Subject Inspection of Special Educational Needs
REPORT

St David’s Holy Faith Secondary School
Greystones, County Wicklow
Roll number: 61830M

Date of inspection: 09 November 2012
REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dates of inspection</th>
<th>08 &amp; 09 November 2012</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inspection activities undertaken</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Review of relevant documents</td>
<td>• Observation of teaching and learning during six lessons plus a number of additional student support settings.</td>
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<td>• Discussion with principal and teachers</td>
<td>• Examination of students’ work</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Interaction with students</td>
<td>• Feedback to principal and teachers</td>
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</tbody>
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MAIN FINDINGS

• The teaching observed in six lessons was of good quality.

• St David’s commitment to inclusion is reflected in a number of policies and practices.

• The school has actively engaged in a number of literacy initiatives and has identified literacy improvement as an area for whole-school development.

• Literacy, numeracy and subject-specific learning support are provided through resource classes and co-operative teaching.

• There is significant variation in the quality of planning by resource teachers.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

• It is recommended that the school review and further develop existing assessment practices.

• School management should create a core resource teaching team and factor all of the known resource hours into the school timetable when the timetable is being created.

• School management should optimise the provision for students with identified learning needs who are exempt from the study of Irish by ensuring that they are not timetabled for support with students who do not have such needs.

• The individual planning process should be revised and a common template for planning resource teaching should be developed and implemented.
INTRODUCTION
St David’s Holy Faith is a co-educational, voluntary secondary school under the Le Chéile Catholic Schools Trust. The school aims to maintain a Christian environment where teachers and students can learn and work together in an atmosphere of co-operation and mutual trust. The current student population of 532 includes students with a range of abilities from diverse social backgrounds.

TEACHING AND LEARNING
- The teaching observed in six lessons was of good quality overall. These lessons were well planned and purposeful. The teachers shared the learning outcomes with their students at the start and referenced them during and at the end of the lesson. Direct instruction was the predominant methodology used to introduce new information and develop specific skills.
- Both the process and the content of lessons were effectively differentiated to suit individual student needs. Clear instructions and explanations were given. Students were successfully encouraged to both answer and ask relevant questions. Visual images including mind maps were used to reinforce learning. Some lessons could be enhanced with more active and discovery learning and the use of concrete materials.
- Lessons were well managed. Teachers were caring, patient and inclusive in their interactions with students. Students were well behaved, co-operative and appreciative of the support given by teachers.
- A range of summative and formative practices are used to assess academic progress. Data on student cognitive and literacy skills is gathered but there is no retesting protocol in place and the instruments in use need to be reviewed. It is recommended that the school further develop practice over time to focus more on measuring learning outcomes and tracking and recording progress in literacy and numeracy.
- The school has actively engaged in a number of literacy initiatives and has identified literacy improvement across the whole school as an area for ongoing development. Plans are in place to participate in a literacy pilot project. The school intends to target numeracy in the future.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL RESOURCE
- St David’s commitment to inclusion is reflected in a number of policies and practices. The enrolment policy is open and inclusive, and sets out clear procedures. The draft special educational needs (SEN) policy outlines a whole-school approach. The organisation of the provision is described clearly, and the roles and responsibilities of the staff and management are detailed. This policy should be finalised and submitted to the board of management for ratification.
- Two teachers work closely with the guidance counsellor and senior management to effectively co-ordinate the provision. Their significant responsibilities are outlined in the SEN policy.
- The allocated hours for resource and learning support are used appropriately. However, at the time of the evaluation, fourteen teachers were deployed for resource teaching with eight timetabled for only two or three classes per week. To facilitate collaborative planning and a co-ordinated approach to meet the needs of the students, school management should create a core resource teaching team consisting of the two SEN co-ordinators and four to six teachers. In consultation with the co-ordinators, all of the
known resource hours should be factored into the school timetable when the timetable is being created.

- Literacy, numeracy and subject support for students is provided through co-operative teaching and resource classes which take place when students are either exempt from the study of Irish or are withdrawn from lessons selected in consultation with the concerned teachers, the students and their parents. Additional teachers are timetabled for in-class support in some lessons and to enable the formation of smaller English and mathematics classes in second to sixth year.

- There are currently thirteen students with autistic spectrum disorders (ASD) enrolled in the school. These students are fully included into school life and there is some evidence that they have made academic and social progress. These students have very specific needs which should be catered for within the context of their educational programmes. The school is advised to provide information in the SEN policy as to how the autism-specific needs of these students are met.

- There are a number of students who are exempt from the study of Irish but who do not have any identified learning or language support needs. When not attending Irish, these students are frequently timetabled for classes with students who do have identified needs. Three of these classes were visited. There was no evidence of any planned teaching. Instead, the students were supervised by subject specialists who provided individual help on request to the students who were working independently. Management should optimize the provision by not grouping these students together and ensuring that those with identified needs receive targeted interventions during this time.

**Planning and Preparation**

- The SEN co-ordinators prepare extensive individual profiles for every student who accesses learning support or resource teaching. This is time-consuming and for many students unnecessary. A briefer template should be devised to summarise student strengths, needs and learning goals. This will be sufficient for resource teachers to use in their planning. More detailed individual education plans should be reserved for students with more complex needs.

- There is significant variation in the quality of planning by resource teachers. To harmonise planning across the school and to ensure it targets individual student needs, the school should develop a simple planning template that allows teachers to record the goals, learning outcomes, content, resources, and evaluation of each lesson. This will facilitate the tracking of student progress and act as a record of attainment. These records should be stored in each student’s file and be available to inform future planning.

- Subject teachers receive support from the SEN co-ordinators in a variety of ways including information provided through the school’s shared drive. A whole-school planning day has been scheduled and will include the further development of inclusive teaching practices within subject planning.

- An SEN office houses a work area for the co-ordinators and secure storage for student files as well as a range of resources for the teaching staff. Two designated resource rooms are available for teaching small groups and contain a good range of resource teaching materials.
The draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation were discussed with the principal, deputy principal, guidance counsellor and SEN co-ordinators 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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