

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Mother of Fair Love Special School
James' Street, Kilkenny

Uimhir rolla: 19210P

Date of inspection: 16 January 2014



1. Introduction

Mother of Fair Love Special School caters for pupils of primary and post-primary age with special educational needs arising from mild general learning disabilities and associated difficulties. A number of pupils with autistic spectrum disorder also attend the school. Current enrolment is 56 pupils, reflecting a significant decline in recent years. The majority of pupils avail of school transport. 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, teachers, special needs assistants and ancillary staff demonstrate high levels of commitment and concern for the work and development of the school.
- A broad range of teaching activities and relevant methodologies is provided across the school.
- The school has developed good working relationships with external agencies such as the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) and the National Council for Special Education (NCSE).
- Long-standing and supportive relationships have been developed between Mother of Fair Love Special School and the local community, over many years.

The following **main recommendations** are made:

- The school should, as a priority, devise a whole-school collaborative process to facilitate the further development of pupils' individual education plans (IEPs).
- The board of management, in consultation with the trustees and the patron, should address the management of the school's finances as a matter of urgency.
- In order to carry out its role effectively, the board of management should participate in the training for boards provided by organisations such as the National Association of Boards of Management in Special Education (NABMSE) and the Catholic Primary School Management Association (CPSMA).
- To address the current situation and to meet the daily demands of the school, a working group consisting of the principal, deputy principal and other teachers should be put in place to engage in whole-school development planning and through this process identify, agree and progress school priorities.
- To facilitate the development of management and leadership skills across the school, opportunities for the principal, deputy principal and senior teachers to access relevant continuing professional development opportunities should be facilitated by the board of management.
- The board of management should develop a plan to build staff capacity to meet the needs of pupils by supporting their participation in post-graduate training in areas of special education.

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The board of management should oversee the formation and implementation of a strategic plan to guide the future direction and development of the school over the next number of years. |
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3. Quality of School Management

- The board of management is properly constituted and its members demonstrate commitment to the development of the school and the quality of the educational provision. To this end, the board meets regularly to carry out its duties. Policies required by legislation such as child protection and enrolment are in place and have recently been reviewed. However, there was little evidence that recent boards have taken a leading role in policy development, review and strategic planning in relation to a changing school context, such as the reducing enrolment. A number of the current board members have been recently appointed. In order to carry out its role effectively, in areas such as the development of school policies and the management of finances, the board of management should now participate in training in the role and functions of boards of management provided by organisations such as the National Association of Boards of Management in Special Education (NABMSE) and the Catholic Primary School Management Association (CPSMA).
- A key current concern of the board of management is to address the school's financial situation which has arisen over a number of years. This has placed an onerous burden on the school. Factors contributing to this include a decrease in enrolment and a consequent reduction in the capitation grant provided, a significant decrease in fundraising from the parents' association in recent years and an overrun on expenditure in relation to a recent summer works programme. The limited response of the board to this significant fall in income has reduced the funding available for the running of the school. The board of management, in consultation with the trustees and the patron, should address the management of the school finances as a matter of urgency.
- The board of management needs to strengthen its role in the area of policy development and review. Thus the future attention of the board should be directed to whole-school development planning across the organisational, curricular and pastoral areas of work of the school. The board should collaborate with the principal and the in-school working group proposed below to put in place processes for the development of school policy and the creation of a strategic plan to guide the future direction and development of the school over the next number of years. The board of management should be provided with regular updates by the principal and members of the in-school working group on progress in policy development in specific organisational, curricular and pastoral areas.
- The principal, who was appointed in 2011, is highly committed and concerned for the development of the school. Her appointment has followed several changes of principal over a short number of years. The principal has worked assiduously to address policy deficits and curriculum matters. She has endeavoured to cope with the negative impact caused by the lack of finances, introducing new arrangements in areas such as pupils' lunches and swimming costs. The school currently lacks a functioning in-school management team and there are no structures in place to support this important management and organisational work. It is recommended that the wide range of duties assigned to the post of deputy principal be reviewed in light of current school needs. Specific duties in relation to the organisational, curricular and pastoral areas should be agreed through consultation, ratified by the board of management and reviewed annually. Moreover, to address the present circumstances and the daily demands of the school, a working group consisting of the principal, deputy principal and other teachers should be

put in place to support whole-school development planning and through this process identify, agree and progress school priorities. To facilitate the development of management and leadership skills across the school, opportunities for the principal, deputy principal and senior teachers to access relevant continuing professional development opportunities should be facilitated by the board of management.

