

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

**Subject Inspection of Special Educational Needs
REPORT**

**Killina Presentation Secondary School
Rahan, Tullamore, County Offaly
Roll number: 65630B**

Date of inspection: 12 October 2010



**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

SUBJECT INSPECTION REPORT

This report has been written following an evaluation of the provision for students with special educational needs (SEN) in Killina Presentation Secondary School. It presents the findings of an evaluation of the quality of the provision and of the teaching and learning for students with special educational needs and makes recommendations for further development in this area in the school. The evaluation was conducted over two days during which the inspector visited classrooms and observed teaching and learning. The inspector interacted with students and teachers, examined students' work, and had discussions with the teachers. The inspector reviewed school planning documentation and teachers' written preparation. Following the evaluation visit, the inspector provided oral feedback on the outcomes of the evaluation to the principal, the deputy principal and the SEN team. The board of management of the school was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the report, and the response of the board will be found in the appendix of this report.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

Killina Presentation Secondary School is a co-educational, voluntary secondary school under the trusteeship of the Catholic Education an Irish Schools Trust (CEIST). There were 462 students enrolled in the school at the time of the evaluation. The school uses its allocation of 48.5 resource teaching hours proficiently to provide appropriate support for students diagnosed with low and high incidence needs who are enrolled in the mainstream classes. The school also has an allocation of 15.4 teaching hours for students requiring learning support. In addition, the school successfully hosts a unit designated for students with moderate general learning disabilities, which is referred to as the Resource Centre. At the time of the evaluation, the Resource Centre's two classes were operating at capacity with a total enrolment of sixteen students. The centre is staffed with the equivalent of three teaching posts and five full-time special needs assistants.

The school's mission statement declares the school to be an inclusive Christian community aimed at the holistic development of each individual. Overall, there is significant evidence of a whole-school commitment to an inclusive approach to the provision for students with special educational needs. The organisation is suitably flexible and there is regular review of the provision in response to the needs of the students.

The admissions policy of Killina Presentation Secondary School is a practical document which contains a range of pertinent information which helps the parents of prospective applicants to understand the procedures governing enrolment in the school. This policy is consistent with the school's mission statement and with current legislation. It was amended to fully reflect the school's commitment to inclusion, and ratified by the Board of Management in 2009 following a Whole-School Evaluation. There are separate admissions policies outlining procedures regarding the admission and enrolment to the school for students with special educational needs and to the designated unit for students with moderate general learning disabilities. Neither of these two policies gives an implementation date nor a date for review. There is also no evidence in either

policy that they have been ratified by the Board of Management. It is recommended that this be addressed as soon as possible, as it is essential that all school policies be approved by the Board and be scheduled for regular review. It would also be timely to review these policies, especially the SEN policy, which does not reflect the numerous inclusive practices in which the school engages.

The school has a well-established and efficient system of gathering student information through contact with the feeder primary schools, parents and external professionals. Incoming students are assessed in the January prior to entry by teachers from the special educational needs team and the guidance department. The test results and the information gathered inform the creation of mixed-ability classes for first-year students. Setting occurs in English, Mathematics and Irish in second year, but concurrent timetabling for these subjects facilitates movement between levels. This good practice is based on a consideration of the quality of each student's class work and homework records, and on attainment in class tests. All other subjects remain mixed ability throughout the junior cycle.

All students, including those with special educational needs, have access to a broad and balanced curriculum. Support for students with learning difficulties is provided through individual and small group withdrawal, team teaching, and the formation of some smaller classes in some subjects through the timetabling of an extra teacher. A few individuals are placed on a reduced timetable if this is agreed by parents as the best option. Senior cycle students may opt for a Transition Year programme or proceed directly to study the Leaving Certificate or the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme. Provision for senior cycle students consists of individual and small group withdrawal, small classes and team teaching.

All teachers accept responsibility for supporting students with special educational needs and strive to provide inclusive instruction. They are supported by the SEN co-ordinator through the provision of pertinent information regarding students' support needs as well as guidance for teachers providing resource teaching or learning support. The Board of Management funds and facilitates staff in attending relevant professional development courses where appropriate. Teachers have attended for in-service on a number of relevant topics including inclusion, attention deficit hyperactive disorder, autism, testing, and the administration of medication.

