



An Roinn Oideachais
Department of Education

Evaluation of Schools attached to Special Care Units and Children Detention Centres

Report

REPORT

Ainm na scoile/School name	Oberstown Campus School
Seoladh na scoile/School address	National Childrens Detention Centre Oberstown Lusk
Uimhir rolla/Roll number	42693V
Dáta na cigireachta/ Date of evaluation	13/12/2023

What is an evaluation of schools attached to special care units?

The Inspectorate carries out a programme of annual inspections of schools attached to Special Care Units (SCU) and Young people Detention Centres (CDCs). Schools at SCUs and CDCs cater for young people with severe emotional and behavioural challenges, for young people who are the subject of special care orders granted by the courts or for young people who have been convicted or placed on remand by the courts. The inspection approach used in evaluating provision in these schools is designed to address the particular circumstances in which they operate.

How to read this report

During these inspection, the inspector(s) evaluated provision under the following headings or areas of enquiry:

1. Identifying and meeting the needs of the young people
2. The leadership and management of the school

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; a response was not received from the board.

Actions of the school to safeguard children and prevent and tackle bullying

During the inspection visit, the following checks in relation to the school's child protection and anti-bullying procedures were conducted:	
<i>Child Protection</i>	<i>Anti-bullying</i>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The name of the DLP and the Child Safeguarding Statement are prominently displayed near the main entrance to the school. 2. The Child Safeguarding Statement has been ratified by the board and includes an annual review and a risk assessment. 3. All teachers visited reported that they have read the Child Safeguarding Statement and that they are aware of their responsibilities as mandated persons. 4. The Child Safeguarding Statement meets the requirements of the <i>Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools (revised 2023)</i>. 5. The records of the last three board of management meetings record a child protection oversight report that meet the requirements of the <i>Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools (revised 2023)</i>. 6. The board of management has ensured that arrangements are in place to provide information to all school personnel on the 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The school has developed an anti-bullying policy that meets the requirements of the <i>Anti-Bullying Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools (2013)</i> and this policy is reviewed annually. 2. The board of management minutes record that the principal provides a report to the board at least once a term on the overall number of bullying cases reported (by means of the bullying recording template provided in the <i>Procedures</i>) since the previous report to the board. 3. The school's anti-bullying policy is published on its website and/or is readily accessible to board of management members, teachers, parents and pupils. 4. The school has appropriate initiatives in place to promote a positive and inclusive school culture and environment. 5. All teachers visited report that they have read the school's policy on anti-bullying and that they are aware of their roles and responsibilities in preventing and tackling bullying.

<p><i>Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools (revised 2023).</i></p> <p>7. School planning documentation indicates that the school is making full provision for the relevant aspects of the curriculum (SPHE, Stay Safe, RSE).</p> <p>8. Child protection records are maintained in a secure location.</p>	
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The school met the requirements in relation to each of the checks above.

Evaluation of schools attached to special care units and children detention centres

Date of inspection	13/12/2023
Inspection activities undertaken <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Discussion with principal and teachers• Meeting with management of school and residential centre• Review of relevant documents• Analysis of teacher questionnaires	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Student focus group• Observation of teaching and learning• Examination of students' work• Interaction with students• Feedback to principal and teachers

School context

Oberstown Campus School operates under the auspices of Dublin and Dún Laoghaire Education and Training Board (DDLETB). It caters for young people up to the age of eighteen and a half years old who have been remanded or sentenced to Oberstown Children Detention Campus by the courts.

At the time of the inspection, forty-six students were enrolled in the school. Students were following different curricular programmes, such as Junior Cycle or Leaving Certificate programmes. Others were working towards Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) certification. The young people attending the school live on campus in the residential setting. The staff of both the school and the residential setting work collaboratively and strive to bring about the best outcomes for the young people.