- The school staff, teachers, special needs assistants (SNAs) and ancillary staff demonstrate high levels of commitment and concern for the work and development of the school. The teaching staff comprises seven class teachers and three part-time teachers of Home Economics, Woodwork and Physical Education. Five of the class teachers have recently been appointed. There are nine SNAs, many with long-standing experience in the school. In light of the recent significant recruitment of new staff, an audit of continuing professional development needs should be undertaken. Additionally, the board of management should develop a plan to build staff capacity to meet the needs of pupils by supporting their participation in post-graduate training in areas of special education. Very good secretarial assistance supports the work of the school.
- The school buildings, classroom accommodation and ancillary areas are well maintained. There are dedicated rooms for Home Economics and Woodwork. There is a soft-play area and a hall for group activities. The classroom teams of teachers and SNAs endeavour to create appropriate and attractive learning environments for the pupils. Classroom teaching resources are of variable quality and there is a limited range of ICT resources to support learning.
- Regular contact between home and school is facilitated. Parent-school meetings in relation to pupils' progress are organised and parents have on-going access to staff regarding their child's progress. The results of parent questionnaires administered as part of the evaluation indicate that parents had overall positive views of the school, saw it as providing a welcoming and open environment and expressed the view that teaching was good. Parents' representatives are actively involved on the board of management. The parents' association has contributed significantly to the school over the years, but is not currently active. The board of management should endeavour to re-establish the parents' association and to facilitate its active involvement in the life of the school. Long-standing and supportive relationships have been developed between Mother of Fair Love Special School and the local community, over many years. The school has developed good working relationships with external agencies such as the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) and the National Council for Special Education (NCSE), which are a critical source of support and advice to the school.
- Good care and management of the pupils was in evidence during the evaluation. Constructive and beneficial interactions among pupils and staff were observed in classrooms. The questionnaires completed by the pupils indicate that they feel safe and cared for in school. A whole-school system to track and reward positive pupil behaviour has recently been introduced and is being implemented across the school. Consideration should also be given to reviewing the role of the care team which had previously been a valuable resource in managing challenging behaviour. A pupils' council had been in operation for a number of years in the school and this important forum should be re-introduced in order to facilitate the views of pupils being heard in relation to the work of the school.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- Whole-school development planning requires significant further development. Good work has been undertaken by the principal in drafting a range of policy documents in relation to organisational matters and the running of the school. Considerable planning in each area

of the curriculum is required in order to support cohesion and continuity in the implementation of curriculum programmes through the school. The recommendations of the previous whole-school evaluation conducted in 2007 in relation to planning and assessment were not implemented. In undertaking curriculum planning, the teaching staff should draw on the guidelines of the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) for pupils with mild general learning disabilities and use the supports available through the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST) and the Special Education Support Service (SESS).

- During the current academic year, the principal has introduced a useful individual education plan (IEP) format. The school's individualised planning process is at an early stage however. The school should, as a priority, devise a whole-school collaborative process to facilitate the further development of IEPs, thus ensuring that they address the specific learning needs of individual pupils. The IEP process should be collaborative involving external agencies, such as NEPS, as well as school personnel, parents and the pupils themselves where appropriate.
- While classroom planning of a high quality was in evidence, practice was not consistent across the school. To promote consistency and to support the monitoring of pupil progress and continuity in the programmes of learning undertaken, the teaching staff should develop and agree a short-term planning and recording template for use in all classrooms.
- 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 broad range of teaching activities and relevant methodologies is provided across the school. Good quality, well-presented, interesting and age-appropriate lessons were observed in classrooms. The teachers are conscious of the wide range of pupils' needs and differentiate the teaching activities in relation to learning process, content and tasks. A good range of teaching approaches is employed and the teachers endeavour to provide opportunities for the pupils to engage actively and purposefully in the learning tasks. The school previously provided pathways for many pupils to access national certification through the Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC) and a range of Junior Certificate subjects. The school is now examining the possibilities of Level 2 and Level 3 programmes as a route to certification for pupils within the reform of the Junior Cycle.
- Good attention is given to promoting the pupils' development in language and literacy. The teachers' programmes consistently aim to address the learning needs of pupils in oral language, reading and writing. Positive pupil involvement was in evidence in classrooms and a good range of teaching approaches is employed constructively. To enhance the effectiveness, continuity and coherence of approaches, priority should be given to consolidating practice and developing a unified policy across the school. Policy and practice should be guided by the NCCA Guidelines for teachers of students with general learning disabilities.
- Classroom practice provides for a wide range of learning needs in Mathematics as pupils follow programmes based on primary and post-primary curriculums. A good variety of approaches is employed in classrooms and aspects of good practice observed include the use of demonstration, clear explanations and linking lessons to the pupils'