Three members of the SEN team have acquired appropriate post-graduate qualifications. One holds a special duties post as the co-ordinator of SEN provision. His wide-ranging duties include identifying students in need of support, organising the provision, and liaising with management, teaching colleagues and relevant external professionals. A second teacher with a special duties post co-ordinates the Resource Centre. The third teacher, who has recently acquired a special education qualification, provides resource teaching. These three teachers, with the co-ordinator of the English Department and the guidance counsellor, make up the SEN team. This team acts collaboratively and professionally to oversee the provision. Plans are in place for the team to meet on a regular basis. This should be at least monthly and minutes of all decisions taken should be recorded

A large number of staff were involved in providing individual and small group learning support or resource teaching at the time of the evaluation. Many of these teachers were timetabled for only one or two weekly sessions. The school reported that being over-quota has led to a small surplus of teaching hours being available for this year only and that these hours have been allocated to resource teaching. Regardless, there are too many teachers involved in support teaching, making collaboration, communication, planning and the sharing of resources difficult and limiting the development of individual expertise through experience and professional

development. The school should endeavour to limit the number of teachers involved in the provision to a smaller core team of teachers willing to devote a proportion of their teaching time to resource teaching, including those with, and those willing to engage in, appropriate training. To facilitate this, it is recommended that the school significantly reduce the number of teachers involved in the provision and that all known additional resource hours be factored into the timetable at the time of its construction. This good practice will facilitate effective, consistent and sustained provision of support for students.

There are several classrooms designated for support teaching, although some teachers prefer to use their own classroom when it is available. Secure storage is utilised for student files which contain confidential information such as medical and psychological reports, IEPs and the results of school testing. A good range of teaching materials and resources including information and communication technology (ICT, e.g. desktops and laptops, data projectors, software) is available and in use to support students. While there is no specific budget, teachers reported a reasonable level of funding was available on request.

The students enrolled in the Resource Centre are divided by age into two base classes, referred to as junior and senior classes. The students receive all of their instruction in the centre, but the school makes sincere efforts to integrate the students into non-academic school activities whenever possible. In a form of reverse integration, Transition Year students come into the Resource Centre twice weekly to work with the students on a variety of projects. The centre has an allocation of teaching hours equivalent to three whole-time teachers. These hours are currently assigned to two base class teachers and to an additional thirteen mainstream subject teachers who provide instruction in a range of curriculum areas such as music, Guidance, ICT, woodwork and cooking. This model which gives students access to subject specialists is good practice. The centre has exceptional facilities, comprising two classrooms, an open community area, a kitchen area, an office, storage rooms, a small room for tuition and woodwork, a sensory room, a laundry room and a toilet suited to the need of students with physical disabilities.

The school has established a pro-active transition planning process for all of the students in the senior cycle section of the Resource Centre. This involves working closely with the students and their families and maintaining good contact with all regional adult support services. Occupational therapists from the local hospital attend the Resource Centre to support the students and their teachers, while speech-language therapy for those students who require it is provided in the hospital. The school is currently developing links with the Special Olympics programme, inspired by the successful participation of a number of students last year.

The seven special needs assistants employed in the school are qualified through a range of appropriate courses. They are experienced and work well as a team, rotating their work by agreement. They meet with the Resource Centre co-ordinator each week. They maintain a clear sense of their purpose in promoting student independence. They report finding the work rewarding and describe the school as a good place to work. Two of the special needs assistants job share the school's one mainstream post, providing care assistance to two students – one with a physical disability and one with autistic spectrum disorder. They work properly under the direction of the mainstream co-ordinator. The other five special needs assistants are assigned to work in the Resource Centre to cater for the wide range of care needs generated by the additional multiple needs, including Down Syndrome, Cerebral Palsy, Hearing Impairment, and characteristics associated with Autistic Spectrum Disorders, with which most of the students present.

