

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

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

**REPORT**

**Scoil Aislinn,  
Boreenmanna Road,  
Cork  
Uimhir rolla:  
20331L**

**Date of inspection: 15<sup>th</sup> May 2014**



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

### Introduction

A Whole-School Evaluation – Management, Leadership and Learning (WSE - MLL) was undertaken in Scoil Aislinn in May 2014. 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, behaviour consultant, deputy principal and with board and parent representatives, completed parent 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.

In the last three years, the school has changed from being a centre devoted to adherence to principles of Applied Behavioural Analysis (ABA), to becoming a recognised special school. This process has built on the strengths of the ABA centre and led to the provision of a broader range of curriculum experiences and to developing a variety of teaching methodologies. Staff members have availed of substantial continuing professional development.

The school has **strengths** in the following areas:

- The close collaboration that exists between the principal teacher and the behaviour consultant is a notable strength of the school.
- The in-school management team demonstrates a proactive commitment to the provision of quality services in all areas of the school's work.
- A strong team approach and a high level of dedication and trust exist among well-qualified members of classroom teams.
- The pupils are provided with access to a broad curriculum that addresses the triad of impairments associated with Autism Spectrum Disorder.
- The members of the board of management and its patron, COPE Foundation, provide informed guidance and support to the school.
- Careful attention has been given to supporting the smooth transition of senior pupils to adult services.
- The school has achieved a great deal in a relatively short period.

The following **main recommendations** are made:

- The board should maintain its own financial accounts and appoint a treasurer from its membership.
- Aspects of the school's enrolment policy should be reviewed in order to more fully reflect the inclusive practice that exists in the school.
- The deputy principal should be given the opportunity to give an account of her work to the board.
- The school should adopt the complaints procedure currently used by schools.
- Further curriculum policies should be cross-referenced with the implications of ASD for practice.
- The teachers should achieve closer alignment between whole-school planning, classroom planning and monthly progress records.
- Policies on relationship and sexuality education and substance use should be developed.
- Curriculum planning should include an emphasis on providing carefully designed opportunities for play as part of the learning programmes.

## Findings

### 1. The learning achievements of pupils

- Pupils' educational plans and behaviour plans are highly individualised and their progress is closely monitored.
- The pupils have access to a broad and balanced curriculum that takes into account their abilities and personal interests.
- Detailed records are maintained of the learning achievements and progress made by pupils.

### 2. Quality of teaching

- The overall quality of teaching in the school is very good. The pupils are provided with a broad and balanced range of curriculum experiences. A strong team approach is in evidence and a high level of trust exists within class teams. Teaching and learning is also supported by the involvement of the occupational therapist and the speech and language therapist.
- A range of ASD specific teaching approaches is used and reflects a child-centred approach to learning and teaching. While Applied Behaviour Analysis continues to be a distinctive feature in the overall provision, other interventions such as The Treatment and Education of Autistic and Communication Handicapped Children (TEACCH) and Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS) are utilised.
- Daily routines and individual work systems are well established. Visual timetables and tactile schedules are often used to indicate the sequence of activities. Transitions between activities are signalled and well-managed.
- Communication skills are developed through speech and through the use of PECS, the use of real objects, symbols, and written words. Electronic communication devices are also utilised. Collaborative learning is facilitated in each class to some extent and the pupils are assisted in engaging in reciprocal communication through group activities.
- Reading skills are addressed based on individual ability. In writing activities, emphasis is placed on developing pupils' fine motor control and on functional and personal writing exercises. Pupils are given opportunities to develop literacy skills in social situations and in recording words and sentences based on curriculum experiences.
- In Mathematics good activity-based, hands-on activities was observed. Effective use of information and communication technology was noted. Emphasis is placed on the acquisition and application of skills that are useful in daily living.
- Music appreciation is a feature of good classroom practice and supports pupils' learning.
- Staff members provide a stimulating learning environment. Learning resources continue to be extended including staff-produced materials. The sensory garden and trips outside the school extend the range of pupils' learning experience.
- Teachers' written planning is informed by the *Guidelines for Teachers of Pupils with General Learning Disabilities*. Good progress has been made in developing a number of curriculum policies. Other areas of the curriculum are yet to be developed and it is recommended that all further curriculum policies be cross referenced with the needs of pupils and give consideration to the implications of ASD. Aspects of the school's enrolment policy should be reviewed in order to more fully reflect the welcoming and inclusive practice. Future planning should include an emphasis on providing opportunities for play as part of the learning programmes. Policies on relationship and sexuality education and substance use should also be developed.

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

- The management of pupils is characterised by positive and empathetic interaction by adults. Low-arousal approaches help to ensure that, in the main, a calm atmosphere

prevails throughout the day. Social stories are exploited to enable the pupils to cope with social situations that they find difficult.

- Depending on individual ability, senior pupils carry out tasks within the school and participate in work experience. The school has established links with other special and mainstream schools and some pupils are being included in activities with pupils who do not present with ASD.
- There is an awareness of the sensory differences of pupils with ASD. Occupational therapy recommendations are followed or incorporated into lessons. The importance of physical exercise for pupils is emphasised.
- In addition to ASD some pupils present with other conditions and adaptations have been made to assist pupils with sensory/physical disability. In the coming years the school should develop a policy outlining how other special educational needs are to be addressed.
- The school strives to maintain an open-door policy with transparent communication between home and school. Home-school diaries give parents an account of learning achievements which have occurred in school so they can be reinforced at home. A parents' association has been formed which is very active and successful and provides ongoing support to the school. In responding to questionnaires, parents were overwhelmingly positive about the quality of education being provided.
- 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 board of management is very effective. The members of the board of management and its patron, COPE Foundation, provide informed guidance and support to the school. The board should now appoint a treasurer from among its members to give an account of income and expenditure at each board meeting. A range of policies has been developed and ratified.
- There has been an effective induction of new staff. Teachers have had access to extensive training which was organised by the Special Education Support Service.
- The principal demonstrates a proactive commitment to the provision of quality services in all aspects of the school's work. She takes a keen interest in the quality of teaching and learning in the school. In close collaboration with the board of management and staff she has successfully led the process of developing the school.
- The principal is well supported by the deputy-principal who takes responsibility for important aspects of the management of the school in administrative, pastoral, and curricular areas. It is recommended that the deputy principal gives an account of her work to the board from time to time.
- Effective collaborative leadership and support is provided by the school's behaviour consultant. She is centrally involved in the development of pupils' individual education plans and there is close monitoring of pupils' response to individualised behaviour protocols. She organises the handover of classes in an effective and efficient manner.

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

- The learning needs of the pupils are assessed systematically and the tracking of pupil progress is detailed and thorough. The school evaluates its work systematically and reports regularly on the learning of its pupils. The school has yet to provide a school improvement plan for literacy, although several of the elements are already in place. A closer alignment between whole-school planning, classroom planning and monthly progress records should be developed.

## **Conclusion**

The school's capacity to engage in school improvement is very good. Very good quality leadership at board and at in-school management levels ensures clear direction for the work and development of the school. The school leaders and members of staff interact well in a mutually supportive manner for the benefit of the pupils. There is a strong sense of community and a collective confidence in the school's capacity to prosper.