An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
Management, Leadership and Learning

REPORT

Ainm na scoile / School name	Sonas Special Primary Junior School
Seoladh na scoile / School address	Carrigaline Co. Cork
Uimhir rolla / Roll number	20162O

Date of inspection: 06-12-2017

AN ROINN OIDEACHAIS AGUS SCILEANNA | DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND SKILLS

WHAT IS WHOLE-SCHOOL EVALUATION – MANAGEMENT, LEADERSHIP AND LEARNING?

Whole-School Evaluation – Management, Leadership and Learning reports on the quality of teaching and learning and on the quality of management and leadership in a school. It affirms good practice and makes recommendations, where appropriate, to aid the further development of educational provision in the school.

HOW TO READ THIS REPORT

During this inspection, the inspectors evaluated and reported under the following headings or areas of enquiry:

1. The quality of pupils' learning
2. The quality of teaching
3. The quality of support for pupils' well-being
4. The quality of leadership and management
5. The quality of school self-evaluation

Inspectors describe the quality of each of these areas using the Inspectorate's quality continuum, which is shown on the final page of this report. The quality continuum provides examples of the language used by inspectors when evaluating and describing the quality of the school's provision in each area. 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.

Whole-School Evaluation – Management, Leadership and Learning

Dates of inspection	06-12-2017
Inspection activities undertaken • Meetings with principal and in-school leadership team • Meeting with representatives of the board of management • Meeting with parent representative • Meeting with teachers • Review of relevant documents	• Analysis of parent and questionnaires • Observation of teaching and learning • Examination of pupils' work • Interaction with pupils • Feedback to principal, deputy principal and teachers, and to parent and board of management representatives

SCHOOL CONTEXT

Sonas Special Junior Primary School is a co-educational junior special school located in Carrigaline in Co. Cork. It is under the patronage of the Brothers of Charity and there are currently forty-two pupils on roll. The school provides for pupils between the ages of three and six years who are diagnosed with autistic spectrum disorder (ASD) and function within the average, mild, moderate or higher range of intellectual ability. Pupils are drawn from a wide catchment area encompassing Cork city and county and the school has experienced significant growth in recent years. The staffing schedule consists of an administrative principal, seven classroom teachers, nineteen special-needs assistants (SNAs) and eighteen ancillary staff. The school is currently accommodated in two buildings over one kilometre apart and is scheduled to move to a new purpose-built school in the Ballinrea campus in Carrigaline when completed.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

FINDINGS

- The overall learning achievements of the pupils are very good and they enjoy participating in an extensive range of learning activities and experiences.
- The overall quality of teaching in the school is very good; there is scope to enhance some aspects of the school planning and assessment processes.
- There is excellent support for pupils' well-being in this school. The highly committed and conscientious staff demonstrate a clear understanding of the holistic needs of the pupils.
- The board of management, the principal and the in-school management team manage the school in a conscientious and highly effective manner: a strategic plan would assist in guiding the school through the forthcoming transition to a new shared complex.
- An extremely positive relationship exists between the school, the parents' association and the general parent body.
- The school is a vibrant learning community with capacity for ongoing school improvement although, at the time of the evaluation, it was not engaging in the school self-evaluation (SSE) due to industrial action.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- The school should embed the principles of the *Aistear* framework in the individual education planning process for pupils.
- Pupils' progress in key priority areas identified in individual education plans (IEPs) which is currently recorded, should now be included in pupil profile assessments.

- The board should develop a strategic plan giving consideration to all implications associated with the next phase of the school's development.
- The school should reintroduce the formal school self-evaluation process.

DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. THE QUALITY OF PUPILS' LEARNING

- The overall learning achievements of the pupils are very good. They enjoy participating in an extensive range of learning activities and experiences. Pupils are enabled to develop suitable behaviours to engage appropriately with learning experiences. Activities are carefully selected to systematically build on pupils' strengths, interests and prior learning. Staff are commended for the creation of positive task-oriented classroom atmospheres which are very conducive to learning.