The school maintains good working relationships with a number of external professionals including their assigned National Educational Psychological Services psychologist and Special Educational Needs Organiser.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

The two base class teachers in the Resource Centre prepare individual education plans (IEPs) for their students. These plans include background information, a positive student profile noting strengths and priority learning needs in the five areas of literacy, communication, numeracy, motor skills, and Social, Personal and Health Education. There is a positive involvement of parents in the IEP process. Parents meet with the teachers each autumn to discuss the proposed IEPs which the teachers have prepared. The process also provides astutely for the participation of the individual pupil where this is feasible and appropriate. Curriculum planning provides for a developmental and differentiated approach to teaching and learning in relation to the needs of the students. Plans for specific curriculum areas outline aims, objectives and a summary of content, methodologies and cross-curricular approaches. The curriculum for students in the centre has been designed with knowledgeable reference to the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment Guidelines for Teachers of Students with General Learning Disabilities, the Primary Curriculum and the Junior Certificate curriculum. There is a strong emphasis on planning learning outcomes and providing a broad and balanced curriculum. The two base teachers and the other thirteen subject specialists who work in the unit competently plan group instruction with differentiation, identifying the aims and objectives of each lesson.

Current individual learning targets are generic and non-specific in nature, and therefore not measurable. All information gathered on students, including the results of standardised tests and psychological assessments, should inform the process of setting targets so that each is specific, measurable and achievable within a specific time-frame. This will facilitate the measurement of student progress. The school is advised to seek support in developing the capacity of the relevant staff to write purposeful IEP targets. The Special Educational Support Service or the National Educational Psychological Service may be of assistance in this regard.

Good practice is demonstrated in the transition planning for senior students in the Resource Centre. The pro-active process begins at least one year before the students are scheduled to leave the school. Students follow an individualised pre-vocational programme to develop life and social skills to ensure an appropriate level of independence. An appropriate level of contact is maintained with local services that may provide future placements, and parents are involved at all planning stages.

Planning for resource teaching for mainstream students focuses mainly on the development of literacy and numeracy skills and subject support. This work is guided by the advice of the co-ordinator, the students' own identified needs, and the input of subject teachers. A common individual planning template is used to record student background and assessment information, priority learning needs in literacy, numeracy, communication and social skills, and to state long-term aims and short-term objectives and to record daily work. A Weekly Plan template stating learning objectives, teaching strategies, resources and differentiation is used effectively by teachers for individual and group lesson planning.

Individual mainstream subject plans make a reference to and give some advice to teachers regarding planning for students with special educational needs. Subject teams should seek the support of the SEN team in further developing this practice.

Support for students who are gifted is referenced in the school's SEN policy. Current affirmative practices include identifying students with potential for high achievement through formal assessment and notifying teaching staff, so that they can encourage them. In addition, awards are given to recognise academic attainment. These are positive procedures and the school should now consider how the supports for gifted students can be further developed. It is therefore recommended that upcoming planning includes the drafting of a whole-school policy to outline the current practices and the development of additional supports for students who are gifted or have exceptional talents. The publication *Gifted and Talented Pupils: Guidelines for Teachers* (2007), produced jointly by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment and the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment, can provide some assistance in this regard.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Lessons providing subject support for mainstream students were observed in a number of areas, including History, Science, Mathematics, German, English and Construction Studies. These lessons ranged in quality from good to excellent. Lessons focused on revising learning, developing understanding, practising subject-related skills and exam preparation. Teacher-led discussion was the dominant methodology, but teachers also capably used probing questions and promoted self-correction to foster learning. A variety of teaching strategies were also in use, including graphic organisers, text highlighting, memory aids and key words. Literacy lessons featured the development of word attack, spelling and comprehension strategies, while other lessons focused on the development of social and life skills. Positive student-teacher interactions were observed. Teachers were empathetic and supportive and aware of the strengths and needs of their students. Students were co-operative and engaged in their work.

The introduction of team teaching to the school is a positive innovation in the support of students with special educational needs. This successful practice was observed in two separate lessons with two teachers who collaborated in lesson planning, took turns in leading instruction and provided individual and whole-class support as required.

A high quality of teaching and learning was observed in the Resource Centre. Teachers correctly employ visual timetables and schedules to provide guidance and structure for the students. Purposeful curricular activities contribute to fostering a positive learning environment. Good practice was noted in the promotion of independence and the fostering of language and communication, functional, and social skills. Development in literacy and numeracy is also targeted and due attention is given to the practical application of learned skills during the school day. Activity-based learning is carefully structured and concrete materials and visual aids are employed at a level suited to the needs of the students. The teachers have established an excellent level of rapport with students through the use of praise and encouragement. Positive student interaction is facilitated and supported and all activities are skilfully structured. Students in the Resource Centre were happy, well-mannered and well-behaved. They were also motivated, and worked purposefully.

