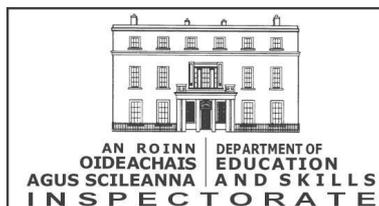


**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills**

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

**Holy Spirit Special School
Seville Lodge, Callan Road, Kilkenny
Roll Number: 19523N**

Date of inspection: 28 November 2014



Whole-School Evaluation – Management, Leadership and Learning Report

Introduction

A Whole-School Evaluation – Management, Leadership and Learning (WSE - MLL) was undertaken in the Holy Spirit Special School in November 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 and with board and parents' representatives, completed parents' and pupils' questionnaires and a selection of school documents. 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.

The Holy Spirit Special School is a co-educational special school under the patronage of the Catholic Bishop of Ossory. The school provides for pupils with emotional disturbance and autism aged from four to eighteen years. At the time of this evaluation there were seventy-seven pupils enrolled and good attendance was in evidence. The school has acquired attractive new purpose-built facilities since the last evaluation.

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

- Impressive shared leadership is in evidence throughout the school which facilitates the provision of a high quality service to the pupils.
- The board of management, principal and in-school management team have successfully managed the development of the school over many years.
- The principal and staff team collaborate successfully in the very effective management and organisation of the work of the school.
- The class teams of teachers and special needs assistants (SNAs) collaborate effectively in addressing the pupils' individual learning needs.
- The active participation of the pupils in their learning across the range of curriculum areas, at both the primary and post-primary stages, was praiseworthy.
- A good range of approaches to teaching and learning, suited to the needs of pupils with emotional disturbance and autism, is carefully employed in classrooms.
- Pupils' holistic learning needs are identified and supported through the primary and post-primary stages of their education.
- Team-teaching approaches are used effectively in a number of class settings.

The following **main recommendations** are made:

- Building on existing good work in the development of school policies, a number of specific areas should be identified annually for review and development.
- To extend the tracking of pupils' progress in specific areas of learning and development, the school's individualised education planning (IEP) process should be further developed.

Findings

1. The learning achievements of pupils

- Good achievement in pupils' learning was in evidence in the classrooms observed across the school. Pupil learning included the pupils' development of personal skills and their positive engagement across the range of curriculum areas. Pupils are enabled to progress at their own pace and to participate beneficially in the learning activities of the classroom. Carefully organised individual and group activities facilitate consistent and purposeful pupil involvement in a wide range of learning activities, relevant to their age and needs, and linked to the primary and post-primary curriculum areas.
- In the area of language and literacy, pupils develop skills and confidence in speaking, listening, reading and writing at their individual pace. They participate in discussions, engage in reading activities and write for a range of purposes. Written work is carefully presented in copies and displayed in classrooms. The pupils receive helpful feedback on their work through the use of formative assessment approaches.
- Pupils were observed engaging actively in the area of numeracy and participating purposefully in opportunities to use mathematical skills. The pupils have good opportunities to use concrete and visual materials and there is scope for linking the mathematical activities to their experience.
- The active participation of the pupils in their learning across the range of curriculum areas, at both the primary and post-primary stages, was praiseworthy.

