

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection of Special Educational Needs
REPORT

St Joseph's Secondary School
Spanish Point, County Clare
Roll number: 62010C

Date of inspection: 30 April 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**

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

Dates of inspection	30 April- 1 May 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 eleven class periods• Examination of students' work• Feedback to principal and teachers

MAIN FINDINGS

- The overall quality of teaching and learning observed is good.
- St Joseph's Secondary school strives to be inclusive in both its policies and practices, and it has come to recognise the interdependence between the promotion of inclusive learning and overall school improvement.
- The school's policies and practices aim to be student-centred with good lines of communication evident among staff.
- Continuing professional development is a feature of the school's improvement agenda and some teachers have shown leadership in this regard.
- The current timetabling practices do not always ensure the optimal use of the additional teaching hours provided.
- Learning is personalised in the classroom for each student and a similar practice should be adopted to clearly show who is entitled to additional resources and to monitor how such resources are used to support learning.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- The ways in which the additional teaching hours, provided for students with special educational needs, are used and tracked require review and it is strongly recommended that the school devise a register of those entitled to receive the allocation.
- Renewed attention to timetabling issues and to the place of team-teaching in the provision for special educational needs is recommended.
- The key role of the mainstream teacher requires that ongoing attention be given to building capacity among mainstream teachers through formal and informal learning opportunities.
- It is recommended that an overarching policy on inclusive learning be created so as to best address and respond to the wide range of students' needs and abilities presenting.

INTRODUCTION

St Joseph's Secondary School is a co-educational school with a current enrolment of 217 students. The school offers a broad curriculum and adopts an inclusive approach to meeting the diverse needs of all those who are enrolled.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- In the lessons observed, the overall quality of teaching and learning observed was good. While examples of good practice were witnessed, the school needs to undertake a strategic review of the quality of learning experienced by its students and the professional knowledge and skills that are used, or deemed required, by teachers to optimise student outcomes.
- The lessons observed focused on a number of appropriate learning outcomes including the development of literacy and numeracy skills, and curriculum-related learning goals associated with English, Mathematics, Art, French, and the Leaving Certificate Applied programme
- Classes ranged in size from small group withdrawal to whole-class teaching. In the past the school has made tentative steps with regard to implementing team-teaching as a mode of delivering support for learning. The school should renew engagement with this mode of supporting learning among students in receipt of additional teaching hours.
- In all lessons, teachers' knowledge of individual students and of the course content was used effectively to create positive learning environments. Teachers and students displayed good working relations which supported learning. Appropriate levels of praise and affirmation for effort were the norm in most of the classrooms visited and, in general, students displayed an admirable confidence in themselves.
- The school should now consider how the interplay of whole-class teaching and differentiated practices can support individual and collective learning. Building on the evident relationships of trust and respect between teachers and students, teachers should consider, for example, the place of personalised learning, co-operative learning and graphic organisers in supporting inclusive learning.
- Purposeful formal co-operative learning opportunities were the exception rather than the norm. This needs to be addressed. Similarly, attention needs to be given to teachers' questioning. It is recommended that teachers, possibly through their subject departments, continue to focus on how they can best support learning by the quality of the questions they frame, the activities they facilitate in class and the feedback they provide during and after the activity. In such deliberations the degree to which students self-evaluate and are held accountable for their learning, both individually and collectively, should be kept to the fore.
- Since many classrooms are teacher-based, consideration should be given to further develop ways in which student work can be viewed by themselves and fellow students. Public sharing of students' work can add to student motivation and perseverance as well as promote a sense of belonging and a sense of place. Similarly, variations on seating arrangements to promote co-operative practices, for certain periods of the day or of a lesson, merit discussion.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- St Joseph's strives to be inclusive in both its policies and practices, and it has come to recognise the interdependence between the promotion of inclusive learning and overall school improvement.
- At the time of the inspection, the school was in receipt of a total of 60.3 additional teaching hours per week for learning support and to meet the needs of students identified with special educational needs. An examination of the deployment of these hours indicates that the school is not making optimal use of this provision for the students for whom it is intended. It is strongly recommended that the school devise a register of those entitled to receive the allocation and that such a register identify the manner in which the resources are being used, and the impact they have upon students' learning.
- Efforts to account for the hours allocated should also consider how best use can be made of the additional resources. Extension of the use of team-teaching would assist in this regard as it would reduce the need for students to be withdrawn from class and facilitate teacher collaboration and communication. Furthermore, it would facilitate the optimal use of the allocation in excess of the original hours allocated.
- Notwithstanding the good work of the co-ordinator, who holds a recognised qualification in special education, the key role of the mainstream teacher requires that ongoing attention be given to building capacity among teachers through formal and informal professional learning opportunities. This point is all the more prevalent given the continued increase in the diversity of students' needs and abilities. Continuing professional development is central to responding to needs and to promoting school improvement. Due regard should be given to such provision emerging from within as well as from outside of the school staff.
- Student access to the full curriculum is facilitated by the school's flexible approach, though there is a need to ensure that exemptions from Irish are decoupled from an automatic non-engagement with modern languages.
- Students' engagement, achievements and attainments are communicated home on a regular basis. Extracurricular and co-curricular activities allow fellow students to support and be supported by inclusive actions. In light of this purposeful interaction, more formal peer support, such as paired-reading and other similar activities, merits consideration.
- Reasonable accommodation for certificate examinations (RACE) is facilitated by the school, with strategies in place to provide students with practice in the relevant accommodations in advance. It is recommended that, in consultation with the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) psychologist, appropriate cognitive ability tests be administered to students upon entry and at a later date in their school career. Combined with other information, test data will assist in determining the progress being made by students, relative to their assessed ability. Standardised testing in literacy and numeracy in first year should be supported by revisiting such tests before the end of third year.
- The school's current focus on literacy and numeracy development will be informed by these standardised tests and by the expertise among staff, including those qualified in the area of special education. There are some further areas of assessment that require attention. Agreed collective understandings regarding homework merit attention. More nuanced and intermediate assessment practices such as work samples, classroom observation schedules and case studies should be considered as should the best manner in