environment. In a number of classrooms, concrete materials, active-learning methodologies and ICT were employed effectively and it is advised that such practical and experiential learning approaches be implemented consistently across the school. In the senior classes, opportunities are taken to link learning in Mathematics with aspects of the vocational subjects being studied and the life skills dimension of Mathematics is emphasised appropriately.

- Due provision is made for the area of Social, Environmental and Scientific Education (SESE) and good practice and lively pupil engagement was observed in the teaching of History and Geography. Thematic and cross-curricular approaches were in evidence incorporating an emphasis on relevant concepts and language development involving good use of visual resources and active-learning methodologies. There is scope for increased attention to Science. Consideration should be given to participation in the Green Schools programme, which would provide opportunities for pupils to become actively involved in environmental projects.
- Good opportunities are provided for pupils to participate in Arts Education. In the Visual Arts, positive pupil engagement in discrete lessons and in cross-curricular activities was in evidence. Active and enjoyable participation in Music, choir activities and Drama were observed. Pupils also engage regularly in a range of physical education and sports activities, including swimming in a local pool. The pupils in the senior classes have access to a regular programme of activities in Home Economics and Woodwork.
- The area Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) is conscientiously attended to in classrooms. The aims of the programme are supported through the development of a positive school climate, the teaching of discrete lessons in aspects of SPHE and the integration of relevant topics across other curriculum areas. The fostering of a sense of school community and the celebration of the pupils' work and accomplishments are important aspects of provision in SPHE. Co-operative skills and positive social interactions among the pupils are encouraged. The promotion of life skills and independence are key themes in all classes and particularly in the senior and school leaver years. The Stay Safe Programme is implemented across the school. While policy in Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) is implemented in the primary classes, it is not yet in place in the post-primary section of the school. It is recommended that this matter be addressed straightaway.
- The work and progress of the pupils is regularly monitored in classrooms. A number of approaches is employed, including observation of pupils, completion of tasks and projects, maintenance of folders of pupils' work, monitoring of homework and teacher-designed tests. A whole-school policy on assessment is now required to guide and support practice across the school. In developing this policy, the teaching team needs to clarify the rationale and purpose of the various aspects of assessment, review approaches currently employed and consider the use of baseline and criterion-referenced testing. The use of diagnostic assessment materials and assessment-for-learning approaches should also be enhanced. Strategies to address the specific learning needs of particular pupils should be set out in programme planning and incorporated in the practice of the classroom.

6. Quality of Support for Pupils

- The classroom teams of teachers and SNAs work collaboratively to support the learning and care needs of the pupils. Positive and supportive staff-pupil interactions were observed in classrooms. The broad programme of activities provided endeavours to cater for the wide range of needs of the pupils. The SNA team plays an important role in the

management of the care needs of the pupils. Good relationships have been developed with NEPS and the NCSE which provide essential support to the school's work. While the school has developed IEPs, this process needs further development. The teaching staff has accessed continuing professional development in the management of behaviour and autism. The school now has a number of new staff whose professional development in the area of special education should be prioritised. Procedures have been put in place to support positive pupil behaviour in classrooms. There is an appropriate emphasis on the promotion of independence and the development of life-skills across the school. Important work is undertaken to facilitate the school leavers in their transition to further education and training.