2. Quality of teaching

- A whole-school team approach supports the collaborative classroom work of the teachers and special needs assistants (SNAs) in addressing the learning needs of individual pupils. Aistear, the Primary School Curriculum, Junior Certificate Schools Programme (JCSP) materials and the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) guidelines for students with learning disabilities are all used as sources for the programmes undertaken in classrooms. There is a suitable emphasis on the development of skills and the linking of the lesson content to the experience and interests of the pupils, and the promotion of independence and life-skills. A very good range of resources is available to pupils, including the effective use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in classrooms.
- Specific approaches appropriate to the needs of children with emotional and behavioural difficulties and autism are carefully implemented in classrooms. Behavioural and reward systems are conscientiously planned and implemented. Pupils' changing learning needs are recognised and positive, supportive learning environments are cultivated. Classrooms are well-structured and carefully organised to support pupils' learning. A good variety of teaching strategies, including methodologies such as TEACCH and PECS are systematically employed. Team-teaching approaches are used effectively in a number of class settings. A range of assessment approaches is in place in classrooms, including, portfolios, self-assessment strategies, photographic records, behaviour checklists and standardised tests. To extend the tracking of pupils' progress in specific areas of learning and development, the school's individualised education planning (IEP) process should be further developed.
- Commendable work was in evidence with pupils at the post-primary stage. Teacher planning of a high quality was in evidence and useful records are maintained. Thematic approaches are employed to good effect in several classrooms to integrate aspects of the curriculum programme. A comprehensive School Leavers' Programme has been developed to support pupils' transition to the next stage of post-school education, training and employment. In recent years there has been impressive development of the post-primary provision of the school with the implementation of the Junior Cycle material and the JCSP programmes. The school is currently engaged in training in relation to the introduction of the Junior Certificate Level 2 Programme.

3. Support for pupils' well-being

- The support for pupils' well-being in school is very good. Most parents agree that their child is doing well in school. The school liaises productively with agencies such as the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS), the Special Education Support Service (SESS) and the National Council for Special Education (NCSE). New school buildings, including purpose-built classrooms and facilities, and ancillary rooms provide a good physical environment for the pupils to engage in learning, participate in recreational activities and to access individualised support when required.
- The inclusive approach of the principal and staff team provides a supportive school environment in which the developmental needs of the pupils are consistently and skilfully attended to. There is on-going staff interest and involvement in continuous professional development, supported by the board of management. The regular use of home-school communication journals facilitates good sharing of information and the understanding of pupils' changing needs. The teachers' and SNAs' awareness of the needs of the pupils arising from emotional difficulties and autism guides and informs practice in relation to the management of behaviour. Individual accommodations have been developed to support pupils' self-management. Commendable use is made of the areas of Physical Education, sport, the Visual Arts and Music to support the pupils' involvement and engagement in learning across the curriculum.
- The pupils participate in a variety of extra-curricular activities and enjoy the beneficial and well-organised experiences undertaken in the community setting and using local amenities. Building on existing good links with local schools, development of further opportunities to promote inclusive learning experiences for pupils should, where appropriate and, as far practicable, be considered.
- 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

- Impressive shared leadership is in evidence across the school which facilitates the provision of a high quality service to the pupils. An open style of leadership supports a culture of constructive communication and effective collaboration among staff members. The board of management, principal and in-school management team have successfully managed the development of the school over many years. The principal and staff team collaborate successfully in the very effective management and organisation of the work of the school.
- Effective systems of communication have been put in place and there is on-going staff communication in addressing issues emerging across the school. A system of regular scheduled meetings is in place to plan, organise and manage the work of the school. Building on existing good work in the development of school policies, a number of specific areas should be identified annually for review and development.
- The parents' association has contributed positively to the school community over many years. The parent questionnaires indicate that most parents agree that the school is well run and most parents are happy with the school.

5. School Self-evaluation

- The school has engaged successfully with the school self-evaluation (SSE) process and focussed on the area of literacy. Effective planning has been undertaken at a whole-school

level. Specific targets have been identified in the school improvement plan and work is ongoing in relation to their implementation.

Conclusion

- This school has very good capacity to develop further and to engage in school improvement. The effective management of the school and the work undertaken by the staff team demonstrate a commitment to continuous improvement in the provision for the pupils in its care.

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 of School of the Holy Spirit welcomes the publication of this extremely positive report, and readily accepts its findings.

The Board welcomes the Report's acknowledgement of the high standards of teaching, learning and leadership in our school, along with the commitment to continuous improvement for the provision for pupils in our care.

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 Board of Management and Staff acknowledge the recommendations made in the report. We plan to incorporate them in our School Improvement Plan and implement them as part of our continuous improvement process.