Subject Inspection of
Special Educational Needs Provision
REPORT

St Laurence College
Loughlinstown, Dublin 18
Roll number: 60262T

Date of inspection: 18 October 2011
REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN
SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS PROVISION

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

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<th>Dates of inspection</th>
<th>17 and 18 October 2011</th>
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<td><strong>Inspection activities undertaken</strong></td>
<td><strong>• Observation of teaching and learning during nine class periods</strong></td>
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<td>• Review of relevant documents</td>
<td>• Examination of students’ work</td>
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<td>• Discussion with principal, teachers and special needs assistants (SNAs)</td>
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MAIN FINDINGS

• The overall quality of teaching and learning was good and lessons were structured and purposeful.

• Effective support is provided through individual, small group and team teaching.

• The school has adopted a range of inclusive practices.

• The school has engaged successfully with an individual planning process.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

• Management should ensure that the utilisation of the resource teaching and learning support allocations is always responsive to the individual needs of the students for whom they have been allocated and clearly documented.

• It is recommended that the school’s special educational needs policy be advanced to expound the principles of inclusion and provide guidance for future development and practice.

• The school should develop a whole-school literacy policy to guide the future development of literacy-centred practices and to inform the DEIS (Delivering Quality of Opportunity in Schools) action plan.
INTRODUCTION
St Laurence College is a mixed, voluntary secondary school under the auspices of The Marianists. The school participates in the DEIS initiative. Present enrolment includes students with an array of special educational needs (SEN) including general and specific learning disabilities, emotional and behavioural difficulties, physical disabilities and autism.

TEACHING AND LEARNING
• The overall quality of teaching and learning was good in the nine lessons observed.

• The predominant teaching methodology was direct instruction with skills being taught explicitly. Visual images and active learning were used to good effect in some lessons. Instructions were given clearly and good use was made of repetition and direct questioning.

• Learning support classes in literacy, numeracy and subject support are provided for students with Irish exemptions. Support is also given in the development of self-management, organisation, and social skills.

• To maximise its use as a method of support in mainstream lessons, team teaching should be extended and developed to ensure teachers work collaboratively to plan, co-teach and evaluate learning.

• Positive interactions between students and teachers were evident. Teachers were cognisant of individual students’ abilities and needs, and consistently affirmed the efforts of their students. Students were co-operative, engaged in learning and appreciative of the support given. They were active in their own learning and their input was sought and valued.

• The school has engaged in various literacy initiatives and some students receive literacy intervention through a National Behaviour Support Service programme. In the support classes, reading skills were developed using guided reading techniques.

• Standardised measurements of reading and cognitive ability are used to assess enrolling students. This data along with information from feeder schools should be used to establish groups for targeted literacy interventions. Low-scoring students should be further assessed on diagnostic instruments to inform this planning. The school is advised to only use standardised reading tests that are age-appropriate and to record and monitor reading progress using percentile scores rather than reading ages which are liable to misinterpretation.

• Plans are in place to re-assess the literacy skills of first to fifth year students. This evolving good practice will contribute to the school’s efforts to monitor progress and evaluate interventions.

• Student progress is tracked through observation and successful task completion and reported to parents through meetings and journal comments. Assessment and progress records are kept by the co-ordinator. Support teachers file weekly records of work completed. These records should inform the measurement of outcomes.
Applications for reasonable accommodations in State examinations are made on behalf of eligible students and the school endeavours to provide these accommodations during school exams.

**SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT**

- The school engages in a number of inclusive practices including enrolment procedures, mixed-ability classes and the promotion of differentiation. All students are offered a full and balanced curriculum. Consecutive timetabling in core subjects facilitates mobility and access to support classes.

- The school has established effective information-gathering practices to support the entry of new students. Knowledge of incoming students could be enhanced through the collection and analysis of the results of the standardised tests administered in the feeder schools.

- Most support teaching is delivered by a core team of special education teachers. This is good practice. The SEN co-ordinator has the significant role of overseeing the organisation and monitoring of the provision and is ably supported by the team. It is recommended that this team be facilitated to meet on a more regular basis to assist collaboration, planning and evaluation.

- The school receives a significant allocation of support teaching hours. It was unclear how all of these hours were used. Utilisation should be clearly documented to verify that they are used for their intended purpose. The co-ordinator should be consulted to ensure that all known hours are factored in when the timetable is constructed.

- Four qualified SNAs are assigned to meet the care needs of specific students. They are flexibly deployed and welcomed in classrooms. SNAs should collaborate with class teachers regarding the support of students and their access to the curriculum. Regular formal meetings with the co-ordinator should be re-established.

- Most support classes take place in two well-equipped specialist classrooms. A range of resources is available to augment teaching and learning including suitable reading material and workbooks.

**PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

- The draft SEN policy requires further development. It is recommended that it be advanced to outline the school’s principles of inclusion. It should function as a guide for future development and practice, and should detail designated roles and responsibilities.

- The school does not have a whole-school literacy policy. It is recommended that one be created setting out the purpose and rationale for current and planned practices including the identification of student needs, interventions and measuring outcomes. This policy and the school’s DEIS literacy action plan should be developed in parallel.

- The school has engaged successfully with an individual planning process led by the co-ordinator. The individual plans are accessible to staff to guide their lesson planning. The current planning format appears sufficient for the needs of the present cohort of students, but the school is advised that more detailed planning will be necessary for students who
present with more complex needs. The school is also advised to consider how the involvement of parents and students themselves can be further developed in the process.

- Pertinent information is disseminated to mainstream staff to inform planning. Findings and recommendations from psychological reports are summarised and accessible to all staff. Staff has participated in some relevant professional development activities with the support of the school. Management should conduct an audit to ascertain staff professional developments needs in providing inclusive instruction.

- Planning in support classes is based on pre-teaching and re-teaching mainstream work, and responding to the needs voiced by students and the targets set out in their individual learning plans. There is a focus on the development of literacy and numeracy skills and supporting the English and mathematics curricula. Support teachers use a variety of means to prepare individual and group lesson plans. The development and use of a common template would improve the quality of planning in this area.

The draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation were discussed with the principal, deputy principal and subject teachers at the conclusion of the evaluation.

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