- Language and communication is a key feature of the school's work. The range of approaches used is informed by pupils' individual needs. These include Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS), communication core boards, LÁMH and the Hanen Approach. Pupils develop appropriate skills for communicating with peers and staff members and their progress is monitored carefully.

- All pupils have access to the *Primary School Curriculum*, and learning tasks are designed based on individual needs and abilities. There is a highly commendable emphasis on social skills and personal care. Pupils have regular access to their local community through frequent outings and events.

2. THE QUALITY OF TEACHING

- The overall quality of teaching in the school is very good. Teachers demonstrate high levels of knowledge and expertise and are committed to ongoing continuing professional development (CPD). The board is to be commended for its implementation of a staff bursary to support CPD in the school.

- Staff members are dedicated to developing pupils' self-esteem and a sense of belonging to the school and wider community.

- Teachers employ a good range of child-centred and specialised teaching approaches including Treatment and Education of Autistic and related Communication Handicapped Children (TEACCH) and PECS. Teachers have high expectations for pupils. Daily routines are well-established, visual schedules are used very effectively and transitions are managed smoothly. Highly effective levels of collaboration between teachers and SNAs were observed in the classrooms visited.

- The school is to be commended for the organisation of learning environments in both buildings. A wide range of learning resources have been provided together with a broad range of facilities including playgrounds, a garden, soft rooms, multi-sensory rooms, a sand shed and a cycle track.

- High levels of whole-school and individual teacher planning are in evidence and extensive work has been undertaken in linking learning activities to the *Primary School Curriculum.*

Individual education plans (IEPs) are formulated in conjunction with parents and visiting multidisciplinary support staff. IEPs clearly document pupils' strengths, needs and learning goals. The school has commenced planning for the implementation of the *Aistear* framework. As play is a significant component of learning for the pupils, these principles should now be embedded in teacher planning and practice.

- The overall quality of assessment is good with the broad range of approaches being utilised including checklists, commercially-produced materials and monthly curricular reports. An individual assessment profile, which tracks curricular progress, is completed on a six-weekly basis. This should be further developed to reflect pupils' progress in key priority areas identified in IEPs.

3. THE QUALITY OF SUPPORT FOR PUPILS' WELL-BEING

- There is excellent support for pupils' well-being in this school. The highly committed and conscientious staff demonstrate a clear understanding of the holistic needs of the pupils.

- Challenging behaviour is sensitively and effectively managed by school staff. Low arousal approaches, including *Team-Teach* methods, and empathic interactions ensure that the school environment remains calm.

- The SNAs demonstrate an insightful understanding of the implications of ASD in providing for pupils' care needs and make very good provision in meeting these requirements. They also are very aware of the importance of promoting pupils' independence.

- The school is very supportive of parents and promotes very strong home-school relationships. It adopts a highly effective range of approaches to communicating with parents. These include scrapbooks, video and the school website to nurture this supportive relationship. All parents who responded to the parental questionnaire administered during the evaluation indicated very high levels of satisfaction with the school. The parents' association is commended for the significant contribution it makes to the life of the school.

- The school liaises frequently and productively with the Brothers of Charity Services which provide a range of specialist multi-disciplinary supports to pupils. Strong links have also been forged with local community groups who support the school in a variety of ways.

- Very effective and supportive arrangements are in place to facilitate the smooth enrolment and introduction of pupils to the school and again when transitioning to the next stage of their education.

4. THE QUALITY OF LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

- The overall quality of leadership in the school is very good. The board meets regularly and is committed to the principles of good governance. It is highly supportive of the school and is commended, along with the staff, for overcoming significant structural challenges to create highly appropriate learning environments for the pupils in both locations. A very good suite of administrative policies supports the smooth day-to-day running of the school. The board

should prepare a strategic plan to assist in guiding the school in the forthcoming transition to a new shared complex.