Summary of main findings and recommendations:

Findings

- The quality of the process in place to identify and meet the needs of young people was very good.
- The overall quality of teaching and learning was good. There were areas of very good practice noted, as well as aspects that needed improvement.
- Curricular provision was highly effective and every effort was made to develop curricular and learning opportunities to meet the needs of the young people.
- The quality of supports for ensuring the wellbeing of the young people was highly effective, and the positive approach of staff to promoting meaningful student voice was very good.
- The quality of leadership and management of the school was very good, and there were significant strengths in the cooperation between the residential setting and the school.

Recommendations

- Teachers should plan lessons to meet the individual needs of learners by utilising fully the information in the young peoples' individual learning support plans in collaboration with the Special Education Needs (SEN) department.
- Lessons would benefit from all teachers setting out clear learning intentions at the start and using well thought out teaching approaches to maximise student interest, motivation and progression in learning.
- The DDLETB should seek to fill the vacant post for Guidance teaching hours and should seek to expedite all recruitment processes associated with the school, to ensure that school has a full complement of teaching staff to support the needs of the students.

Detailed findings and recommendations

1. Identifying and meeting the needs of young people

The practices in the school of identifying and meeting the needs of young people were highly effective

Meeting learner needs through effective learner experiences and appropriate learning programmes

- The school was deeply committed to providing an appropriate curriculum to meet the learners' needs, and over the last few years the principal with the support of the board has progressed significant changes and positive developments in the curriculum.
- Students followed learning pathways appropriate to their needs. Some took modules leading to QQI certification, while others prepared for Junior Cycle and Leaving Certificate, in order to pursue the State Examinations.
- A significant strength of the school was its adaptive approach to curricular planning to meet the evolving needs of the students. The school provided flexibility within the curriculum to meet the learners' needs.
- The introduction of horticulture as a subject in the school to match the availability of work experience in the campus' polytunnels was an example of excellent practice. This met the learners' needs in a most practical way that enhanced their theoretical and practical knowledge and skills.
- The school was deeply committed to developing suitable education pathways tailored to individual needs and interests. To enhance work experience possibilities on the campus, a mobile café unit was acquired and some learners availed of barrista training. The school sought the possibility of providing work experience in the canteen on site to link with the study of home economics and life skills in order to meet learners' needs.
- The learner experiences on offer were highly effective and students spoke with pride of their possibilities of work experience on site as providing them with good possibilities of entering the world of work and of gaining valuable life skills.

Promoting learner wellbeing

- There were very highly effective practices noted in relation to the promotion of learner wellbeing. The school has recently developed a dedicated wellbeing room. Learners experienced significant support in this space to enable them to self-regulate and manage their behaviour in a supportive environment. This provided learners with skills to manage emotions and strategies to cope with their individual context.
- The promotion of creative arts has provided significant support to learner wellbeing. In the past year an artist attended the school and worked on projects with students. Other external collaborators worked with the school on writing workshops e.g. *Fighting Words* and the students have engaged very well with these projects.
- Some students have collaborated to achieve the *Yellow Flag* award and this has led to an enhanced understanding of inclusion and diversity among the students, which in turn has promoted a sense of wellbeing.

Identifying and meeting needs of learners with special educational needs

- There were highly effective practices in place to build a clear profile of learners upon their entry into the school. The principal met each student individually outside of the school setting to discuss their educational pathways and how the school would support them on their chosen pathways. This was highly commendable practice and gave the young people clear indications of how much support they would get in their education and also set high expectations for them at the critical point of entry to the school.

