

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**  
**Department of Education and Skills**

**Subject Inspection in Special Educational Needs (SEN)**

**REPORT**

<b>Ainm na scoile / School name</b>	Blackwater Community School
<b>Seoladh na scoile / School address</b>	Ballyanchor Road Lismore Co Waterford
<b>Uimhir rolla / Roll number</b>	91509E

**Date of Inspection: 04-05-2018**



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agus Scileanna  
Department of  
Education and Skills

## **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. Teaching, learning 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.

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.

## **CHILD PROTECTION**

During the inspection visit, the following checks in relation to the school's child protection procedures were conducted:

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.

The school met the requirements in relation to each of the checks above.

## SUBJECT INSPECTION

### INSPECTION ACTIVITIES

<b>Dates of inspection</b>	03 and 04-05-2018
<b>Inspection activities undertaken</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Review of relevant documents</li><li>• Discussion with principal and key staff</li><li>• Interaction with students</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Observation of teaching and learning during eight class periods</li><li>• Examination of students' work</li><li>• Feedback to principal and relevant staff</li></ul>

### School context

Blackwater Community School is a co-educational post-primary school in the joint trusteeship of Waterford and Wexford Educational and Training Board (WWETB), the Mercy and Presentation Sisters and the Christian Brothers. The school has a current enrolment of 768 students and offers the Junior Cycle programme, the Level 2 Learning Programme (L2LPs), an optional Transition Year (TY) programme, the Leaving Certificate, the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) and the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA). The school has an additional allocation of 195 teaching hours per week to support students with additional and special educational needs. This allocation includes two classes to support students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). The school has an allocation of 8.5 special needs assistants (SNAs) to support the care needs of some students.

### SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

#### Findings

- Overall the quality of teaching and assessment was very good; however, there was improvement needed in a small number of lessons, particularly with regard to ensuring that all students are purposefully engaged and included in lessons.
- In almost all lessons, learning outcomes for students were very good and experiences for almost all students were very positive.
- Whole-school support and provision for special educational needs (SEN) is good and whole-school structures, policy and practice support the inclusion of students; however, support for some students is fragmented across a large number of teachers.
- Very good levels of planning for students with SEN is conducted by the core SEN co-ordination team whose work is very strongly supported by senior management.
- A school provision plan is in place, but this plan does not reflect the school's entire additional teaching allocation to provide supports to students with SEN.

#### Recommendations

- Individual teachers' practice should ensure that all students are purposefully included and engaged in their learning and that student understanding of lesson topics is assessed, so that students achieve to their potential within lessons.
- Senior management should seek to identify interested teachers to add to the core teaching team in order to ensure continuity of teaching supports for all students with SEN.

- The school provision plan should record and document the manner in which the additional teaching supports are provided to students with SEN and should reflect the utilisation of the entire additional teaching allocation in accordance with Circular 14/2017.

## **DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **1. TEACHING, LEARNING, AND ASSESSMENT**

- Overall the quality of teaching and assessment was very good. However, there was improvement needed in a small number of lessons. In almost all lessons, learning outcomes for students were very good and experiences for almost all students were very positive.
- Eight lessons were observed across the year groups and class groups observed were formed on the basis of whole-class mainstream groups and small group withdrawal. Subjects included Mathematics, English, Art, Craft and Design and Literacy support.
- In almost all lessons, teachers were very well prepared for teaching. Resources were well chosen or designed and included graphic organisers and good quality visuals. Information and communications technology (ICT) was also used to very good effect.
- Teacher demonstrations and modelling of tasks to support students' learning were very good in most lessons observed. When lessons were most effective, success criteria was shared and understood by students. This effectively supported student learning and promoted student ownership of their learning.
- Scaffolding of learning for students was observed to be very effective in almost all lessons. This provided students with clear step-by-step instruction and supported successful task completion.
- Appropriate repetition and encouragement of students to make links with prior learning was used effectively to connect topics and to build on new learning. This was a key teaching strategy in the very good lessons and was observed to provide meaningful learning experiences for students, which also effectively supported students to think, to make links and to reinforce learning.
- In almost all lessons, learning outcomes for students were very good. Students for the most part were engaged in their learning and persisted with given tasks. Learning was demonstrated through task completion, application of skills and through answering and asking questions.
- Experiences for almost all students were very positive. This was achieved by students being provided with very good classroom routines and lesson structures. Experiences were enhanced for students through very positive teacher-student rapport.
- In a small number of lessons where scope for development and improvement at individual teacher level was identified, it was advised that lesson planning should focus on the priority learning needs of the students, particularly within support lessons. Teaching strategies should ensure that all students are engaged in their learning and are enabled to apply that learning on given tasks when provided. In addition, student understanding of lesson topics should be assessed. Lessons should purposefully include students with SEN in their learning and should ensure that students achieve to their potential within lessons. Collaboration with subject teachers as appropriate and with the core SEN team should aid this type of lesson planning within the support lessons.

