

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection of Special Educational Needs
REPORT

St. Joseph's Secondary School
Stanhope Street, Dublin 7
Roll number: 60843Q

Date of inspection: 20 February 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	20 and 21 February 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 8 class periods• Examination of students' work• Feedback to principal and teachers

MAIN FINDINGS

- The quality of teaching and learning in all observed lessons was very good.
- Senior management is supportive of the special educational needs (SEN) team and is committed to providing an inclusive education for all.
- Allocated resources are used for the purposes intended.
- Students have access to a full and balanced curriculum.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- It is recommended that the school develop whole-school policies on homework, assessment, and the support of exceptionally able students.
- When reviewed, the role and responsibilities of the board of management (BOM) and information on the role of the subject teachers in providing inclusive instruction should be included in the SEN policy document.
- It is recommended that behaviour plans be developed for mainstream students with more complex needs.
- A student register should be established to track the resources provided, the personnel assigned, and the outcomes for the students.
- It is recommended that the school conduct an audit of the staff's professional development needs to support mixed-ability teaching and the full inclusion of students with special educational needs.
- It is recommended that meetings of the SEN team be formally timetabled on a regular basis.

INTRODUCTION

St. Joseph's Secondary School is a voluntary secondary school which operates under the patronage of the Religious Sisters of Charity. It has a current enrolment of 280 girls. The school 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 a Junior Certificate programme, Transition Year (TY) programme, Leaving Certificate and Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programmes.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- The quality of teaching and learning was very good. Eight lessons were observed over the course of the two-day inspection. They ranged in size from one-to-one withdrawal to whole-class teaching groups and spanned both junior and senior cycle programmes. The lessons ranged in focus from the development of literacy and numeracy skills to subject specific assistance in Mathematics, Gaeilge, Home Economics and Art.
- Students' achievements were in keeping with their ability, and there was an appropriate balance between the amount of time spent on priority needs and time spent on accessing the wider curriculum.
- Lessons were purposeful, well planned and paced. Mutual respect between teachers and students was evident. Good use of direct and global questioning was made.
- Teachers used praise to affirm students' efforts, engendering a positive learning environment. Teachers demonstrated a thorough knowledge of their students with special educational needs.
- Some lessons began and concluded with an outline of the objectives of the lesson and the desired learning outcomes for the students. Such practices are commended and ongoing examination on how best to extend these to all lessons is encouraged. Concentration on keywords and the development of students' vocabulary was a common feature of all language lessons observed.
- Teacher-led discussion was the dominant methodology. The school is encouraged to explore a wider variety of teaching strategies to include graphic organisers, text highlighting and memory aids. These visual frameworks can offer opportunities for co-operative practice, self-assessment and self-evaluation.
- It is recommended that an audit of staff professional development needs in the area of students with special educational needs be undertaken. The school should consider facilitating professional development for all mainstream staff in a number of areas, such as differentiation, behaviour management and specific methodologies to support learners with special educational needs. The Special Educational Support Service (www.sess.ie) may be able to support the school in this regard.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- The school's admission policy and enrolment practices are open and inclusive. The school gathers relevant information on students at entry from parents and feeder schools, and all students sit standardised tests of literacy and numeracy. The school should develop a whole-school assessment policy.

- The school's allocation for provision for students with special educational needs is used effectively for the purposes intended. To further develop the quality of provision and whole-school support it is recommended that the school maintain a detailed register of students with special educational needs. This register should include those students in receipt of support, their learning needs, the hours allocated, the manner in which these hours are used, the teaching and non-teaching staff involved and the progress students make.
- The school's four well-qualified fulltime special needs assistants (SNAs) are appropriately deployed in accordance with Department guidelines. Their effective non-teaching duties and contributions are acknowledged by all school staff and students.
- Interventions to support identified students usually focus on literacy and numeracy needs, mainstream subject assistance and life skills. It is recommended that the school develop support and interventions for students who may present with social, emotional or behavioural difficulties. Individual behaviour plans created and maintained, in consultation with teachers, students and parents, will support this work.
- Support offered is flexible, responsive, inclusive and student-focused. It includes student withdrawal, small-group withdrawal and team teaching. The school is encouraged to extend the good practice of team teaching.
- A wide range of co-curricular and extracurricular activities is open to all students and ensures all students are included in all aspects of school life.
- The co-ordinator of SEN efficiently fulfils her significant responsibilities in organising and monitoring the provisions. She leads a team of four teachers. Collaborative links are maintained with management, the guidance counsellor, parents, and with relevant external agencies.
- Classes in the school are formed on the basis of mixed ability in first year. Setting occurs in Mathematics after Christmas in first year and in English and Irish in second year, but concurrent timetabling for these subjects facilitates movement between levels. Students with exemptions from Gaelge receive additional support at the time of the Gaelge lesson. Similar practices occur for students who do not pursue the study of a modern language.
- Whilst the school is alert to a range of needs, it is recommended that it gives attention in terms of policy, selection and provision for the needs of students who are deemed exceptionally able.
- The special educational needs policy appropriately reflects the numerous inclusive practices in which the school engages. When reviewed, it is recommended that the role of the board of management (BOM) and the mainstream teacher's role be included in the SEN policy document.
- While the SEN team meet on an informal basis monthly, it is recommended that meetings of the SEN team be formally timetabled on a regular basis, that agendas be drawn up and minutes of all decisions taken recorded and provided to management.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- The school engages in a range of activities that support effective planning and preparation.

- Learning profiles are developed for each student with additional learning needs and reviewed regularly by the SEN co-ordinator. Individual Education Plans (IEPs) have been developed for some students with low-incidence disabilities. There is scope for development in some aspects of this process including the writing of specific targets which are measurable, realistic and time-bound, and the involvement of the student in identifying goals where it is feasible and appropriate.
 - A variety of formats were used by teachers to plan and record work completed. Teachers provide regular feedback to the co-ordinator to inform subsequent planning.
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The draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation were discussed with the principal, deputy principal/ and the SEN team 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.