- The principal is conscientious and highly effective and articulates a clear vision for Sonas. She is deeply committed to the provision of a quality service to the pupils and is highly supportive of parents and staff. The deputy principal is hard-working, provides effective support to the principal and has a clear leadership role within the school. She discharges her assigned duties in an efficient and professional manner.

5. THE QUALITY OF SCHOOL SELF-EVALUATION (SSE)

- Evidence of work undertaken, prior to industrial action at national level, indicates that this school was making good progress in SSE. Particular areas had been identified and an action planning process had been used effectively to guide school improvement in areas of numeracy and communication. The school is a vibrant learning community with capacity for ongoing school improvement; however, the school reported that, at the time of the evaluation, it was not engaging in the SSE process due to industrial action. The school should reintroduce the formal school self-evaluation process.

6. CHILD PROTECTION

- 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.

THE INSPECTORATE'S QUALITY CONTINUUM

Inspectors describe the quality of provision in the school using the Inspectorate's quality continuum, which is shown below. The quality continuum provides examples of the language used by inspectors when evaluating and describing the of quality the school's provision of each area.

Level	Description	Example of descriptive terms
Very Good	***Very good*** applies where the quality of the areas evaluated is of a very high standard. The very few areas for improvement that exist do not significantly impact on the overall quality of provision. For some schools in this category the quality of what is evaluated is ***outstanding*** and provides an example for other schools of exceptionally high standards of provision.	Very good; of a very high quality; very effective practice; highly commendable; very successful; few areas for improvement; notable; of a very high standard. Excellent; outstanding; exceptionally high standard, with very significant strengths; exemplary
Good	***Good*** applies where the strengths in the areas evaluated clearly outweigh the areas in need of improvement. The areas requiring improvement impact on the quality of pupils' learning. The school needs to build on its strengths and take action to address the areas identified as requiring improvement in order to achieve a *very good* standard.	Good; good quality; valuable; effective practice; competent; useful; commendable; good standard; some areas for improvement
Satisfactory	***Satisfactory*** applies where the quality of provision is adequate. Overall, learners have access to a basic level of provision. The strengths in what is being evaluated just outweigh the shortcomings. While the shortcomings do not have a significant negative impact they constrain the quality of the learning experiences and should be addressed in order to achieve a better standard.	Satisfactory; adequate; appropriate provision although some possibilities for improvement exist; acceptable level of quality; improvement needed in some areas
Fair	***Fair*** applies where, although there are some strengths in the areas evaluated, deficiencies or shortcomings that outweigh those strengths also exist. The school will have to address certain deficiencies without delay in order to ensure that provision is satisfactory or better.	Fair; evident weaknesses that are impacting on pupils' learning; less than satisfactory; experiencing difficulty; must improve in specified areas; action required to improve
Weak	***Weak*** applies where there are serious deficiencies in the areas evaluated. Immediate and coordinated whole-school action is required to address the areas of concern. In some cases, the intervention of other agencies may be required to support improvements.	Weak; unsatisfactory; insufficient; ineffective; poor; requiring significant change, development or improvement; experiencing significant difficulties;

Appendix

SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

Submitted by the Board of Management

Area 1 Observations on the content of the inspection report

Sonas Board of Management would like to acknowledge the findings of this report as an accurate reflection of the commitment and professionalism displayed by management and staff in the daily operation of the school.

In our view it encapsulates the positivity and genuine care and attention experienced by our pupil's on their educational and developmental path through the school.

We welcome affirmation by the Inspectorate of the extremely positive relationship that exists between the school and the parent body.

The Board is particularly pleased that the Inspectorate observed a vibrant learning community that engages with all of the educational partners for the sole purpose of enhancing the lives of our young pupils and their families.

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

As teachers formulate individual education plans (IEPs), the principles of the Aistear framework will be included as appropriate to each pupil.

The pupil profile assessments will now include the progress made in the key priority areas identified in the IEPs.

The Board of Management will develop a strategic plan for the next phase of the schools development. This is an exciting chapter in the life of Sonas. Every effort will be made to ensure a smooth transition for all members of the school community to the new Ballinrea campus.