- Thereafter great attention was paid to gather as much data as possible about the learners' previous educational experience, about their interests and aptitudes, and also areas where they may need additional support.
- The systems in place to gather important information about the learners had significant strengths. These systems involved many members of staff collaborating effectively and combining critical information about the learners to establish their needs.
- The induction booklet for new entrants, the Wide Range Achievement Test (WRAT) 5 tests and subject assessment templates were all used to very good effect in the collaborative process of building learner profiles. The school is commended for putting in place systems and structures that enabled teachers to really get to know the learners' education and wellbeing needs.
- The special educational needs department has developed comprehensive individual learning support plans (ILSPs) for students. Currently not all teachers use these plans to inform their teaching, therefore it is timely now for all staff to consider how best the information from these plans can be used to maximum effect in lesson. There was scope for some teachers to become more familiar with these plans and how the information in them could be utilised in lessons in their subject areas.
- Learners would benefit greatly if all teachers used the information in the ILSPs in their planning for teaching. It is suggested that the SEN department and all teachers collaborate on how best to support this process going forward. In order to meet learners' needs and to enhance professional learning, consideration should be given to team teaching as opposed to individual one to one lessons delivered by the SEN department.

Meeting learner needs through effective teaching, learning and assessment

The overall quality of teaching and learning was good.

- Due to operational reasons class groups are formed on the basis of the young people's residential arrangements. Therefore students who were following different programmes were grouped together in lessons. This context required individualised planning on the part of teachers, as not all learners in the one class group were following the same programme.
- To meet the challenge of mixed groups, a new approach to planning for delivery of lessons was developed, and teachers were encouraged to use a common planning template. A number of teachers were already using this very successfully. It is suggested that all teachers use this very supportive planning tool which assists teachers in planning for the individual learners' needs and to use differentiated methodologies in the lessons. This will lead to a more cohesive whole-school approach which should work well for the learners and teachers alike.
- In all lessons visited a very positive classroom climate was established with a strong sense of mutual respect between teachers and young people. Students were affirmed in a supportive manner to persevere with tasks, and teachers are commended for their very constructive and positive approaches.
- In a significant minority of lessons, where practice was highly effective, meaningful differentiation was noted. In these lessons learning intentions were appropriately differentiated to meet the needs of the students, to facilitate them to work with purpose and to acquire the skills and understanding. In lessons where students had quite different needs, teachers had prepared worksheets which guided individual student learning. These worksheets contained a mixture of tasks which were carefully designed to scaffold incremental learning.
- There was a strong emphasis on developing learners' literacy skills in the majority of lessons. Good attention was paid to subject specific vocabulary and the development of comprehension skills.
- Literacy and numeracy policies have been developed. It would be very useful to include the definitions of literacy and numeracy used in the *Framework for Junior Cycle 2015* in these policies. The rationale for using these definitions is to provide a broader and more

comprehensive framework for developing these key skills among young people than exists in the current policy. While there was some evidence of cross-curricular planning in relation to literacy, cross-curricular planning in relation to numeracy remains an area for development.

- In a significant minority of lessons there was a greater need for advance individualised planning, underpinned by clear learning intentions and well thought out pedagogical approaches to maximise student interest, motivation and progression in learning.
- In most lessons, teachers used the print rich environment to reinforce the core learning for the lesson and to familiarise students with the key language terms which were necessary to fully understand the subject matter of the lesson. Visual reinforcement of the area of learning complemented the tasks that were set for the lesson.
- In less than half of the lessons, the use of ongoing formative assessment led students to being challenged in their learning, and therefore they made good progress. In the best lessons students were supported to reflect on their learning, make judgements around how to progress. This practice supported the development of the key skills of being creative, critical thinking, managing information and reflection on learning.
- In a few lessons where there was scope for development, a more effective balance between teacher and student input was needed, particularly in relation to how questions were framed. There was also an overuse of lower order questions requiring limited answers. In highly effective lessons, good strategies associated with assessment for learning were used, these included wait time or prompt sheets to give young people time and full opportunity to demonstrate their learning.

2. The leadership and management of the school

Highly committed leadership and staff

The quality of leadership and management was very good.