## **2. SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT**

- Whole-school support and provision for SEN is good. Whole-school structures, policy and practice support the inclusion of students.
- The co-ordination of the provision is student-centred and informed by knowledge of the students; by communication with parents and with primary schools; and by collaboration with subject teachers and with other professionals involved with some students with SEN. The work of the co-ordinators is very good.
- Support is provided through a model of withdrawal from some subjects. The level and type of support provided is evidence-based, collaborative and informed by the continuum of support framework. A core team of teachers for planning and co-ordinating provision is established. This is very good practice. Support for some students, however, is fragmented across a large number of teachers. Senior management should seek to identify interested teachers to add to the core teaching team. Provision should be enhanced by enabling these teachers to provide the additional teaching supports to students, thereby providing continuity of supports to students. Team-teaching should be further advanced as a model of support for students within collective mainstream settings.
- Students have access to all programmes, subjects and levels. The Level 2 Learning Programmes are provided for some students. This is very positive.
- It is very good that the core SEN team of teachers have accessed qualifications in the area of SEN. Whole-school training is also a priority for senior management, who seeks to continue to develop and improve SEN provision for its students. Senior management recognises the importance of providing continuing professional development (CPD) opportunities for teachers and for special needs assistants (SNAs) both at individual and whole-school levels.
- A very good system for tracking student progress is in place at SEN department level which is informed by whole-school practices and collaboration between teachers, parents and students.
- A school provision plan is in place, however this plan does not reflect the school's entire additional teaching allocation of 195 hours per week. While the majority of the additional teaching allocation to support students with SEN is used for its intended purpose, a significant number of teaching hours are not deployed appropriately. The school provision plan should record and document the manner in which the additional teaching supports are provided to students with SEN and should reflect the utilisation of the entire additional teaching allocation in accordance with Circular 14/2017.

## **4. PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

- Very good levels of planning for students with SEN is conducted by the core SEN co-ordination team. This work is very strongly supported by senior management. This is very positive.
- Transitions in and out of school are very well planned for and supported through visits to primary schools, communications with parents and with others as appropriate. Open days, induction days and individual transition programmes for students are organised to support students. Transitions to further education, training programmes and supported work-placements are well assisted by school structures and through working with local outside school agencies, with parents, with businesses and with the students themselves. This is an excellent support for students.

- There are very high levels of collaboration between the support team and subject teachers. This positively supports students. Relevant information on individual students is gathered and collated. Relevant information is shared with teachers and review of student progress takes place and informs further individual learning plans.
- Student support files are in place for students identified with SEN. It is very positive that these files are used to good effect and are working documents. Learning plans are being developed. These plans should include specific, measurable, attainable, realistic and time-bound (SMART) targets to progress student learning.

The draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation were discussed with the principal, a deputy principal and members of the SEN co-ordination team at the conclusion of the evaluation.

## 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
<b>Very Good</b>	<b>Very good</b> 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 <b>outstanding</b> 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
<b>Good</b>	<b>Good</b> 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 <i>very good</i> standard.	Good; good quality; valuable; effective practice; competent; useful; commendable; good standard; some areas for improvement
<b>Satisfactory</b>	<b>Satisfactory</b> 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
<b>Fair</b>	<b>Fair</b> 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
<b>Weak</b>	<b>Weak</b> 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;