An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection of Special Educational Needs
REPORT

Presentation College
Askea, Carlow, County Carlow
Roll number: 61141M

Date of inspection: 5 October 2011
REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

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MAIN FINDINGS

• The overall quality of teaching and learning in the seven lessons observed was good.

• The school engages in a wide range of inclusive practices but established inclusive enrolment procedures are contradicted by sections of the admission policy.

• The school has a dedicated special educational needs (SEN) support team which meets weekly to oversee the provision for students with SEN and provide support for teachers.

• All students with diagnosed disabilities receive support teaching but the utilisation of allocated resource hours is not clearly documented.

• There are too many teachers involved in resource teaching and current timetabling practices can have unhelpful effects on students with additional needs.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

• The board of management should review the admission policy to ensure that it better reflects the school’s inclusive practices and is not in contradiction with the spirit of the Education Act, 1998.

• Timetabling practices need to be revised as do the procedures for teacher deployment and the scheduling of support classes.

• The utilisation of resource hours should be clearly recorded to confirm that they are being used for their intended purpose.

• The school should conduct annual assessments of student literacy skills and use the baseline data to track student progress and inform the planning of a whole-school policy on literacy development.
INTRODUCTION

Presentation College is a coeducational secondary school under the trusteeship of Catholic Education, an Irish Schools Trust (CEIST). The school caters for a wide range of students of all abilities from a variety of social, economic and cultural backgrounds. The school is experiencing an increase in enrolment numbers.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- Seven lessons, including learning support and mainstream classes and small withdrawal groups were observed. The overall quality of teaching and learning in these lessons was good. Teachers were professional in their work and focussed on students’ needs.

- An appropriate level of individual support was provided by teachers who effortlessly circulated to promote engagement and monitor progress. Suitable level work was set and teacher expectations were high. Subject-specific vocabulary was clearly introduced and there was good clarification and repetition of instructions.

- Some classes effectively employed group or pair work to support peer learning. Key words and graphic organisers were used to great effect in some lessons. Two lessons began with the good practice of sharing lesson objectives with the students. These instances of good practice should be implemented in all classrooms.

- Students were well behaved and responded positively to the support provided.

- Student progress was evaluated through teacher-observation; good questioning techniques, regular homework and periodic formal assessment. In every lesson homework was checked and date stamped. Teachers should increase the amount of formative feedback.

- The school should consider providing reasonable accommodations to students in ‘mock’ examinations even on a limited basis.

- There is no whole-school literacy assessment practice. It is recommended that all incoming students be assessed in reading to facilitate the planning of literacy interventions. Diagnostic tests should be administered to students who are at risk of failure and all students should be monitored and re-assessed to measure progress.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- Good practice was seen in the information-gathering process for enrolling students which includes accessing the results of primary-administered standardised tests. Additional testing on entry uses school-designed tests plus a measure of general cognitive ability. This information should facilitate the establishment of a baseline to help assess future achievement.

- The school’s admission policy proclaims the board’s support for the principles of inclusiveness and equality of access and participation. However, one section is not in the spirit of inclusion promoted in legislation. This section should be revised.
• The school creates a class for students of higher ability. It is recommended that this practice be reviewed in order to allow reconsideration of the rationale for this class and whether it is the best way to serve the needs of all students.

• The SEN policy was identified for review during the 2009 whole-school evaluation. This review should now be prioritised with consideration given to conceiving it as a whole-school policy on inclusion with reference to provision for all students with additional needs.

• The college did not have a policy or practices in place to identify and support students who are gifted and talented. Nonetheless, this has been identified as an area for development by the guidance and special needs departments and this is to be applauded.

• Current timetabling practices result in a range of unconstructive consequences for students with additional needs affecting subject choice, support-class size, and the provision for students for whom English is an additional language. Also, the number of support teachers militates against effective collaboration, planning and professional development. All of these issues need to be addressed through a revision of the timetabling process.

• Timetabling of allocated resource and learning support hours should be done in tandem with the construction of the main timetable and in consultation with the SEN team to ensure structure and cohesiveness. Use of the allocated hours should be clearly documented as evidence that they are responsive to the individual needs of the students for whom they have been allocated and are being used for their intended purpose, and to ensure that the students with the most significant needs are supported by teachers with appropriate expertise and experience.

• The college is advised to develop a whole-school literacy policy to strategically target students for intervention. The members of the SEN team with their colleagues should review current practices and initiate the development of an action plan to promote the development of literacy skills for all students across the curriculum.

• Significant efforts are made to share pertinent information on students across the school. The SEN team provides overviews and recommendations for each student. Additional information to support planning, and teaching and learning is available in the staff room.

• Two fulltime, qualified special needs assistants (SNAs) are deployed to meet the care needs of specific students. They are effective in helping their students access the curriculum and in promoting their independence.

• Staff have experienced a range of relevant professional development areas from the support agencies. The school should consider conducting an audit of staff professional development needs especially in relation to engaging in inclusive teaching practices and differentiated instruction.
PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- The quality of lesson planning was variable. Good planning was responsive to individual student needs and supportive of mainstream class work.

- Learning support class planning requires further development. Teachers are advised to agree a common planning template which focuses on learning objectives and recording outcomes as well as noting content and learning activities.

- The school has begun to engage in an individual education planning process but this requires further refinement. The school is advised to prioritise individual planning for students with more complex needs and to involve mainstream teachers, parents and students where possible.

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

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