

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection of Special Education

REPORT
Hartstown Community School,
Clonsilla, Dublin 15
Roll number: 91339F

Date of inspection: 10 February 2015



AN ROINN | DEPARTMENT OF
OIDEACHAIS | EDUCATION
AGUS SCILEANNA | AND SKILLS

**REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN SPECIAL EDUCATION**

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

Dates of inspection	10 and 11 February 2015
Inspection activities undertaken <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review of relevant policies and documents • Discussion with the principal, the coordinators special educational needs, and members of the team for special educational needs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Observation of teaching and learning during eight periods • Interaction with students and special needs assistants (SNAs) • Individual teacher feedback • Feedback to the principal and coordinators for special educational needs.

MAIN FINDINGS

- The overall quality of teaching and learning was of a very high standard, and lessons observed were structured and purposeful, and carefully designed to address the literacy, numeracy, and social needs of the students.
- Highly effective differentiation strategies were a feature of the support model in use in special group settings.
- Formative and summative assessments are well-utilised to ensure that students are taught at a correctly identified instructional level, and are afforded opportunities for consolidation and progression.
- Reciprocal links with the local primary schools, and a comprehensive transfer and induction programme assist the introduction and orientation of incoming students and their parents.
- Students in all classes are afforded full access to curriculum choices and levels, and are supported in achieving attainment commensurate with potential.
- The co-ordinators for special educational needs carry out their duties conscientiously, and careful timetabling enables a team of eight appropriately qualified teachers to provide most of the support teaching in line with best practice.

MAIN RECOMMENDATION

- It is recommended that the school begins to engage in the individual educational planning process (IEP) for students in receipt of additional resource teaching hours, particularly for students with low incidence special educational needs.
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INTRODUCTION

Hartstown Community School is a co-educational, multi-denominational post-primary school, which caters for the population of Hartstown and Huntstown. The school is an inclusive school with a current enrolment of 1,132 students. Junior Certificate (JC), Transition Year programme (TY), Leaving Certificate (LC), and Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) are offered to all enrolled students. An evaluation of special education provision was conducted over a period of two days during which teaching and learning were observed in eight learning settings. Access to some classes was restricted due to timetabling to accommodate in-house simulated state examinations for third-year and sixth-year students.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- The overall quality of teaching and learning was of a very high standard, with targeted individual support and a positive, encouraging atmosphere in lessons observed. Appropriate scaffolding and teaching strategies were skilfully utilised by teachers, and learning objectives were shared with students in all lessons.
- Highly effective differentiation was a feature of the support model in use in small group settings. All teachers had a clear understanding of differentiation and the importance of teaching at individual student's instructional levels. Teachers gave clear instructions and explanations, and enhanced learning and comprehension through good use of visuals and manipulatives.
- A range of formative and summative assessments was utilised by support teachers, to ensure that additional teaching is appropriately supportive and challenging for learners. Assessment data played an integral role in informing learning content and progression. In accordance with effective strategies associated with Assessment for Learning (AfL), oral feedback to students was a feature in all lessons. To complement these good practices, teachers are advised to evaluate with the students at the end of each lesson, the extent to which intended learning outcomes have been achieved.
- Teachers were very affirming and created a safe environment where students were well supported and where learning was linked to previous knowledge. Cross-curricular literacy initiatives were embedded in all lessons observed. Attention to the teaching of subject specific vocabulary and terminology was effective.
- Students were provided with opportunities for consolidation and progression of knowledge and skills. They demonstrated a good understanding of the taught terminology, concepts, and operations in mathematics support lessons. A problem-solving teaching approach would further enrich understanding of concepts, and encourage investigative engagement in the learning process.
- In English lessons observed, students engaged effectively in active learning tasks, in higher order inquiry and analysis, and in independent tasks and projects.
- The students are highly commended for their helpfulness and good behaviour in classrooms and on corridors during the inspection.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- A whole-school commitment to inclusion is very evident in planning and practice. The school welcomes all learners and has evolved a flexible range of student-centred

responses to meet individuals' needs. High expectations and the provision of real opportunities for success for all learners are features of this inclusive model. A section of the school's admission's policy, which refers to exceptional circumstances, does not reflect the school's inclusive practices as witnessed during the course of the inspection. Management is advised to further reflect on, and review this section.