Appendix

SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

Submitted by the Board of Management

Area 1: Observations on the content of the inspection report

Both the BOM and the school consider this report to be a fair assessment of the current situation in MFL School. The BOM welcomes both the recommendations in this report and the advice offered by the Inspectorate and would like to give the assurance that follow up work is already well underway. The Board welcomes confirmation from the Inspectorate of their level of satisfaction regarding the quality of learning and care that the school provides.

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

Main Recommendations & Follow Up to Date

- 1. Recommendation: Development of whole school collaborative process to facilitate further development in area of IEPs*
Follow Up: Temporary Template for IEP in use across the school for 2013/2014 year. Introductory afternoon training organised for June 2014 for staff in IEP development, in conjunction with further SESS training as advised.
- 2. Recommendation: Address management of school finances*
Follow Up: Sub Finance Committee organised to meet short term school funding. Overrun of Summer Works Project 2009 met by the Trustee.
- 3. Recommendation: Training for Board Members*
Follow Up: Notification of CPSMA Board training to be circulated as it arises
- 4. Recommendation: Establishment of Working Group consisting of Principal, Deputy Principal and other teachers*
Follow Up: Three meetings organised in May 2014 between assigned Facilitator, Principal and Deputy Principal, in order to facilitate commencement of working group in September 2014
- 5. Recommendation: Provision of CPD opportunities for Principal, Deputy and Senior teachers*
Follow Up: Training to be availed of as it arises
- 6. Recommendation: Support by BOM for staff post graduate training in Special Ed*
Follow Up: One primary teacher to complete Diploma in Special Ed in Drumcondra 2014/2015
One secondary teacher to submit application for similar training 2015/2016
- 7. Recommendation: Formation and Implementation of a strategic three year plan by BOM*
Follow Up: The Board agreed that in September 2014 we would have a sub-committee to look at issues such as both policy and strategy development. The present outline of a new website, currently under construction, will be further developed at that stage.

Other Recommendations

8. *Recommendation:* Adaptation by BOM of a leading role in Policy Development review and strategic planning in relation to a changing school context
Follow Up: Seven school policies (some new) reviewed and ratified by the BOM in January 2014
9. *Recommendation:* Future attention of Board to be directed to Whole School Development Planning in relation to organizational, curricular and pastoral areas of work and which should be reviewed annually
Follow Up: Junior Cert level 2 to be rolled out across the school in September 2014
10. *Recommendation:* Review of duties of post of Deputy Principal.
Follow Up: Reviewed Spring 2014
11. *Recommendation:* Reestablishment of Parents' Association and facilitation of its active involvement in school life
Follow Up: A new constituted Parents' Association has been established and registration is proceeding. Fundraising for ICT school resources prioritized by group
12. *Recommendation:* Review of role of Care Team
Follow Up: To be reviewed in conjunction with new templates for use with revised Code of Discipline & Behaviour Policy
13. *Recommendation:* Reintroduction of Student Council
Follow Up: Planned for 2014/2015
14. *Recommendation:* Re Curriculum Planning, teaching staff to draw on NCCA Guidelines for pupils with Mild GLD
Follow Up: All classes in receipt of copy of NCCA Guidelines CD Rom
15. *Recommendation:* Re Curriculum Planning: Teaching staff to use supports available via PDST and SESS
Follow Up: Ongoing use of these services always has been and continues to be in place
16. *Recommendation:* Short term planning and recording template for use to promote consistency, monitoring of pupil progress and continuity in learning
Follow Up: May 2014 Short & Long Term Planning Template discussed and planned for use in coming year
17. *Recommendation:* Practical and experiential learning approaches to be implemented across the school
Follow Up: Implementation of same in conjunction with Parent Association fundraising plan for increased IT in the school
18. *Recommendation:* Increased attention to Science Curriculum required.
Follow Up: Whole School CPD "Discover Primary Science & Maths" workshop was organised term 1 2013/2014
19. *Recommendation:* Participation in Green School's Programme
Follow Up: To be investigated

20. Recommendation: RSE Policy Development in Post Primary Section of School
Follow Up: Final ratification of RSE Policy in Post Primary underway

21. Recommendation: Enhancement of use of diagnostic assessment materials and assessment for learning approaches
Follow Up: Preliminary discussions initiated with PDST in May 2014. Further planned for 2014/2015 year.