

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**

**Department of Education and Skills**

**Subject Inspection of Special Educational Needs  
REPORT**

**Blackwater Community College  
Lismore, County Waterford  
Roll number: 91509E**

**Date of inspection: 2 October 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 EDUCATION**

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**INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION**

<b>Dates of inspection</b>	1 and 2 October 2012
<b>Inspection activities undertaken</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Review of relevant documents</li><li>• Discussions with principal, teachers and special needs assistants</li><li>• Interaction with students</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Observation of teaching and learning during nine class periods</li><li>• Examination of students' work</li><li>• Feedback to principal and teachers</li></ul>

**MAIN FINDINGS**

- The quality of teaching was judged to be good or very good including commendable practice in differentiation and assessment for learning.
- Teachers are very aware of student abilities and teaching is targeted to student needs.
- There is a positive whole-school focus on full inclusion for all students and all students are ensured access to a full and balanced curriculum.
- Teaching hours allocated for resource and learning support are used appropriately to support students, but there are too many teachers involved.

**MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS**

- The number of teachers involved in delivering resource hours should be reduced to better facilitate planning and co-ordination.
  - When the special educational needs (SEN) policy is next reviewed, the information on the provision for students with autism and students who are gifted or talented should be extended.
  - The individual education planning (IEP) process and the whole-school approaches to literacy and numeracy require further development.
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## **INTRODUCTION**

Blackwater Community School opened in 2003 following the amalgamation of three catholic, voluntary secondary schools. Enrolment has risen significantly over the intervening years from 447 to 767 students. The school enrolls students with a diverse range of abilities and socio-economic backgrounds.

## **TEACHING AND LEARNING**

- The quality of the teaching in the support and mainstream classes was judged to be good or very good. Effective practices were seen in all lessons. Appropriate levels of individualised support were provided yet students were still challenged.
- Lessons were planned, purposeful and well paced. Teachers involved students through targeted and global questioning and they effectively used repetition to consolidate learning, and praise and affirmation to motivate students. Student questions and comments were well received and often led to fruitful class discussions. Appropriate tasks were set and students were kept active in their learning.
- Teachers were very aware of student abilities and teaching was targeted to their needs. Students were included successfully through differentiating the curriculum and the expected learning outcomes. Good use was made of information and communications technology (ICT) to enhance learning.
- During the lessons teachers engaged in a range of good assessment practices to monitor learning. They shared learning objectives and revisited them to summarise learning. Some teachers used the WALT technique (What we are learning today) effectively to structure lesson objectives. Teachers provided good oral and written formative feedback to show students how they can improve and involved students in assessing their own learning.
- Literacy development was supported through a range of activities with a particular focus on the development of subject-related vocabulary. Key words were identified and discussed in most lessons. Some teachers guided students in creating visual supports such as word maps or pictograms to reinforce their learning. Strategies to promote numeracy are not as advanced. Literacy and numeracy support packs developed by the SEN co-ordinator provide guidance for teachers.

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

- There is a positive whole-school focus on full inclusion for all students and all students are ensured access to a full and balanced curriculum. Numerous structures and procedures are in place to govern the provision and ensure it meets student needs.
- The provision includes individual and small group support, and team teaching. Team teaching is well established and has a good record of providing effective targeted support. Assistance is also provided through a homework club and a peer literacy-support programme.
- In second and third year, a number of students participate in what is referred to as a Junior Certificate modified programme. All of these students receive targeted support in literacy, numeracy and specific subjects and a few students study a reduced number of subjects. The students are selected in consultation with the students and their parents on the basis of need.

- The school hosts a unit for students with autistic spectrum disorders (ASD). The ASD Unit is allocated one full-time teacher who efficiently co-ordinates the provision and one part-time teacher. While the enrolled students spend some of their time in a designated classroom for autism-specific interventions, the school endeavours to include them as much as possible in mainstream classes and school activities with their peers. This is good practice.
- The SEN co-ordinator has a significant role in planning and monitoring whole-school provision and is consulted in the creation of the school timetable in reference to the support needs of students. The co-ordinator creates a student register which provides a clear overview of the provision. She efficiently leads a team of committed teachers who meet regularly and are well supported by management.
- All of the allocated hours for resource and learning support are used appropriately to support students. A core team delivers the majority of these hours. However, the remaining hours are allotted to a large number of teachers. This is not best practice. The school should keep this latter number to a minimum to better facilitate planning and co-ordination.
- The school's special needs assistants (SNAs) are flexibly deployed in mainstream classes and in the ASD Unit. The SNAs have accessed relevant training. They know the students well and are conscious of their roles in supporting curriculum access and promoting independence. They keep diaries to record student progress and behaviour, and they meet weekly with the SEN co-ordinator. An informative SNA policy and handbook guides their work.
- The school's assessment policy has been ratified by the board of management. The policy focuses on the assessment of incoming students and summative academic assessment. On review, the various *Assessment for Learning* practices seen in classrooms should be included and management should seek to extend their use.

#### **PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

- The SEN policy provides a good overview of the provision. It is reviewed regularly and has been ratified by the board of management. The information on the provision for students with ASD and for students who are gifted or talented should be extended.
- Resource teachers use student profiles, assessment results, information from parents, report recommendations and teacher observations to prepare IEPs with general goals and areas for development. It is recommended that the IEP process be further developed by noting two or three specific targets for each student with complex needs. This will improve the monitoring and measuring of progress for these students.
- In planning mainstream lessons, teachers are rightly expected to be aware of individual student needs, to differentiate instruction, and to support student IEP goals as appropriate. Support for mainstream teachers and teaching resources is provided by the SEN team. Additional information on students is available on a need-to-know basis from the SEN team, the year heads and the school intranet.
- The literacy policy provides a good outline of a whole-school approach. It could be enhanced with a section to describe the roles and responsibilities of personnel including resource teachers and mainstream subject teachers. Subject departments are advised to extend their plans to include the role and responsibilities of the subject department in

literacy (and numeracy) development and to list subject-specific strategies. A numeracy policy should be developed.

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

*Published January 2013.*

# **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 very pleased that the quality of teaching was considered to be very good and that commendable practice was seen in differentiation and assessment for learning.
- It was pleasing to note that teachers were aware of student abilities and that learning was seen to be targeted to student needs.
- The Board was delighted with the finding “that there is a positive whole school focus on full inclusion for all students and all students are ensured access to a full and balanced curriculum.”
- The Board was well pleased that, as has always been the case, that the DES Inspectorate recognised that teaching hours allocated for resource and learning support are being used appropriately to support students.

#### **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 new SEN policy has been reviewed and adopted by the Board with further information on the provision for students with autism and students who are gifted or talented included as requested.
- The school is continuing to develop work in the areas of literacy and numeracy and to work further on IEP targets.
- In so far as it will be possible, given timetabling restrictions, efforts will be made to reduce the number of teachers involved in delivering resource hours.