further differentiation of the Mathematics programme would provide for more individualised learning and increased opportunities for reinforcement.
- The teachers structure weekly opportunities for the generalisation and transfer of aspects of the Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) programme to the wider context. Consideration should be given to developing a recording system to assess progress in accessing and using the community facilities availed of during these outings. A links programmes has been established with local mainstream schools and the Cheeverstown pupils participate in a range of activities on a weekly basis. Some of these sessions were observed during the period of inspection and it was evident that the pupils greatly enjoyed their participation in the shared school activities.
- The staff are conscious of the importance and benefits of physical and motor activities for the pupils and a wide range of activities is undertaken across the school. The pupils attend a regular session in the centre's swimming pool, where confidence in the water, self-care, independence and personal hygiene are promoted. Very good cooperation between the personnel involved contributes to this being an enjoyable and beneficial experience for the pupils. Opportunities for motor activities and movement to music are incorporated in classroom routines during the school day. The teachers are creative in their efforts to engage the pupils in a range of movement activities suited to their individual needs.
- Teachers and SNAs carefully monitor the progress of the pupils across the range of education and care activities undertaken in school. To further enhance the pupils'

programmes, consideration should be given to implementing a concurrent recording system. Each pupil's progress towards the achievement of his or her individual goals and targets could be recorded and the level of prompt or support by members of staff noted. Such a system would provide useful data for the review of pupils' progress in specific areas over time, and facilitate the appraisal and renewal of class-level and individual programmes.

6. Quality of Support for Pupils

- In addition to the level of intellectual disability, many of the pupils attending the school have additional physical, sensory or behavioural needs and concerns that require consideration in the formulation of the pupils' programmes. The therapists collaborate on an ongoing basis with school staff members in relation to pupils' programmes and where appropriate provide training in the use of specific techniques and strategies.
- IEPs are devised and relevant programmes are undertaken with the pupils. Consideration should now be given to further developing whole-school policy in the area of individualised planning with a view to extending the involvement of parents and the use of professional reports in devising specific goals and targets for pupils.
- A variety of relevant and specific teaching methodologies, suited to the needs of the pupils, is employed across the school. These include the effective use of objects of reference, Lámh sign language, PECS, TEACCH and Intensive Interaction.
- The school has developed a number of strategies and arrangements to support home-school communication, including two-way diaries and meetings with parents. Further consideration should now be given to extending communication opportunities with parents, regarding the work of the school, both at the level of individual pupils and in relation to the wider parent body.

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 and the staff of Cheeverstown School found the Whole School Evaluation process helpful and encouraging. We are very pleased with the report and are committed to providing high quality education and care to our pupils.

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

A Deputy Principal has been appointed for the school.

Discussions have commenced with the Transport Manager in relation to advancing the recommendations made in the report.