

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

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

REPORT

**Jonah Special School
Slieverue, Co. Kilkenny
Roll Number: 20380B**

Date of inspection: 22 January 2016



Whole-School Evaluation – Management, Leadership and Learning Report

Introduction

A Whole-School Evaluation – Management, Leadership and Learning (WSE - MLL) was undertaken in Jonah Special School for Children with Autism and Complex needs. 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' 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.

Jonah School is a co-educational special school under the patronage of Autism Ireland. The school provides for pupils with a primary diagnosis of autistic spectrum disorder (ASD) and complex needs. At the time of this evaluation there were eleven pupils enrolled and attendance was very good. Staffing consists of two teachers, seven special-needs assistants (SNAs) and a behaviour analyst. In 2011, the school was granted temporary recognition by the Department of Education and Skills and has now applied for permanent recognition.

The evaluation has found:

- The board of management has successfully led and supported the management and development of the school over many years.
- The acting principal, behaviour analyst and senior staff demonstrate an open and child-centred approach in the leadership and management of the school.
- The high degree of collaboration among the staff is commendable; very good systems and protocols for communication contribute to the high quality of care, management and support of the pupils.
- There is good quality teaching in evidence; a range of methodologies appropriate to the needs of children with autism is employed in classrooms.
- While the pupils work in pairs and groups during the school day, there is scope to extend such opportunities across a variety of learning activities and settings.
- Pupils have access to a good variety of learning activities, however there is scope to broaden the range of curriculum activities pupils participate in across the school day.

The following **main recommendations** are made:

- More extensive opportunities for pupils to access learning activities while working in pairs and groups should be developed in a variety of settings, across the school day.
- To extend pupils' access to a broader curriculum, a wider range of curriculum activities should be developed, where pupils have opportunities to engage purposefully in a greater variety of learning areas, linked where practicable to the application of skills in purposeful contexts.

Findings

1. The learning achievements of pupils

- Good achievement in pupils' learning is in evidence in classrooms. Pupils are enabled to acquire appropriate behaviours and this facilitates their participation in a broad range of learning and curricular activities. Monitoring of each pupil's day in school is undertaken on a consistent basis and involves the assessment and tracking of progress and identifying areas for development. The programme of learning provided in each classroom is informed by the use of assessment information across the areas of development for each pupil. Diagnostic, summative and formative assessment approaches are employed, including classroom observation, and the use of standardised materials and recorded data.

- Pupils access a variety of activities across the curriculum areas. In language and literacy there is a consistent emphasis on functional communication and pupils develop beneficial skills to communicate their needs and to interact with peers and staff members. The functional dimension of literacy is underlined in the areas of reading and writing. In numeracy, the approaches employed support pupils in accessing mathematics experiences through the use of visual and concrete materials and linking to practical tasks. Cross-curricular approaches are in evidence, incorporating the areas of Social Environmental and Scientific Education (SESE), Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE), the Visual Arts and Music. To extend pupils' access to a broader curriculum, a wider range of curriculum activities should be developed, where pupils have opportunities to engage purposefully in a greater variety of learning areas. Where practicable, these should be linked to the practical application of skills in purposeful contexts.
- The promotion of life-skills and independence is a core dimension of the work of the school and well-structured activities are employed to support this area of pupils' development. Consideration should be given to widening the range of opportunities for pupils to use and apply skills in practical and purposeful activities such as cooking, gardening, and in the Visual Arts, where this is feasible. Jonah School caters for pupils from the primary stage through to the post-primary stages. The introduction of the Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN) and the Junior Cycle Level 2 facilitates the pupils' involvement in activities relevant to their needs and interests. The implementation of these age-appropriate programmes, curriculum activities related to the pupils' needs and interests, and the variety of methodologies employed is commended. Opportunities to extend such approaches across the school day should be explored.

