

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

**Subject Inspection of Special Educational Needs
REPORT**

**St. Dominic's College
Cabra, Dublin 7
Roll number: 60731F**

Date of inspection: 22 October 2013



**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	21 and 22 October 2013
Inspection activities undertaken <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review of relevant documents • Discussion with principal, deputy principals and teachers • Discussion with special-needs assistants • Interaction with students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Observation of teaching and learning during eight class periods • Examination of students' work • Feedback to principal, deputy principals and teachers

MAIN FINDINGS

- The overall quality of teaching and learning was good, with some very good practice witnessed.
- The resource teaching and learning support allocation of hours is utilised for the purposes intended.
- The school's ethos and declared vision supports inclusion. However, the school's written admissions policy does not fully reflect the school's commitment to inclusive practices.
- Teacher knowledge of, and care for, students is a significant school strength.
- Senior management and the special educational needs (SEN) team have a clear understanding of their role and their leadership supports the inclusive practices undertaken in the school.
- Incoming students are placed in lower and upper bands based on the information which is gathered at entry and initial test results: however the school's strategy of ability grouping, especially for junior cycle students, requires review.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- The school should develop an assessment strategy for literacy and numeracy as part of a whole-school approach.
- The school should review its current ability grouping practices and consider the many benefits of mixed-ability grouping for all students, especially for junior cycle students.
- The school should review the admissions policy in order to better reflect the school's commitment to inclusion as witnessed during the course of the inspection.
- The individual education planning (IEP) process should be further developed.

INTRODUCTION

St. Dominic's College is an all-girls secondary school and member of the Le Cheile Schools Trust. Current enrolment is 875 girls. The school offers a broad curriculum including the Junior Certificate, Transition Year programme, the established Leaving Certificate, the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme and the Leaving Certificate Applied programme.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- The overall quality of teaching and learning was good with some very good practice witnessed. Good use was made of the available resources including the whiteboard and information and communication technology (ICT). Best practice was observed where appropriately chosen visual images and video clips were used to clarify complex concepts.
- Teacher-led instruction was the dominant methodology. Best practice was observed where teacher-led instruction was well balanced with student input and active learning methodologies were central to lesson delivery.
- The good practice of sharing the intended learning outcomes with the students at the outset and reinforcing them during and at the end of the lesson was observed in most of the lessons. This practice provided a clear focus for students and the teacher.
- Direct instruction in literacy and numeracy, and subject support is provided to students with additional learning needs. The school is commended for initiating a range of literacy interventions including a book in the bag strategy, punctuation action plan and a focus on subject-related vocabulary.
- Strategies to promote numeracy are not as advanced as those for literacy. It is recommended that the school develop an assessment strategy for literacy and numeracy as part of a whole-school approach. This would guide the identification of students in need of interventions and the monitoring of progress.
- Support teachers were caring and patient in both their words and actions. Students were well-behaved and cooperative, and appreciative of the support given by teachers.
- Lessons observed were well structured. Where appropriate, lessons began with homework correction and an examination of students' copybooks showed that work was regularly corrected. Some teachers engaged in oral formative correction when discussing work with individuals. Examples of written formative correction were seen in only a few lessons.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- There is a positive whole-school focus on inclusion for all students and they 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 resource teaching and learning support allocation of hours is utilised for the purposes intended. A range of needs is identified in the school including students with low-incidence and high-incidence disabilities, as well as students with low achievement in literacy and numeracy.

- The school's special-needs assistants (SNAs) are flexibly deployed. They have accessed relevant training. They know the students well and are conscious of their roles in supporting curriculum access and promoting independence.
- The school recognises and engages with continuing professional development as a means of responding to identified needs and to promoting school improvement.
- Two appropriately-qualified teachers, efficiently organise and monitor the provision, and provide advice and support to staff. Management provides positive support to the team. A strong culture of teamwork, collaboration and professional support is evident.
- Class placement for junior cycle students is determined by the information which is gathered at entry and initial test results. Incoming students are placed in three bands with most students with assessed special educational needs placed in the two lower bands. It is recommended that the school review its current ability grouping practices and, in particular, consider the many benefits of mixed-ability grouping for all students.
- The school's admission policy is presented clearly and outlines in detail the procedures involved. However, it does not fully reflect the school's commitment to inclusive practice as witnessed during the course of the inspection. It is recommended that the admissions policy be reviewed.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- The SEN policy provides an accurate description of the provision and contains useful information for the whole school community regarding inclusive practices.
- Resources and student files are stored securely and can be accessed as appropriate.
- Files on individual students are developed and teaching staff and SNAs are made aware, in a timely manner, of the needs and strengths of students newly enrolled in the school.
- Planning and preparation at whole-school and individual teacher level was variable. To further promote consistency a common school-designed planning template should be used which focuses on learning objectives and recording outcomes as well as noting content and learning activities. This will facilitate the tracking of student progress and act as a record of attainment to inform future planning.
- A comprehensive transfer programme assists the induction and orientation of incoming students and their parents. Timely liaison with, and information gathering from feeder schools, combined with school based initial assessments inform the planning for students with SEN.
- In consultation with the local National Educational Psychological Service psychologist, the school adopts a systematic approach to arranging reasonable accommodation in certificate examinations. Students are facilitated, where possible, in becoming familiar with the relevant accommodation provided.
- The IEP process for students with low incidence special educational needs requires further development to include, the writing of specific targets which are measurable, realistic and time-bound, and the involvement of mainstream teachers in identifying and supporting targets. The developed process should be outlined in the SEN policy. In planning mainstream lessons, teachers should be aware of individual student needs, differentiate instruction, and support student IEP goals as appropriate.

The draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation were discussed with the principal, deputy principals and teachers of SEN at the conclusion of the evaluation. The board of management of the school was given an opportunity to comment on the findings and recommendations of the report; the board chose to accept the report without response.