

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

**Subject Inspection of Special Education
REPORT**

**Cnoc Mhuire Secondary School
Granard, County Longford
Roll number: 63730S**

Date of inspection: 9 April 2014



**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 (SEN)

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

Dates of inspection	8 and 9 April 2014
Inspection activities undertaken <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review of relevant documents• Discussion with principal, deputy principal, and special education teachers• Interaction with students	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Observation of teaching and learning during nine class periods• Examination of students' work• Feedback to principal, deputy principal and SEN co-ordinators

MAIN FINDINGS

- Teaching and learning were of a good or very good standard in almost all lessons observed.
- Students were engaged in their learning and were very well behaved, co-operative and responsive.
- Priority SEN timetabling ensures that a core team of five teachers is enabled to provide most of the support teaching, in line with good practice.
- The school is engaging in a number of literacy initiatives and is successfully implementing focused literacy strategies at whole-school level.
- The school's commitment to inclusion, evident in every aspect of culture and practice, is highly commended.
- Pastoral care and strong collaboration between care team members ensure a holistic and student-centred approach to special education provision.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- Teaching approaches for students with SEN should be extended to include team teaching configurations, in order to provide supplementary teaching within their mixed ability class settings.
- The school should strive to ensure that students with Irish exemptions who are in receipt of learning support and EAL students who receive language support are taught separately, in order to address their different learning needs.
- The individual planning process should be reviewed, and the current planning template should be extended to provide a practical map of goals and learning targets for students with SEN.
- It is recommended that the school further develop and extend the SEN student register and records, in order to effectively document, track, and monitor individual progress.

INTRODUCTION

Cnoc Mhuire is a co-educational Voluntary Secondary School under the trusteeship of CEIST. The student population of 445 includes students with a range of abilities and from a variety of backgrounds. The school offers Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate programmes. Transition Year and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme are also provided.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- Teaching and learning were of a good or very good standard in almost all lessons observed. The predominant teaching methodology was direct instruction and explanation, which was generally of a very high standard. Lessons were well structured, and good attention was paid to vocabulary extension and oral language development. Explanations were clear, and supported by appropriate, good quality visuals.
- Most teachers balanced whole-class teaching with collaborative and active learning opportunities. In many cases teachers placed appropriate emphasis on linking learning to students' life experiences and previous learning, thus enhancing understanding and making learning relevant. Opportunities for students to work collaboratively, and to utilise problem-solving strategies, should be developed by all teachers, in order to support learning and comprehension for students with SEN.
- Students were engaged in their learning, and were very well behaved, co-operative, and responsive. They competently asked and answered questions, and their contributions were valued and affirmed. Where individual support was required, teachers were patient and encouraging. Written work was well-presented, and in some lessons teachers used the whole-school assessment for learning (AfL) strategy when correcting both oral and written assignments.
- Students with SEN, and those for whom English is an additional language (EAL), receive supplementary teaching support through withdrawal from their classes. The quality of this support was particularly effective where teachers tailored lessons to the needs of the students. In small-group settings teachers should be cognisant of learning styles and varying abilities of students, and should use a wide variety of teaching approaches and resources, to optimise comprehension and learning.
- Special education teachers were caring and helpful in their interactions with students. They provided good quality support in literacy and Mathematics, and lessons were tailored to meet the needs of the students, as needs arose. It is recommended that SEN and EAL teachers complement current provision through careful planning and structuring of lesson content, in order to more effectively progress prioritised learning targets.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- The strong commitment by management and staff to inclusion, evident in every aspect of culture and practice, is highly commended. Priority SEN timetabling ensures that a core team of five teachers is enabled to provide most of the support teaching, in line with good practice.
- A good quality transfer programme with eighteen feeder primary schools assists the induction of incoming students. Passports and information requests have been highly

successful in recent years. Transfer information is combined with school-based assessments, and careful analysis of this combined evidence is undertaken to provide information on the strengths and learning needs of incoming students.

- The two SEN co-ordinators, assisted by management, efficiently organise SEN and EAL provision, and reasonable accommodations for school and certificate examinations. The co-ordinators meet regularly with the guidance counsellor and the care team to plan a co-ordinated approach to SEN provision. These well-embedded collaborative practices ensure holistic, student-centred pastoral care provision.
- In most cases students are placed in mixed ability class groupings. However, in third and sixth years some students with SEN are currently placed in banded ability-based classes. Where possible, the school should consider extending mixed ability to all class levels and provide additional support through team-teaching configurations. An inclusive model of in-class team-teaching support will provide for both EAL students and those with learning difficulties within their class settings, and will utilise available resources more effectively.
- The school is engaging in a number of literacy initiatives and is successfully implementing focused cross-curricular literacy strategies.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- Student information is disseminated to teachers through shared files on the school e-portal, and students and their parents have access to the guidance counsellor through a dedicated link on the school website. The SEN co-ordinators should similarly develop effective ways to disseminate learning plans, to allow teachers to share records of prioritised goals and learning targets of students with SEN. This will facilitate involvement by subject teachers, and tracking and recording of progress and attainments.
- The school has successfully engaged in the practice of developing individual educational plans (IEP) for students identified with SEN. The current IEP template requires further development. IEPs should document specific, measurable learning targets, and record students' learning achievements.
- The individual planning process should also be reviewed. Parental input should be included in IEP goals and targets, and IEPs should be reviewed at least once per year for students with SEN.
- A good range of assessments is well-utilised to establish base lines and to monitor monthly progress. The school should now devise ways of recording and disseminating this information and utilising it to best effect, in order to inform IEPs and individual teacher planning and teaching.
- It is recommended that the school further develop and extend the SEN student register and special education records in order to effectively document, track and monitor individual progress. Pupil profiles would facilitate the gathering together of available information combined with new information. Profiles should follow students as they progress through the school, and should be made available to teachers involved in the education of the students.
- Students with learning difficulties and EAL students who receive support should have group learning plans, which include learning targets relevant to their identified learning or language needs. In addition, the school should strive to ensure that students with Irish

exemptions who are in receipt of learning support and EAL students who receive language support are taught separately, in order to address their different learning needs.

- The school has engaged in a range of professional development opportunities offered by the Special Education Support Service and the Professional Development Service for Teachers. A whole-school seminar, offered by the National Educational Psychological Services on The Continuum of Support would be of great benefit and should be undertaken.
- This is a time of transition for the school, with a newly appointed SEN team, and a new pastoral care team currently being drawn together. It is a challenge, and also an opportunity, for the school to work towards a model of best practice in the support of students with special and additional needs.

The draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation were discussed with the principal, deputy principal, and the two SEN co-ordinators at the conclusion of the evaluation. The board of management of the school 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 report was welcomed by the board. It commended good practice. The recommendations regarding IEP planning and SEN student register will be acted upon from 2014/15.

The recommendations regarding team teaching and striving to ensure that EAL and SEN students be taught separately will be part of an appeal for further hours to the DES.

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

As above.