

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

**Subject Inspection of Special Educational Needs
REPORT**

**McEgan College
Macroom, County Cork
Roll number: 71030J**

Date of inspection: 26 September 2011



**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 EDUCATION**

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

Date(s) of inspection	26-27 September 2011
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 nine class periods• Observation of Care and of JCSP meetings.• Examination of students' work• Feedback to principal and teachers

MAIN FINDINGS

- The overall quality of learning and teaching observed during the two-day inspection was good. Teachers' knowledge of, and visible care for, students is a significant strength of the school as is the communication with home and relevant others.
- McEgan College has established a diverse, and suitably flexible, range of responses to meet the diversity of needs presenting. The school strives to be inclusive in both its policies and practices, recognising the interdependence between the promotion of inclusive learning and overall school improvement.
- Senior management have a clear understanding of their role and their leadership supports the inclusive practices and self-review undertaken in the school.
- Policies and practices are student-centred with good lines of communication evident among staff. Continuing professional development is a central feature of the school's improvement agenda and some teachers have shown considerable leadership in this regard.
- Planning, preparation and assessment are well co-ordinated and approached systematically by the school. While there are some areas that merit attention, the overall quality of these aspects of provision is very good.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- The key role of the mainstream teacher requires that ongoing attention is given to building capacity among teachers through formal and informal learning opportunities.
- It is recommended that an overarching policy on inclusion be created so as to best address and respond to the wide range of needs and abilities of students. This could inform, in turn, a review of the school's policies, including its admissions policy.
- Renewed attention to assessment procedures, including the use of case studies, work samples and other data to track progress is recommended.

INTRODUCTION

McEgan College operates under the patronage of County Cork Vocational Educational Committee and is one of three post-primary schools in Macroom. Student enrolment figures have increased in recent years and the school participates in the Delivering of Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) action plan.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- A total of nine lessons were observed. Lessons focused on a range of learning outcomes including the development of literacy and numeracy skills, and a range of curriculum areas including English, Mathematics, Irish, Science and French.
- Classes ranged in size from small group withdrawal to whole-class teaching and team-teaching. The school has been to the fore in successfully promoting team-teaching where two teachers work in the classroom at the same time.
- The overall quality of teaching and learning was good, with some very good practice witnessed. In all lessons teachers and students enjoyed good working relations which supported learning through individual and, on occasions, collaborative practices.
- Teacher's knowledge of individual students and the course content were used effectively to create positive learning environments. Best practice saw teachers engage and motivate students in their learning through a combination of effective questioning, structured activities which held students accountable for their learning, and focused feedback.
- Differentiation to support student learning was seen in some of the lessons taught to whole-class groups. In the classes formed by small group withdrawal, teachers took full advantage of the opportunity to provide individualised instruction, including wise use of Information Communication Technology (ICT). Similarly, team-teaching was effective in meeting individual needs and allowed students to learn together or individually as well as competitively or collaboratively.
- Individualised instruction was also facilitated in some of the larger classes by teachers' purposeful use of seating arrangements and by facilitating cooperative learning activities among students. Best practice also saw the intentional framing by teachers of lower and higher order questions to commence and sustain student inquiry and interest.
- It is recommended that teachers, possibly through their subject departments, continue to focus on how they can best support learning by the quality of the questions they frame, the activities they facilitate in class and the feedback they provide during and after the activity.
- As seen in some lessons, the good use of graphic organisers and of peer support merits discussion at whole-staff level, as well as the various configurations associated with team-teaching.
- Teachers recognise the interplay between academic progress and social-emotional development among their students. The increasingly wide range of abilities presenting is

welcomed by the school and the school is well placed to provide an equally wide repertoire of teacher-led responses.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- McEgan College strives to be inclusive in both its policies and practices, recognising the interdependence between the promotion of inclusive learning and overall school improvement.
- The school's Code of Behaviour promotes good behaviour and identifies ways that can support positive behaviour and promote meaningful inclusion for all students. The school's admissions policy does not always capture the inclusive nature of the practices witnessed and is dated in parts. It would benefit from being reviewed by the board of management in the near future and any review should take cognisance of, and make reference to, the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act, 2004.
- There are very good timetabling practices in place which allow for a systematic and effective use of the 126 additional hours allocated. Good internal lines of communication, supported by a collaborative and supportive culture, were clearly evident during the course of the inspection. The school has been to the fore at national and local level in advancing inclusive delivery models such as team-teaching and the Irish Vocational Educational Authority (IVEA)-led Instructional Leadership Programme.
- The key role of the mainstream teacher requires ongoing attention being given to building capacity among teachers through formal and informal professional learning opportunities. This point is particularly important given the increase in the diversity of students' needs and abilities, as exemplified by the new resource area for students with autistic spectrum disorder (ASD) and by the recognition of students who are deemed exceptionally able.
- Student access to the full curriculum is facilitated by the school's flexible approach, though there is a need to ensure that exemptions from Irish are decoupled from an automatic non-engagement with modern languages.
- Students' engagement, achievements and attainments are communicated home on a regular basis. Extracurricular activities are open to all which allow fellow students to support inclusive actions. In light of this informal collaboration, more formal peer support, such as paired-reading and other similar activities, merit consideration.
- Policies are in place relating to assessment, including homework policies, retesting of literacy, DEIS planning documents and reasonable accommodation for certificate examinations (RACE). The focus on student progress ensures that all additional provision is coordinated in an efficient and effective manner.
- As discussed when giving feedback to teachers and senior management, there are some areas of assessment that require attention including the assessment of numeracy development, and the reassessment of students' cognitive ability as they enter senior cycle. More nuanced and intermediate assessment practices such as work samples, classroom observation schedules and case studies should also now be considered as should the manner in which such findings can be disseminated to colleagues so as to inform teaching and improve learning.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- Provision is very well coordinated by a qualified and dedicated staff member who is ably assisted by senior management, other teaching colleagues and by the good work of the appointed special needs assistants. Contact is made with the relevant primary schools and this work combined with good relationships with personnel from external agencies adds to the quality of planning and preparation.
- Individual files are constructed and teaching staff and special needs assistants are made aware, in a timely and exemplary manner, of the needs and strengths of students newly enrolled in the school. The good work of the special needs assistants is duly noted by this report.
- Ongoing engagement with individualised planning for students with low-incidence needs will add further to the quality of this work as will the adaptation of existing practices to create a student register. This register can facilitate the implementation and impact of all additional hours allocated to individuals or in the form of learning support provision.
- Future planning should give consideration to forming an overarching policy on inclusion so as to best address and respond to the diversity of needs and abilities of students. Such a policy could emerge from collating existing policies and once formed can be used to stress test other policies and practices in relation to the school's understanding of inclusion, including the existing practices associated with mentoring and inducting new teachers or teachers returning to the school. The formation of such a policy will also serve school review well as it will highlight areas that may not have attracted as much attention as others to date.

The draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation were discussed with the principal, deputy principal and subject 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 report; a response was not received from the board.

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