

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**

**Department of Education and Skills**

**Curriculum Evaluation  
Communication and Language**

**REPORT**

**Our Lady of Good Counsel Special School  
Innishmore  
Ballincollig  
Co Cork**

**Roll Number: 18208A**

**Date of inspection: 24<sup>th</sup> May 2016**



## **Introduction**

An evaluation of Communication and Language was undertaken in Our Lady of Good Counsel Special School in May 2016. 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 / teachers, a pupil group discussion, and a review of a selection of school documents and assessment data. The board of management was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the report; a response was not received from the board.

### **Findings:**

- Our Lady of Good Counsel Special School is a vibrant and thriving school community where the principal, staff, and external professionals work closely together to achieve high standards in a supportive and caring environment.
- In the area of language and communication there is abundant evidence of professional commitment, competence, and creativity among the teachers who provide stimulating learning experiences that are differentiated to take account of the pupils' individual needs.
- A very positive attitude to school is displayed by pupils at all levels of the school. A notable feature of practice in the school is the establishment of a pupil support team which provides a continuum of support to class teachers and to pupils with communication difficulties and behaviour issues.
- Because of the high quality leadership in the school and the professionalism of the staff generally, the school is well equipped to act on the recommendations of this report to enhance the existing very good practice.

### **Recommendations:**

- It is recommended that a programme of specific language and communication associated with valuable learning activities that take place outside the base classrooms, is developed. This programme should endeavour to enrich the pupils' vocabulary and address the functions of language involved in social interaction.
- The innovative practice of the positive behaviour support team would benefit from further elucidation about how the support is operationalised, providing further clarity about the roles of various staff members responding to needs of pupils whose behaviour is challenging.

## **1. The quality of pupils' learning in Communication and Language**

The pupils enjoy learning language and communication and are well motivated. They engage well in lessons and they exhibit a sense of achievement in their accomplishments. They apply their oral language and non-verbal communication as well as their reading and writing skills in other areas of the curriculum. Generally they show well-presented and legible handwriting and use a growing vocabulary in their written work.

Reading skills are addressed from an initial to a more advanced level depending on individual ability and the majority of pupils are making good progress in reading. In writing, emphasis is placed on developing pupils' fine motor control and many pupils have made considerable progress in their handwriting and typing skills.

## **2. Supporting pupils' learning in Communication and Language: learning experiences and teachers' practice**

The quality of teaching in communication and language is very good and there is a discernible focus on all pupils participating. Particular attention is given to the development of oral language and communication skills. Observed lessons were characterised by beneficial thematic discussion between teachers and pupils. Visual schedules, LÁMH and Picture Exchange Communication System are used with pupils where appropriate. The pupils are consistently given opportunities to develop communication skills in social situations outside of classrooms. The school benefits from close links with health service professionals and with the speech and language therapist in particular.

Print-rich environments are created in most classrooms and class libraries are well stocked. Opportunities are created for pupils to acquire an extensive sight vocabulary. Some pupils have motor coordination difficulties, and care has been taken in selecting suitable approaches in the teaching of hand-writing. Due attention is paid to spelling, and punctuation. Teachers also make frequent use of information and communication technology to develop language skills. The use of iPad technology has been very successful.

With the senior pupils particular emphasis is on developing functional reading and functional writing within the framework of the Junior Cycle Level 2 programme. Very good practice was observed in the integration of language and communication skills in this context.

Across the school, teachers have developed innovative teaching practices to promote language and communication skills and this is notable especially in specialist subjects such as home economics and physical education. A variety of texts, media resources, commercial and teacher-made resources are used to support learning.

Opportunities for language development and communication are exploited through the use of whole school events such as assembly, exercise time, and at play time or meal times. It is recommended that a programme of specific language and communication associated with enriching the pupils' vocabulary in these activities is developed. The plan should address the functions of language involved in social interaction, such as engagement in conversation, and looking for and giving information.

The establishment of the students' council has contributed to the students' overall language development and has opened up channels of communication for pupils.

The school's special needs assistants make a valuable contribution in promoting the pupils' language competence and communication skills.

## **3. The effectiveness of school planning, including SSE, in progressing pupils' learning in Communication and Language**

Under the guidance of the highly effective principal, valuable, collaborative whole-school planning has been undertaken by staff. Curricular plans in communication and language are comprehensive and informative and serve as a very useful guide to classroom practice.

The quality of individual teacher class planning and preparation is very good. Assessment practices are of high quality and the learning needs of pupils are assessed systematically. Parents are actively involved in developing the individual education plans.

The teachers have embraced the structures in School Self-Evaluation and developments to date have benefited pupils learning outcomes in language and communication. Particular attention has been given to literacy and a school improvement plan has been developed.

The teachers recognise that providing pupils with means of communication contributes to the development of their self-esteem and reduces frustration levels. In this regard a notable feature of practice in the school is the Pupil Support Team. Utilising existing school personnel, the team provides a continuum of support ranging from consultation with class teachers to personalised high support to individual pupils who present with behaviour issues. Staff members have undertaken substantial continuing professional development in the area of risk reduction, understanding functions of behaviour, and intensive interventions. This innovative practice would benefit from further elucidation about how the support is operationalised. Thus a description should be provided about the roles of various staff members in developing individual education plans and behaviour support plans. Clarification should also be provided as to how decisions are taken in relation to creating personalised time tables, delivery of curriculum, and how the learning environment is to be managed.

*Issued September 2016*