

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection of Special Educational Needs
REPORT

Ó Fiaich College
Dundalk, County Louth
Roll number: 71770D

Date of inspection: 7 February 2012



A N R O I N N | D E P A R T M E N T O F
O I D E A C H A I S | E D U C A T I O N
A G U S S C I L E A N N A | A N D S K I L L S

**REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL
NEEDS**

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

Dates of inspection	7 and 8 February 2012
Inspection activities undertaken <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review of relevant documents• Discussion with principal and teachers• Discussion with special needs assistants• Interaction with students	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Observation of teaching and learning during 8 class periods• Examination of students' work• Feedback to principal and teachers

MAIN FINDINGS

- The quality of teaching and learning in all observed lessons ranged from good to very good.
- The school has evolved a flexible range of responses to meet the diversity of students' needs and abilities.
- Students have access to a full and balanced curriculum.
- The school is open and inclusive in its policies and practices.
- Senior management is supportive of the special educational needs (SEN) team and is committed to maintaining an inclusive school providing an appropriate education for all students.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- When reviewed, information on the role of the board of management, principal, deputy principal and year heads in relation to SEN provision should be included in the SEN policy document.
- It is recommended that more detailed individual education and behaviour plans be created and maintained, in consultation with teachers, students and parents, for mainstreamed students with complex needs.
- It is recommended that more detailed and regular records of support teachers' planning, delivery, and students' progress be made available to the SEN co-ordinator.
- It is recommended that the school utilise the data acquired from student assessment on entry as baseline data to plot improvement in attainment across all subjects.

INTRODUCTION

Ó Fiaich College operates under the management of County Louth Vocational Education Committee (VEC) and comprises a post-primary college and an Institute of Further Education that provides Post Leaving Certificate (PLC) courses. The second level school has a current enrolment of 355 students. The school participates in the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) action plan for educational inclusion. The school offers the full range of programmes which includes the option of Transition Year (TY) for some students.

TEACHING AND LEARNING.

- The quality of teaching and learning in the eight observed lessons ranged from good to very good. The lessons visited reflected the different models of provision available in the school. Both senior and junior classes were visited, featuring instruction in literacy and numeracy skills, and a range of subject disciplines including English, Mathematics, Irish and Technical Graphics.
- Two models of co-operative teaching were observed in mainstream classes. In one, a subject teacher led the instruction while a resource teacher provided individual support and behaviour management. In the second, two qualified subject teachers taught in tandem. The two teachers collaborated in both planning and delivering the lesson. Students benefited from increased individualised support. The school is encouraged to create opportunities for those involved in team-teaching to share their experiences with colleagues.
- Lessons typically featured strong links with prior learning. Teachers began lessons by sharing learning outcomes. Effective differentiated questioning techniques were practised by teachers, which kept all students involved and learning. Judicious use of ‘wait time’ was observed in all cases and particularly when higher-order questions were opened up to the class.
- A common feature in all lessons was the use of key words and key concepts which were placed on or near the board from the start of the lesson. This helped frame and scaffold the learning.
- Teachers were caring, patient and supportive of students in both their words and actions. There was good use of praise, with students’ efforts consistently affirmed. Teachers’ knowledge of individual students’ needs and abilities resulted in the creation of positive learning environments.
- Students were well behaved and respectful at all times towards staff. They were appreciative of the help and support provided.
- The school has developed a whole-school policy on literacy. This policy supports the literacy targets in the school’s DEIS Action Plan in its promotion of literacy developments in all mainstream classes. Practice observed during some classroom visits indicates a need for teacher support and training for direct and explicit instruction on word attack and spelling techniques.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- The school has evolved efficient and effective procedures for gathering information about incoming students. The results of the school’s entry assessment, along with parent

interviews, psychological and other professional reports, and the views of the feeder schools are used to place students in appropriate classes and to identify students requiring additional support. It is recommended that the school utilise the data acquired from student assessment on entry to target and inform whole-school policy on advancing educational attainment in all subject disciplines.

- All students have access to a broad and balanced curriculum. Students who would benefit from the support of the Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP) are identified on entering first year. The number of JCSP students in each of the classes of the three junior cycle years is small. These students take a reduced curriculum and additional time is provided for support in English and Mathematics.
- Senior cycle students with SEN receive support through co-operative teaching, withdrawal and special needs assistants (SNAs).
- The school SEN support team consists of the co-ordinator and eight other resource teachers. Two members of the team hold recognised qualifications in special education. This team meets formally once a term. It is suggested that more frequent working meetings be scheduled for the SEN support team to facilitate the collaboration that is required for the planning, organising and monitoring of provision. An agenda for each meeting should issue and minutes of meetings should be copied to the management.
- Five fulltime, qualified special needs assistants are deployed to meet the care needs of a range of students in mainstream classes in accordance with Department guidelines. Collaborative working relationships are maintained between SNAs, teaching staff and management.
- The school has a SEN policy which provides a good outline of the organisation of the provision and procedures for selection for support. It is recommended that the role and responsibilities of the board of management, senior management and year heads in SEN provision be added.
- Standardised norm-referenced tests are administered to all students on entry. This information should be used as baseline data to plot improvement in attainment across all subjects.
- Considerable investment has been made in Information and Communications Technology (ICT) and the SEN department uses netbooks to promote literacy and numeracy. Very good use of the college server as a platform whereby teachers can access universal folders containing subject-specific and SEN resources was evidenced. Further investment in ICT software for students with identified needs is encouraged. This will further enhance the impact of such facilities upon students' learning.
- Members of staff have experienced a range of relevant professional development areas from the support agencies. The school should consider conducting a regular audit of staff professional development needs in relation to engaging in inclusive teaching practices and instruction.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- The SEN co-ordinator prepares a profile of each student with SEN. Profiles are accessible to teachers to guide planning for inclusive instruction. The school is advised that SEN students in the mainstream with complex needs require detailed individual and behaviour plans, to support their learning.

- Twice a year support teachers provide the SEN co-ordinator with a list of topics covered by students. It is recommended that more detailed records of planning, delivery and students' progress be maintained and provided to the co-ordinator on a more regular basis.
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The draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation were discussed with the principal, 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, and the response of the board will be found in the appendix of this report.

Appendix

SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

Submitted by the Board of Management

Area 1: Observations on the content of the inspection report

The content of the Report on The Quality of Learning and Teaching in SEN in O’Fiaich College, Dundalk was very detailed and correct. The recommendations made are being taken on board and implemented in this academic year.

Area 2: Follow-up actions planned or undertaken since the completion of the inspection activity to implement the findings and recommendations of the inspection

- Information on the role of the board of management, principal, deputy principal, and year heads in relation to SEN provision is now included in the SEN policy document.
- Very detailed individual and behavioural plans have been drawn up in consultation with NEPS, NCSE, teachers, students, parents, HSE, SCP, HSCL and psychologists to support student learning.
- Weekly records of support teachers’ planning, delivery and student progress are made available to the SEN co-ordinator. These are constantly being evaluated and reviewed.
- Monthly meetings are taking place with the SEN team. Agenda and minutes will be available to management.
- Even further investment in ICT specific to SEN has been made since the inspection in February. All members of the SEN team are obtaining inservice for the iPad in an effort to explore ways of using Apple technology within the school environment. Teachers have purchased iPads at their own expense which in itself is an indication of their commitment to ICT in the classroom.
- All first years students’ entrance results are made available to all their teachers, for planning purposes, so that this baseline data can be used to plot improvement in attainment across all subjects.