Subject Inspection in Special Educational Needs (SEN)

REPORT

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<tr>
<th>Ainm na scoile / School name</th>
<th>Mount Mercy College</th>
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<tr>
<td>Seoladh na scoile / School address</td>
<td>Model Farm Road Cork</td>
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<tr>
<td>Uimhir rolla / Roll number</td>
<td>62661U</td>
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Date of Inspection: 26-01-2017
WHAT IS A SUBJECT INSPECTION?
Subject Inspections report on the quality of work in individual curriculum areas within a school. They affirm good practice and make recommendations, where appropriate, to aid the further development of the subject in the school.

HOW TO READ THIS REPORT
During this inspection, the inspector evaluated learning and teaching in Special Educational Needs (SEN) under the following headings:

1. Learning, teaching and assessment
2. Subject provision and whole-school support
3. Planning and preparation

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.
Subject Inspection

INSPECTION ACTIVITIES DURING THIS INSPECTION

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Dates of inspection</th>
<th>25 &amp; 26-01-2017</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inspection activities undertaken</td>
<td>Observation of teaching and learning during seven class periods</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Review of relevant documents</td>
<td>• Examination of students’ work</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Discussion with principal and key staff</td>
<td>• Feedback to principal and relevant staff</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Interaction with students</td>
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SCHOOL CONTEXT

Mount Mercy College is an all-girls post-primary school, situated in Cork city. The school is under the trusteeship of Catholic Education: an Irish Schools’ Trust (CEIST). The school offers the Junior Certificate, the Leaving Certificate and an optional Transition Year (TY) programme. The current student enrolment is 832. The school has a significant allocation of additional teaching hours to support students with special educational needs.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

FINDINGS

- Overall, teaching was good with some examples of very good practice.
- In a majority of lessons, differentiation to include all students in their learning was evident.
- Purposeful independent and collaborative tasks, when used in lessons, facilitated students to be more engaged in their learning.
- Overall provision for students with SEN is good, due in particular to the excellent work of the co-ordinator and the motivation of the core team.
- There is scope for the development of provision for some students with SEN who take a reduced number of subjects.
- Planning and preparation at SEN department level is very good.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Teachers should ensure that all students are included in their learning through developing and embedding differentiated approaches into practice.
- Purposeful independent and collaborative tasks should be planned for and facilitated in lessons to engage students in their learning.
- Planning should take place to ensure that students with SEN who take a reduced number of subjects are engaged in structured learning environments, therefore optimising their time in school; these lessons should be included in the timetable at the time of its construction.
- Building capacity amongst subject teachers should be prioritised through providing focused whole-school and individual continuous professional development (CPD) to support inclusive classroom practices.
DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. TEACHING AND LEARNING

- Overall, teaching was good with some examples of very good practice. In support lessons, very effective practice included: student-centred lesson content which was based on student reflection; use of real-life contexts and examples; teacher modelling, and very good individual support of student tasks and learning.

- Lessons observed were formed on the basis of whole-class, and small and individual withdrawal class groups. Curricular areas in these lessons included English, Mathematics, Social Personal and Health Education (SPHE), History, and lessons which focused on the development of literacy and numeracy.

- In all lessons, students were very quiet and well-behaved. In a few lessons, differentiation to include all students in their learning was not evident. In these lessons, teacher-voice and teacher-led learning were strong features. This resulted in students being passive in their learning. Teachers should ensure that all students are included in their learning through developing and embedding differentiated approaches into practice. The SEN core team could be a valuable resource in leading the development of this practice in the school.

- Where students were provided with opportunities for purposeful independent and collaborative activities, they were more actively engaged in their learning. These activities supported students’ curricular needs and promoted the development of skills. It is recommended that opportunities for independent and collaborative tasks should be planned for and facilitated in lessons, to engage students in their learning.

- In almost all lessons, a very good standard of preparation for teaching was evident. Teacher-generated worksheets, stories, templates, flashcards and good quality visuals were used to aid student learning.

- Very good classroom structures to support learning and very positive teacher-student relationships were evident. Also, respectful student interactions with each other were observed.

- In almost all lessons, very good reinforcement of student learning took place. Where this was most effective, students were engaged through fun and motivating tasks, and through the recall of prior learning, to consolidate their learning. This reflects excellent practice.

- In all lessons, questioning was used to encourage students to participate and to assess learning. It was recommended, in a small number of lessons that students should self-assess. In all support lessons observed, students assessed their own learning through the very good use of a self-reflection sheet. Students recorded what they learned and reflected on their future learning needs. This was then used to inform future lessons. This is an excellent strategy to encourage self-directed learning and to give students ownership of their learning. Consideration should be given as to how this strategy could be applied at a whole-school level.
2. SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- Overall provision for students with SEN is good. This is due in particular to the commitment and experience of the co-ordinator, and the motivation of the newly established core team. Senior management are supportive of the work undertaken by the team in supporting students with SEN.