2. Quality of teaching

- There is good quality teaching in evidence in the school. In the parent questionnaires, all parents agree that teaching is good in the school. With the highly effective support of the behaviour analyst, the class teams of teachers and SNAs collaborate skilfully in addressing pupils' individual learning needs. A range of child-centred and autism-specific approaches is carefully implemented in each classroom. Pupils' learning needs are identified, addressed and monitored through well-planned individualised education programmes (IEPs). There is, however, some scope for the development of more specific, time-framed targets in the IEP process. There is a commendable level of co-operation in each classroom in relation to the management, care and support of the pupils.
- A good standard of planning and preparation was in evidence in classrooms. Programmes are based on the assessed needs of the pupils. Assessment resources and approaches employed include the assessment of basic language and learning skills (ABLIS), applied behaviour analysis (ABA), teaching and education of autistic and related communication handicapped children (TEACCH) materials, and the picture exchange communication system (PECS). The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) guidelines for pupils with general learning disabilities, and primary school curriculum materials are also usefully employed in supporting teaching and learning. In each classroom setting visual timetables and schedules indicate clearly the sequence of activities for individual pupils and transitions are skilfully managed. The organisation of the classroom settings supports pupil learning on an individualised basis, with provision also for pair and group activities. More extensive opportunities for pupils to access learning activities while working in pairs and groups should be developed in a variety of settings.

3. Support for pupils' well-being

- There is very good support for pupils' well-being in the school. The school environment is well-managed and supportive of pupils with complex learning needs. The strong awareness of the needs of the pupils arising from ASD informs practice of the management of behaviour. The behaviour analyst leads the process of devising comprehensive behaviour management plans for pupils and these are implemented in a consistent manner. There is a high quality of

collaboration in classrooms in relation to the management of pupils' behaviour. In the questionnaires parents responded that the school manages children with challenging behaviour well.

- The classroom teams attend to the development of pupils' social, personal and life skills through specific and incidental teaching. All parents agree that the school helps their child with social and personal development. There is regular and on-going communication between home and school and parents have ready access to staff in relation to issues and concerns. All parents agree that their child is doing well in school.
- Pupils have some opportunities to generalise skills in community settings, including visits to shops, local cafés and the use of amenities, such as the library. As far as practicable, these learning activities should be extended with the older post-primary age students. Jonah School has also established links with a number of local schools and organisations. Building on these links, and based on individual needs, opportunities for pupils to experience inclusive learning opportunities should, where feasible, be further developed.

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 meets regularly in attending to the business of the school. A broad range of issues is discussed, including school management, policies and finance. The board has successfully led the development of the school over many years. An impressive level of collaborative practice among the staff team is in evidence across the school and this facilitates the provision of a high quality service in the management, care and support of the pupils. The acting principal and behaviour analyst successfully lead and support the creation of an inclusive and responsive school climate for pupils, parents and staff. A wide range of organisational and curricular policies has been developed to support the good management and running of the school.
- The parents of the pupils have made a notable, commendable and positive contribution to the school community over many years. The parent questionnaires indicate that parents agree that the school is well run and parents are happy with the school. In light of the development of the school, the board of management should continue its efforts to re-establish the parents' association.

5. School Self-evaluation

- Jonah School has engaged productively with the school self-evaluation process and areas for development have been identified and progressed. A strong evidence base for the planning of pupils' programmes is provided through the consistent use of assessment information. Useful development planning has been undertaken by the school over a number of years. School improvement plans have been constructed and implemented.

Conclusion

This school's capacity to develop further and to engage in school improvement is very good. The leadership and management of the work of the school demonstrate a high level of commitment to its on-going development in response to the needs of its pupils.

Appendix

SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

Submitted by the Board of Management

Part A Observations on the content of the inspection report

The Board of Management of the Jonah School welcomes the report from the inspectorate. The report contains numerous positive observations and reflects the great work being done in the school at all levels. The report affirms the high standards prevailing in the various areas of school activity, inclusive of: leadership and management, teaching and learning, pupil care and welfare, self evaluation and planning.

We are particularly happy that the report acknowledges the collaborative approach that is utilized by staff within the school. The Board feels that the report recognizes the expertise and skill set which has been developed within the school over a number of years. As the school caters for students with Autism and complex needs this specific range of skills is imperative for the success of pupils. The report also provides practical recommendations for future improvement, which we feel will be of great benefit to the school.

Part B 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 fully accepts the recommendations in the report and is presently in the process of addressing and taking action on these points.

Students have been provided with more extensive opportunities to access learning activities while working in pairs and groups. Students have been given greater opportunities to apply skills in practical and purposeful activities such as cooking, gardening and in the Visual Arts.

The I.E.P. process will be reviewed with a focus on developing more specific, time-framed targets. The school plans to extend its implementation of age-appropriate programmes and curriculum activities related to the pupils' needs and interests. Links will be developed with local schools and organisations to facilitate and expand community participation.

A Parents Association is currently being re-established.