which findings from such assessment practices can be disseminated among teachers so as to inform teaching and improve learning.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- Contact is made with the relevant primary schools in advance of enrolment, and this work combined with good relations with personnel from external agencies adds to the quality of planning and preparation.
 - Individual student files are constructed and teaching staff and special needs assistants are made aware, in a timely manner, of the needs and strengths of students newly enrolled in the school. Good lines of communication are sustained by the resources made available in the staffroom. The contribution of the special needs assistants in promoting inclusive practices in the school is effective.
 - Ongoing engagement with individualised planning for students with special educational needs is recommended, as is the collective focus on planning for student engagement and participation. To assist with this and other related work, the sharing of information through the development of shared files and other information communication and technology (ICT) platforms is recommended. The role that the guidance counsellor can play should be kept to the fore and more opportunities for key personnel, such as senior management, co-ordinator and guidance counsellor to meet regularly would further assist planning, preparation and self-evaluation of progress.
 - It is timely for the school to consider accessing a place on the Department-funded Postgraduate Diploma in Special Educational Needs. As discussed with senior management, it would be particularly beneficial for the school if a staff member with a numeracy background could avail of this opportunity and so complement the existing work in relation to the promotion of literacy skills.
 - In future planning, consideration should be given to forming an overarching policy on inclusive learning so as to best address and respond to the diversity of needs and abilities of students. Such a policy could emerge, in part, from collating existing policies and once formed can be used to stress test other policies and practices in relation to the school's understanding of inclusive learning, including the existing practices associated with mentoring and inducting teachers, both new or those returning to the school. The formation of such a policy would also serve school review well as it would highlight areas that may not have attracted as much attention as others to date.
 - The well-constructed staff handbook is another means of communication for established and new staff which could be used to identify some key aspects of teaching and learning as outlined above. It could also assist in further highlighting and clarifying roles and responsibilities. In particular, it could clarify the key role of the mainstream teacher in the promotion of inclusive learning in St Joseph's Secondary School.
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The draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation were discussed with the principal, deputy principal and subject teachers 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 B.O.M acknowledges the content of the report.

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

A number of the recommendations have been implemented since the inspection took place.
The B.O.M will endeavour to implement the other recommendations in so far as resources permit.