- The school has an allocation of 2.5 special needs assistants (SNAs) whose work is noted in this report.

- Students with identified SEN are supported through a model of withdrawal for small group or individual support. This support is delivered mainly by the core team of teachers and depending on the needs of students, by some subject teachers. Continuity of support for students is planned for, which is very good practice.

- Students have access to all subjects, levels and programmes. Classes are organised in mixed-ability groupings in nearly all cases. A small number of smaller Mathematics and English classes have been created, to support the identified curricular needs of some students. Teachers demonstrated high-expectations of their students, which is very positive.

- Timetabling of lessons to support students with SEN occurs at the beginning of the academic school year and after the construction of the overall timetable. This results in some students with SEN and who take a reduced number of subjects, spending time in unstructured activities in lessons in which they do not participate, and/or in subjects from which they have an official exemption. This should be avoided. Planning to ensure students are engaged in structured learning environments should now take place in advance of the construction of the timetable. This will optimise the value of the instruction time for these students. These lessons should be included in the overall timetable at the time of its construction, thus ensuring quality learning experiences for all students with SEN.

- Some whole-school and individual CPD events for SEN have been undertaken. It is very positive that two newly-appointed members of the SEN core team are interested in pursuing additional qualifications in special education. It is recommended that building capacity amongst subject teachers should also be prioritised through providing focused whole-school and individual CPD to support inclusive classroom practices. Accessing the services provided by the Inclusion Support Service (ISS) could aid the school in this.

3. PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- Planning and preparation at SEN department level is very good. This is guided by the dedication and excellent work of the co-ordinator, who has established some very good structures to plan and organise SEN provision in the school.

- Very good systems of gathering information on in-coming students are established practice. Planning for transition programmes and for the development of support plans for students with SEN include: visiting feeder primary schools; communicating with parents and other relevant personnel from external agencies, and formal and informal assessment of students’ strength and needs.

- The core team, the guidance counsellor and the principal or deputy principal, meet weekly. The meeting agenda is informed by the SEN co-ordinator through gathering information from an “electronic daily diary” to which the core team contributes. The meeting is action-based and focused on the progress and needs of the students. This is very good and informs short-term planning and practice.
• The co-ordinator provides good generic information and useful strategies on SEN to teachers. Whole-school procedures are in place to identify students’ emerging needs, which include formal teacher referral forms and communication with year heads and parents. This is very good practice.

• The co-ordinator and guidance counsellor compile records of relevant information on all incoming students. The information is discussed verbally with staff in September. Relevant information to be shared on students with SEN is discussed and agreed on with students’ parents before being made available for staff to access in the staff room, through coded records. Other information is shared throughout the year, as necessary. It is very positive that the school has developed a system whereby this information will be shared through the school’s intranet. This will facilitate access for all teachers, which should be used to inform their individual planning to purposefully include students with SEN in their subject areas.

• Individual student learning and support plans are developed for students. These plans are reviewed bi-annually by the SEN team. The review is informed by students’ subject teachers and by a very good system of tracking progress. The continuum of support guides future plans to meet the needs of students. This is very good work.

The draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation were discussed with the principal, deputy principal, co-ordinator and core SEN team at the conclusion of the evaluation. The board of management of the school was given an opportunity to comment on the findings and recommendations of the report; the board chose to accept the report without response.
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 the school’s provision of each area.

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<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Example of descriptive terms</th>
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<tr>
<td>Very Good</td>
<td><strong>Very good</strong> 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 <strong>outstanding</strong> and provides an example for other schools of exceptionally high standards of provision.</td>
<td>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</td>
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<td>Good</td>
<td><strong>Good</strong> 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 <strong>very good</strong> standard.</td>
<td>Good; good quality; valuable; effective practice; competent; useful; commendable; good standard; some areas for improvement</td>
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<td>Satisfactory</td>
<td><strong>Satisfactory</strong> 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.</td>
<td>Satisfactory; adequate; appropriate provision although some possibilities for improvement exist; acceptable level of quality; improvement needed in some areas</td>
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<td>Fair</td>
<td><strong>Fair</strong> 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.</td>
<td>Fair; evident weaknesses that are impacting on pupils’ learning; less than satisfactory; experiencing difficulty; must improve in specified areas; action required to improve</td>
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<td>Weak</td>
<td><strong>Weak</strong> 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.</td>
<td>Weak; unsatisfactory; insufficient; ineffective; poor; requiring significant change, development or improvement; experiencing significant difficulties;</td>
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