

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**

**Department of Education and Skills**

**Subject Inspection of Special Educational Needs  
REPORT**

**Our Lady of Mercy College,  
Beaumont, Dublin 9.  
Roll number: 60870T**

**Date of inspection: 8 April 2014**



**AN ROINN | DEPARTMENT OF  
OIDEACHAIS | EDUCATION  
AGUS SCILEANNA | AND SKILLS**

**REPORT  
ON  
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL  
NEEDS**

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**INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION**

<b>Dates of inspection</b>	<b>7 and 8 April 2014</b>
<b>Inspection activities undertaken</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Review of relevant documents</li><li>• Discussion with principal, deputy principal and special educational needs teachers</li><li>• Discussion with special-needs assistants</li><li>• Interaction with students</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Observation of teaching and learning during seven class periods</li><li>• Examination of students' work</li><li>• Feedback to principal, deputy principal and special educational needs co-ordinator</li></ul>

**MAIN FINDINGS**

- The overall quality of teaching and learning was good, with some very good practice witnessed.
- The school engages in a range of good practices to promote literacy and numeracy development.
- There are currently too many teachers involved in resource teaching.
- 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.
- Some teachers successfully involved their students in the process of assessment but there is scope for further use of assessment for learning strategies.
- A comprehensive transition programme assists the induction of incoming students and their parents.

**MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 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 school should endeavour to minimise the number of teachers engaged in resource teaching and create a core resource teaching team to better facilitate planning and coordination.
- The school should develop a policy to guide the identification, support and monitoring of all students who are exceptionally able or talented to ensure that they achieve their potential.
- When reviewed, the roles and responsibilities of all relevant personnel, including management, parents and students, should be included in the special educational needs (SEN) policy.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Our Lady of Mercy College, Beaumont is a Voluntary Catholic Secondary School, under the trusteeship of CEIST. The school offers the Junior Certificate, Transition Year, Leaving Certificate and Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme.

## **TEACHING AND LEARNING**

- The overall quality of teaching and learning was good with some very good practice witnessed. A positive working atmosphere was present in each lesson. Consistent attempts to keep the learning relevant to the student's lives served to engage and motivate students.
- Many teachers began lessons by clearly stating the expected learning outcomes, sharing the purpose of the lesson with the students and making links with previous learning. A minority of teachers used the outcomes to summarise learning and to promote student self-evaluation with direct questions. There is scope for further use of assessment for learning strategies in all lessons.
- Students were most engaged when teachers used active learning and co-operative learning strategies. Less satisfactory lessons were characterised by teacher-dominated discussion and insufficient time given for students to ask or answer questions. Student engagement could be further enhanced through regular participation in collaborative learning tasks and the use of peer learning activities.
- Good relations and mutual respect was observed between teachers and students. Students were co-operative and well-behaved. Students' efforts were praised and affirmed as teachers endeavoured to build confidence and strengthen student skills.
- Team teaching is provided as a support in some subject classes. The school is encouraged to further extend this good practice. Team teaching promotes collaborative planning and the sharing of good practice and can support the school's capacity for inclusive instruction.
- The school is to be commended for its efforts to progress the development of literacy and numeracy skills across the school through a range of co-ordinated initiatives. Enrolling students are administered standardised literacy and numeracy assessments. The school's plans to re-assess students in literacy and numeracy skills will support efforts to monitor progress and evaluate interventions.

## **SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT**

- The school's ethos and declared vision supports inclusion. However, the school should review the admissions policy in order to better reflect the inclusive nature of the practices witnessed during the course of the inspection.
- Students who are exempt from the study of Irish or a modern foreign language receive support at those times. Additional small class groupings are created in Irish, English and

Mathematics. This arrangement ensures targeted support for these students in these core subjects while allowing full access to a broad and balanced curriculum with their peers.

- The school has a well-established and efficient system of gathering student information through contact with the feeder primary schools, parents and external professionals. Enrolling students' standardised test results as well as the information gathered from their primary schools helps to identify students with additional needs and to inform planning.
- The school's resource teaching and learning support allocation of hours is utilised appropriately to meet identified student needs. However, the number of teachers currently deployed to provide additional support for learning to SEN students is too large. The school should reduce the number of teachers engaged in resource teaching and create a core resource teaching team to better facilitate planning and coordination.
- The school employs two fulltime special-needs assistants. They are effective in helping their students access the curriculum and in promoting their independence.
- At the time of the evaluation, the college did not have a policy in place to identify and support students who are exceptionally able. Nonetheless, this has been identified as an area for development by the management. The school should develop a policy outlining the supports and processes used to identify these students and to monitor their achievement against their potential.
- Some relevant continuous professional development has been provided for staff, but the school is advised to continually build capacity in this area by pro-actively auditing the staff's training needs and engaging with the Special Education Support Service.

#### **PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

- The quality of the co-ordination of the planning and provision for students with special educational needs is good. The co-ordinating teachers provide ongoing support and advice to resource and mainstream teachers and work closely with management.
- The SEN policy clearly outlines the vision, rationale and aims of the provision. The policy includes information on the organisation of the provision, the procedures and criteria for selection and how each student receives support. When next reviewed the roles and responsibilities of all relevant personnel, including management, parents and students, should be included.
- Planning and provision is guided appropriately by the individual needs of students with reference to psychological assessment report recommendations, information provided by parents, subject teachers, SEN co-ordinating teachers and requests by students.
- Resource teachers plan in a variety of ways and many students attend more than one resource teacher. To ensure that there is a consistent approach to planning, a school-designed planning template for resource teachers should be developed that would facilitate the more detailed recording of student learning and progress towards learning targets. These records should be provided at regular intervals to the SEN co-ordinators and stored in each student's file and be available to inform future planning.

- The school has successfully engaged in the individual planning process. In the interests of best practice, targets should be specific, measurable, attainable, realistic and time-bound.
- The school has nominated literacy and numeracy link teachers who lead whole-school initiatives in these areas. A draft literacy and numeracy policy has been developed which outlines literacy and numeracy strategies across each subject department.

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The draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation were discussed with the principal, deputy principal and a co-ordinating SEN teacher 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.