An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Inspection of Special Educational Needs Provision
REPORT

Holy Child Community School
Sallynoggin, County Dublin
Roll number: 91330K

Date of inspection: 26 October 2011
REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING
IN SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

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MAIN FINDINGS

• The overall quality of teaching and learning in all lessons observed was very good.
• Students have access to a full and balanced curriculum.
• The principles of inclusion are reflected in a wide range of practices and policies.
• The school has evolved a flexible range of responses to meet diverse student needs and abilities.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

• When reviewed, the role and responsibilities of the co-ordinator and information on the role of subject teachers in providing inclusive instruction should be included in the special educational needs (SEN) policy document.
• The school should generate a policy to guide the identification, support and monitoring of students who achieve highly in the cognitive assessment set at entry to ensure that each student reaches her or his potential.
• It is recommended that a more detailed individual education and behaviour plan be created for mainstreamed students with more complex needs.
INTRODUCTION

Holy Child Community School is co-educational. The school’s current enrolment of 291 students includes many with a range of diverse abilities and needs. The school participates in the DEIS (Delivering Quality of Opportunity in Schools) programme.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- The quality of teaching and learning in nine observed lessons ranged from very good to excellent. High-quality examples of appropriate methodologies and teaching strategies were seen including active learning, co-operative learning, visual images, and the use of information and communications technology (ICT) and key words.
- An excellent example of team teaching was observed. The two teachers collaborated in both planning and delivering the lesson. Students benefited from increased individualised support. Commendably, the school is endeavouring to extend this good practice.
- Successful differentiation was provided in most classrooms through appropriate modifications to content, delivery of instruction and assessment techniques.
- Lessons were well planned and purposeful in furthering student knowledge and skills. They focused on a variety of learning outcomes covering a range of curriculum areas. Teachers shared the purpose and the learning outcomes of each lesson with their students.
- Teachers were caring, patient and supportive of students in both their words and actions. Their knowledge of individual student needs and abilities was used effectively to create positive learning environments.
- Students were co-operative, and actively engaged in learning. Their oral responses and comments, and their written work, provided substantial evidence of learning.
- A draft literacy policy describes numerous whole-school literacy practices and initiatives. Commendably, it also lists strategies to develop literacy skills in a number of subject areas. This document references a literacy working group with responsibility for developing and implementing a whole-school approach. All students have access to a fine school library which is supported by the local county council.
- A number of students engage in paired reading activities with first year students and the students in the special classes respectively. A few students receive a targeted intervention in basic literacy skills overseen by the school’s educational psychologist.
- The school is planning to focus on numeracy development later in the current school year.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- The school implements an efficient system of gathering relevant information on enrolling students which is used effectively during planning.
- All students have access to a full and balanced curriculum. The school is piloting the Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP) with a small number of students. The school plans to extend the programme to all junior cycle students in recognition of its many benefits.
Most junior cycle classes are of mixed ability including English as recommended in previous inspection reports. Banding assists setting in some subjects particularly in Mathematics. Concurrent timetabling in first year facilitates subject choice and movement.

Senior cycle students with SEN receive support through differentiation in teaching, withdrawal and special needs assistants. Leaving Certificate Applied is an option for senior cycle students.

The school’s SEN team consists of the principal and deputy principal and three qualified resource teachers, one of whom acts as the co-ordinator. The team meets regularly and the minutes of these meetings show the significant roles played by the team, and the co-ordinator in particular, in the organisation and monitoring of the provision.

The school has an SEN policy which provides a good overview of the school’s whole-school approach. It is recommended that the role and responsibilities of the co-ordinator, and information on the role of subject teachers in providing inclusive instruction be added.

A school register clearly documents the use of the school’s allocation of teaching support hours.

The school’s designated unit for students with moderate general learning disabilities is exceptionally well organised and provides a safe, productive learning environment. The students follow a modified curriculum which is appropriate to their individual abilities and needs. Significant efforts are made to include these students in a number of their peers’ activities and in the school community.

Students who are exempt from Irish are timetabled for literacy, numeracy and subject support classes. Students with SEN who study Irish are withdrawn individually or in small groups for support or are supported through team teaching.

Twelve SNAs provide needed support to a range of students in both special and mainstream classes in accordance with Department guidelines. Collaborative working relationships are maintained between SNAs, teaching staff and management.

The cognitive abilities and reading comprehension skills of all students are assessed at entry. Second, third and fourth year students are re-tested in reading to track progress. Diagnostic tests are administered to individual students to identify specific learning needs. This information should be used for the identification and targeting of specific groups of students in the school’s DEIS literacy plan.

The school is currently discussing the development of practices in the assessment and monitoring of progress in mathematics. This should eventually inform the school’s DEIS numeracy plan.

The school applies for reasonable accommodations in state examinations for eligible students and endeavours to provide these accommodations in school exams.

With the support of management, staff have successfully engaged in a variety of relevant professional development opportunities.

While the school celebrates the academic, athletic and artistic attainments of students, it does not deliberately monitor students who achieve highly on the entry assessments to ensure that they reach their potential. This is an area for development.
PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- Teachers engage in a range of good practices to plan instruction for students with additional needs.

- The SEN co-ordinator prepares a profile of each student with SEN. Profiles are accessible to teachers to guide planning for inclusive instruction. However, mainstreamed students with more complex needs require a more detailed individual education and behaviour plan to support their learning.

- Support teachers liaise with subject teachers and the concerned students to plan the aims and objectives of the resource classes. Instruction generally consists of pre-teaching, skill development and revision work. Teachers keep records of work completed.

- Subject teachers produce satisfactory long and short-term plans listing learning objectives, topics to be covered and resources to be used.

- A range of general information about teaching students with low and high incidence SEN is provided to all teachers to inform their planning.

The draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation were discussed with the principal and resource teachers 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 inspection, and the response of the board will be found in the appendix to this report.

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Appendix

School response to the report

Submitted by the Board of Management

Area 1: Observations on the content of the inspection report

- Very constructive and practical recommendations.

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 school is now beginning to address the issue of “generating a policy to guide the identification, support and monitoring of students who achieve highly in the cognitive assessment set at entry to ensure that each student reaches her or his potential.”