- Strongly embedded links with the local primary schools, and a comprehensive transfer and induction programme assist the introduction and orientation of incoming students and their parents. Very effective communications and data-sharing has been established. The promotion of good self-esteem is a whole-school priority.
- Students are placed in ability-based classes for junior cycle and in mixed-ability classes at senior cycle. Resource support is directed towards students most in need of additional teaching, and the needs of in-coming students are prioritised. Student progress is carefully monitored to provide for mobility between class groupings. Commendably, students in all classes have access to full curriculum choice and levels, and are supported in achieving attainments commensurate with potential.
- Notwithstanding the considered rationale upon which banded classes are currently based, management is advised to continue to carefully monitor and review effective ways to deploy available resources, with a view to, where practicable, extending mixed-ability class groupings to junior cycle.
- The co-ordinators for special educational needs carry out their duties conscientiously, and to a high standard. They have developed a very flexible and student-centred range of good quality supports to meet the diverse needs of students with special and additional educational needs. Teachers recognise that resources should be utilised as additional teaching and not in place of main class teaching. Students are supported predominantly through individual and small group teaching, with some in-class support utilising team-teaching.
- Many students for whom English is an additional language (EAL) attend classes in their mother-tongue and achieve very good results in state examinations. Initiatives are in place to challenge and develop more able students, and whole-school student award ceremonies celebrate both personal individual achievements and state examination achievements.
- Effective whole-school literacy initiatives include explicit teaching of subject specific terminology, a paired reading initiative which has significantly raised reading standards for in-coming students, and an effective English social language course for EAL students. Plans to further enhance literacy skills, as outlined in the school self-evaluation (SSE) report, should now be embodied in a school improvement plan (SIP). A pilot whole-school cross-curricular numeracy strategy is underway for first-year students.
- Staff professional development is of a very high standard and is facilitated by management. Teachers regularly present to colleagues on topics relating to best practice provision, and effective teaching approaches.
- A team of nine SNAs has completed appropriate training and relevant professional development courses, and competently supports students with complex or low incidence special needs. SNAs demonstrated commitment, flexibility, and very good quality support for students in their care.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- The special education department demonstrates the capacity to plan, implement, and monitor to a high level. Record keeping correctly focuses on the development of literacy and numeracy skills, and the social, emotional, and care needs of the students. Learning targets are set for each student. Summative and formative assessments are regularly reviewed to meet the changing needs of students. A practical student register is in place, and student progress is tracked and monitored.
- Very good arrangements are in place to communicate the strengths and needs of students to subject teachers and SNAs. Well established communication channels ensure teachers are kept informed on the needs of students, and on approaches and methodologies suited to supporting the students in classroom settings. Parents are consulted as partners in the education provision for their children.
- To draw together the rich information and records already in place, it is recommended that the team for special educational needs engage in the individual educational planning process (IEP), particularly for students with low incidence special educational needs, in line with best practice. Parents should be included in IEP planning and reviews, and students should be encouraged to help set their own specific targets and contribute to assessing their own progress. IEP information should be shared with subject teachers.
- The school's capacity to self-monitor, self-evaluate and improve is demonstrated by a reflective and flexible approach to planning and provision, to meet the diverse and changing needs of students year by year.

The draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation were discussed with the principal, coordinator for special educational needs and members of the team for special educational needs. 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 board is pleased to endorse the inspector's praise of the very good work of the SEN co-ordinators, SNAs and teaching team.
- It is affirming that school improvement initiatives in differentiation, Assessment for Learning, Literacy, numeracy and EAL have clearly become embedded in day to day teaching and learning.
- The board acknowledges that once again, the good behaviour of the students has received special mention in an inspection report.
- The inspector's findings that the quality of teaching and learning in the school is of a very high standard
- It is encouraging to note that the school's mission to create a safe, encouraging and inclusive environment was evident to the inspector

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

- The board notes the recommendation that the school begin engaging in the IEP process. We will do so as resources allow.