ASSESSMENT

A variety of appropriate assessment modes are employed in the school and a number of these, including self-assessment, peer assessment, teacher observation and checklists, were seen to be used efficiently during the classroom visits. Teachers also keep folders of student work and engage in continuous assessment through monthly class tests and the monitoring of individual class and homework. Resource teachers submit each student's record of work at the end of each term to the co-ordinator for the student file.

Students receive positive and constructive feedback on their progress orally and through written comments on their work and in their school journals and regular school reports. Parents of students with special educational needs attend parent-teacher meetings but can also monitor their children's progress through the daily journal and, when needed, phone calls and visits to the school.

The school administers a cognitive ability test each January as part of its enrolment procedures as well as a standardised test of reading comprehension each September to all first year English classes. Students scoring at or below the 10th percentile on the latter test are also administered an individual test of reading accuracy and comprehension and targeted for learning support. This is good practice. The results of such tests can help a school to establish a baseline to support the monitoring of student progress over their school career through periodic re-testing. However, one of the reading tests in current use is quite dated and both are limited in their age spans, rendering them unsuitable for monitoring progress over any length of time. In addition, there is no stated school policy regarding the re-testing of students. It is recommended therefore that the school review current assessment practices regarding the measuring and monitoring of literacy attainment. The school should also consult the Department's approved list of tests for post-primary schools to identify a test that is more suited to purpose.

Assessment procedures in the Resource Centre are actively under development. The teachers are piloting procedures using behavioural and criterion-referenced checklists to establish baselines in literacy, communication, numeracy, motor skills, and Social, Personal and Health Education so that appropriate IEP targets can be developed, implemented and measured. These targets, as mentioned above, should be specific, measurable and achievable within a specific time-frame.

Applications are made on behalf of students requiring reasonable accommodations in the state examinations. Appropriate accommodations are also provided by the school during school exams. This includes the provision of scribes, readers and special centres.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- Overall, there is significant evidence of a whole-school commitment to an inclusive approach to the provision for students with special educational needs.
- The school has a well-established and efficient system of information gathering through contact with the feeder primary schools, parents and external professionals.
- All students, including those with special educational needs, have access to a broad and balanced curriculum.
- All teachers accept responsibility for supporting students with special educational needs and strive to provide inclusive instruction.
- The school hosts a unit designated for students with moderate general learning disabilities and has a range of inclusive practices in place to support students with special educational needs in the mainstream.
- Two teachers with relevant SEN qualifications hold special duties posts to co-ordinate the mainstream provision and the Resource Centre.
- The school has developed positive planning practices at the individual and group level.
- Overall, the quality of teaching and learning across the school is very good. The introduction of team teaching to the school is a positive innovation in the support of students with SEN.

- A variety of appropriate assessment modes are employed in the school.

As a means of building on these strengths and to address areas for development, the following key recommendations are made:

- It is strongly recommended that the Special Educational Needs (admission) policy and the admission policy for the Resource Centre be reviewed and submitted to the Board of Management for ratification. A date for a future review of each policy should be stated clearly in each document.
- The school should significantly reduce the number of teachers involved in the provision and ensure that all known additional resource hours are factored into the timetable at the time of its construction.
- It is recommended that upcoming planning include the drafting of a whole-school policy to outline the current practices and the development of additional supports for students who are gifted or have exceptional talents.
- It is recommended that the school review current assessment practices regarding the measuring and monitoring of literacy attainment.

Post-evaluation meetings were held with members of the SEN team, the principal and the deputy principal at the conclusion of the evaluation when the draft findings and recommendations of the evaluation were presented and discussed.

Appendix

SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

Submitted by the Board of Management

Area 1 Observations on the content of the inspection report

The Board of Management welcomes this report which confirms the good practice in the school in relation to the education of students with Special Educational Needs both in mainstream classes and in the Resource Centre for students with a Moderate General Learning Disability.

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 recommendations of the report will be implemented over the course of the coming school year.