

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection of Special Educational Needs
REPORT

Beneavin De La Salle College
Finglas, Dublin 11
Roll number: 605110

Date of inspection: 10 September 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 EDUCATIONAL
NEEDS**

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

Dates of inspection	10 and 11 September 2012
Inspection activities undertaken <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review of relevant documents• Discussion with principal and teachers• Discussion with special needs assistant• Interaction with students	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Observation of teaching and learning during 8 class periods• Examination of students' work• Feedback to principal and teachers

MAIN FINDINGS

- Overall there is significant evidence of a whole-school commitment to an inclusive approach to the provision for students with special educational needs (SEN).
- The overall quality of teaching and learning in the eight lessons observed was good with some examples of very good practice. Teachers' knowledge of, and care for, the students is an evident strength of the school.
- Effective, flexible, responsive and inclusive support is provided through individual student withdrawal, small group withdrawal and co-operative teaching.
- The school's allocated resource hours for provision for students with special educational needs are used effectively and clearly documented.
- The school has engaged successfully in planning to meet the needs of individual students.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- Attention to access to a modern language by students taking the Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP) is recommended.
- It is recommended that, where feasible and appropriate, a more active participation of the student in the Individual Education Planning (IEP) process be sought. It is further recommended that the targets be specific, measurable and achievable within a specific time-frame. This will facilitate the measurement of student progress.
- It is recommended that an audit of whole staff training needs to support mixed-ability teaching and full inclusion of students with special educational needs be undertaken.

INTRODUCTION

Beneavin De La Salle College is a Catholic Voluntary Secondary School for boys with an enrolment of 491 students. It participates in DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools), the action plan of the Department of Education and Skills for educational inclusion. The school offers a broad curriculum including the Junior Certificate, Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP), Leaving Certificate (Established), Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP).

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- Eight lessons, including learning support, mainstream classes and small withdrawal groups, were observed. The quality of teaching and learning in these lessons ranged from good to very good. Lessons focused on a range of learning outcomes including the development of literacy and numeracy skills, and curriculum-related learning goals associated with Engineering, Social Education and Science.
- Lessons were well planned, appropriately paced and purposeful. Lessons began and concluded with an outline of the objectives of the lesson and the desired outcomes for the students. New work was suitably linked to prior learning.
- Concentration on keywords was a common feature of all lessons observed, as was clarification and repetition of instructions.
- Mutual respect between teachers and students was evident. Teachers were attentive to students' needs. Teachers used praise to affirm students' efforts, cultivating a positive learning environment.
- Teacher-led discussion tended to be the dominant teaching methodology. The school is encouraged to explore a wider use of paired and small group work as well as the use of teaching strategies such as graphic organisers, text highlighting and memory aids.
- It is to be commended that the school has made steps to implement co-operative teaching. This is a positive innovation in the support of students with special educational needs. The school is encouraged to extend the practice of co-operative teaching.
- A range of teacher-questioning techniques was observed. Best practice was in evidence where teachers engaged and motivated students in their learning through a distribution of lower-order and higher-order questioning. In some instances insufficient wait time was given for student responses.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- Overall there is significant evidence of a whole-school commitment to an inclusive approach to the provision for students with special educational needs.
- The school's total allocation of hours for provision for students with special educational needs is used effectively for the purposes intended.

- Seven special needs assistants (SNAs) (6.5 whole-time equivalent posts) provide support to a range of students in accordance with Department guidelines. Collaborative working relationships are maintained between SNAs, management and teaching staff. Scheduled weekly meetings are held and records maintained.
- As an inclusive school, Beneavin De La Salle College is committed to a mixed-ability teaching culture and this is the experience of most students. However some restrictions exist to the universal application of mixed-ability class formations and access to a fuller curriculum. On entry to first year, students are divided into ability bands, with two JCSP classes provided as a separate band for students identified as in need of significant supports. This arrangement is continued in second and third years. Students in the JCSP classes do not have access to a modern language. It is recommended that management address this issue in planning the timetable.
- The co-ordinator of SEN, who holds a recognised qualification in special education, effectively fulfils her significant responsibilities in organising and monitoring the provision. She leads a SEN team of five teachers which meets regularly. The team maintains collaborative links with management, the guidance department, chaplain, parents, and with appropriate external agencies.
- The school has established a successful transition process for new students. Information-gathering practices to support the entry of new students include early engagement with the primary feeder schools by the Home School Liaison teacher, combined with assessment of students' abilities and contact with parents. Knowledge of the needs of incoming students with special educational needs would be enhanced by the additional early engagement of the SEN co-ordinator with the feeder primary schools.
- The SEN policy appropriately reflects the numerous inclusive practices in the school. It was clear during the course of the inspection that the contents of the policy were given expression on a daily basis.
- Most support classes take place in well-equipped specialist classrooms. A range of resources is available including easy access to information and communication technology (ICT) facilities.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- The school is encouraged to review its admissions policy as the current wording does not reflect the inclusive practice and leadership witnessed.
- The school is commended on the whole-school work undertaken with regard to the promotion of literacy and numeracy development. However, in planning for improvement, it is suggested that the good practice that exists among members of staff should continue to be developed.
- The school engages in the process of individual education planning (IEP). There is positive involvement of parents in the IEP process. It is recommended that, where feasible and appropriate, a more active participation by the student in the IEP process be encouraged. It is further recommended that the targets be specific, measurable and achievable within a specific time-frame.

- The school has provided continuing professional development (CPD) for the whole staff in a range of areas such as team-teaching, literacy and numeracy. It is recommended that an audit of whole staff training needs, to support mixed-ability teaching and the full inclusion of students with special educational needs, be undertaken. The Special Education Support Service (www.sess.ie) may be able to assist in this regard.

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 was delighted with the findings of the report in that there was significant evidence of a whole school commitment to an inclusive approach to the provision for students with special educational needs and that the teachers' knowledge of, and care for the students is an evident strength of Beneavin De La Salle College. It was also affirming to see that lessons were well planned, appropriately paced and purposeful with mutual respect between teachers and students evident as teachers cultivated a positive learning environment through affirmation. The recently introduced team teaching approach to learning support was commended and regarded as a positive innovation. The Board is delighted that the school is encouraged to extend this manner of supporting students with special education needs. Overall, the Board is pleased that the report is so positive because Beneavin De La Salle College is very proud of the inclusive practices that are in place and the emphasis placed on ensuring that all students with special needs are not only very well catered for academically but also very well cared for.

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 of Management agreed with all of the recommendations of the report in that they will serve to strengthen the provision for all of our special needs students and ensure that the school offers an even more effective service. The Board has already reviewed its admissions policy to reflect the inclusive practice already in place in Beneavin College. The school continues to develop the whole school work already undertaken to improve literacy and numeracy with further innovative strategies implemented since the inspection took place including the introduction of Accelerated Reading, the expansion of the use of reading laboratories and the introduction of Maths for Fun among many strategies. The management has taken steps through the Board of Studies to address the issue of access to a modern language. Finally, arrangements are in place for the SEN co-ordinator to visit the primary schools, supplementing the visits already in place of the Home School Liaison teacher, to enhance our knowledge of the needs of our incoming students. Finally, an audit is underway of the whole staff training needs to support mixed ability teaching and the inclusion of the students with special educational needs.

The Board would like to express its thanks to the inspectorate for such a supportive report that served to help the Board to get an insight into this very effective department and to direct the board in ensuring that the special needs department is enhanced and further supported by implementing the recommendations.