- The chair of the board of management, the principal of the school and the director of the residential setting all shared a common vision which was student centred and focussed on achieving the best possible educational outcomes for the young people.
- The governance of the school is very good. The board of management provides very good oversight and all necessary policies are in place. In the course of interaction with inspectors, the chair of the board articulated a very clear vision for the school and the important role that education pathways provided by the school play in the lives of the students.
- The board was very supportive of the principal and it was impressive that members of the board meet with students and attend many events at the school. Their interest and commitment to the school was very strong.
- The leadership of the principal was highly effective, and was underpinned by a very clear vision for excellence in wellbeing and educational outcomes for the learners. The principal had very clear strategic priorities in relation to developing curriculum, staff capacity, student voice and learner wellbeing and put excellent systems and structures in place to realise these priorities. All systems and structures were highly student centred and all decisions were driven by what is best for the students. The principal communicated a commitment to provide the students with a high quality education that will provide them with a clear pathway to further education as well as necessary lifeskills.
- The principal has fostered very positive relationships with students and staff alike and was very supportive to staff working in the school and working on the after-school

programme. Through fostering strong relationships with key stakeholders, the principal has achieved a significant programme of change management over the last number of years and this was impacting very positively on students and staff.

- In the course of the evaluation, students spoke very highly of the principal's approach. It was clear that the young people feel listened to and valued in the school. Some learners described the experiences of being able to learn and to achieve success in education as being new to them. Students emphasised that the experience of having high expectations set for them was highly motivating.
- Leadership capacity has been built in a very effective manner by the principal. Teachers assumed leadership responsibilities in different areas of school life. Most recently two new Assistant Principal posts were filled and a middle management structure was being created in the school. Staff were provided with training in their areas of responsibility.
- Staff deployment is very good. However, at the time of the evaluation the role of Deputy Principal had not been filled. The school received an allocation for the provision of eleven hours of Guidance in the course of the previous academic year. At the time of the evaluation this post had not yet been advertised.
- It is essential that recruitment and appointment of staff is done as quickly as possible and that posts do not remain vacant. This has the potential to impact on existing staff and students. The DDLETB should expedite the deployment of the Guidance resource as soon as possible, as the young people in Oberstown need the associated professional input in this critical area to assist in planning transitions and supporting their education pathways.

Ongoing professional development

- The principal was deeply committed to availing of Professional Learning both at leadership level and for all staff. An effective system was put in place in the school which enabled teachers to share their professional practice and exchange ideas of pedagogical strategies that work.
- The principal proactively engaged with relevant Professional Learning in areas of critical student behaviour management. Staff who have been appointed to middle leadership and specialist roles also availed of relevant. Teachers demonstrated a truly professional approach in their commitment to the culture of ongoing learning in the school.

Listening to learners

- The culture of promoting positive relationships in the school provided a very firm basis for giving young people a voice in the educational matters that relate to them.
- Student voice was promoted through the establishment of the student council. The student council were engaged in a variety of initiatives including fundraising. Through different subjects, students made different artefacts and sold them at different school events.

School Self Evaluation

- The quality of school self evaluation was very good. This was led by the principal, and at the time of the evaluation it had just become part of the duties allocated to a newly-appointed post holder. The school self-evaluation processes were working very effectively in the school. Very significant changes have been brought about at a number of levels which have led to important developments. These changes include developing leadership capacity, broadening the curriculum, providing work experience

opportunities on campus for young people, facilitating a comprehensive summer programme and strengthening the student voice.

- The hallmarks of effective SSE were evident, such as clear specific targets linked to the school's priorities, good communication, highly effective collaboration among staff, with students and all stakeholders.

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 quality of the school's provision of each area.

Level	Description	Example of descriptive terms
Very Good	<i>Very good</i> 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 <i>outstanding</i> 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	<i>Good</i> 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 students' 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 <i>very good</i> standard.	Good; good quality; valuable; effective practice; competent; useful; commendable; good standard; some areas for improvement
Satisfactory	<i>Satisfactory</i> applies where the quality of provision is adequate. 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	<i>Fair</i> 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 students' learning; less than satisfactory; experiencing difficulty; must improve in specified areas; action required to improve
Weak	<i>Weak</i> 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;