

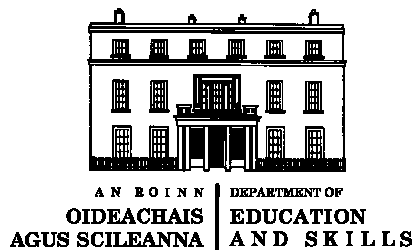
An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

**Subject Inspection of Special Education
REPORT**

**Ursuline Secondary School,
Blackrock, Cork
Roll number: 62650P**

Date of inspection: 25 April 2016



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

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

Dates of inspection	25 and 26 April 2016
Inspection activities undertaken <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review of relevant documents• Discussion with acting principal, special educational needs (SEN) co-ordinator, teachers and special needs assistants (SNAs)• Interaction with students	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Observation of teaching and learning during seven class periods• Examination of students' work• Feedback to acting principal, SEN co-ordinator and teachers

MAIN FINDINGS

- Teaching and learning in the lessons observed was good overall with many examples of very good practice.
- Careful planning structures, to meet the identified needs of students with SEN, are being established by the very good work of the SEN co-ordinator with the support of senior management and the core SEN team.
- Very good progress has taken place in the organisation and provision for SEN in the school.
- Timetabling of the additional hours allocated for SEN takes place in conjunction with the construction of the overall timetable.
- Students have access to the full curriculum, but some small class groups have been formed and support is delivered through a model of withdrawal.
- The development of communication, organisation and teamwork skills was an intrinsic part of the student experience in most lessons.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- The practice of withdrawing students from mainstream subject lessons to receive support in the subject they are being withdrawn from, should be avoided.
- Co-operative teaching practices such as team-teaching should be developed.
- Building upon the existing structures, a more formal system of sharing information on students with SEN with all teachers should be established.
- Formal structures for the assessment of outcomes for students with SEN and student-support files should be further developed.

INTRODUCTION

Ursuline Secondary School is a voluntary secondary school for girls in Cork City, with a current enrolment of 219 students. The school participates in the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) action plan and, at junior cycle, offers students the Junior Certificate and the Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP). At senior cycle, students can avail of the TY programme, the established Leaving Certificate, the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) and the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programme.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- Teaching and learning in the lessons observed was good overall with many examples of very good practice. These included the use of graphic organisers, differentiated and scaffolded tasks, and good use of information communications technology (ICT) and visuals, to support student learning. The lessons observed ranged in structure from whole-class teaching to small-group withdrawal and included Maths, English, History, Business Studies and Geography.
- Some lessons incorporated very good structured collaborative tasks which engaged students in their learning. Experiential learning opportunities in one lesson consolidated student learning and also provided students with opportunities to apply social and organisational skills. Where peer collaboration and purposeful group activities were used, the development of communication, organisation and team-work skills was an intrinsic part of the student experience. This is very good practice.
- Very positive student-teacher and student-SNA rapport was evident in lessons, with teachers and SNAs demonstrating very good knowledge of students' identified learning needs, coupled with an awareness of their holistic, social and emotional needs. This is very positive.
- Classroom structures and routines were a strong feature of almost all lessons which encouraged students' organisational skills and created a safe and secure learning environment for students through modelling good behaviour and practice. There were high-expectations of students, which is very good.
- Subject-specific vocabulary, terms and concepts were taught, and learning was reinforced in mainstream and support lessons. Numeracy strategies and the literacy of numeracy, were focused on in lessons, where appropriate.
- Assessment of student learning was mainly carried out through good quality teacher questioning which encouraged students to think, make links, and recall prior learning. Students demonstrated good understanding through their verbal contributions and tasks. Active participation of students in their learning was evident in almost all lessons and opportunities for independent and collaborative tasks facilitated consolidation of learning.
- All junior cycle students follow the JCSP which is a very positive and inclusive practice. The statements of learning however, should be used in all subject areas to allow students to assess and to record their own learning.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- Very good progress for SEN provision has taken place in the school. Timetabling for SEN takes place in conjunction with the construction of the overall time-table. This very good practice should be continued and the SEN co-ordinator and department should

inform this process, through careful planning to ensure that the identified needs of students with SEN are supported appropriately.

- Whilst students with SEN have access to the full curriculum, some small class groups have been formed to give concentrated and focused support to some students in areas such as Mathematics. These class groups become the students' mainstream lessons in these subjects. School management should therefore ensure that these groups are taught by teachers with the appropriate qualifications.
- Students receive support through a model of withdrawal. During these class periods, students receive supports based on their assessed needs. This is good, student-centred practice. Some students however, are withdrawn for some class periods, in lessons such as English, to receive support in English, thus missing out on the mainstream lessons. This model of providing support to these students is contrary to best practice and should be avoided. A model of team-teaching should be developed to support students access the curriculum and within mainstream settings, as appropriate. This model should also build both the awareness and the capacity of all teachers, to plan and to differentiate to meet the needs of the students with SEN, in their subject areas.
- Very good progress in the area of whole-school continuous professional development (CPD) has taken place, with support and CPD events provided for staff. This is very positive in raising awareness and developing collaborative practices around how best to support students. School management should continue to grow capacity among teachers to meet the needs of all students in their specific subject areas, and to grow expertise among the SEN core team of teachers. It is very positive that a second teacher has received training in special education through further study towards achieving a Post Graduate Diploma in SEN.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- Careful planning structures, to meet the identified needs of students with SEN, are being established by the very good work of the SEN co-ordinator with the support of senior management and the core SEN team. To further develop this good work, the school should analyse the range of valuable information gathered, which should help with the identification of students and their needs, and also inform planning to meet those needs.
- Good transition procedures are in place, where parents and students are encouraged to visit the school prior to enrolment, to attend an open evening, as well as, an experience day. The subject taster in the compulsory transition year programme supports students' transition between junior and senior cycle. The LCA programme also positively supports students to achieve in senior cycle.
- Individual student-support plans are currently devised by the SEN co-ordinator for some students with SEN. These plans are very good and, as the SEN core team of teachers expands, responsibility for the development of these plans should be shared between the team. The core team should monitor and review student progress regularly and such assessment should inform future planning to meet the emerging needs of students.
- Formal structures for the assessment of outcomes for students with SEN should be further developed and should include time-bound monitoring and reviewing of student progress relative to the targets set in their individual learning plans. These outcomes should be used to inform future targets and plans for students. Student-support files should also be developed and be used to track and record individual student supports, interventions and

outcomes as advised by the National Educational Psychological Service and Circular Letter 0070/2014.

- Information on students with SEN is shared with teachers at the beginning of the school year and informally through contact with the SEN co-ordinator thereafter. This good practice should be built upon, to establish a more formal system of sharing this information. Student support plans should be shared through the school's intranet system, allowing all teachers to access important and confidential information on individual students, thus enabling them to plan to give students every opportunity to access the curriculum in their specific subject areas.

The draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation were discussed with the acting principal, SEN co-ordinator and teachers of SEN 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.