

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

**Subject Inspection of Special Educational Needs
REPORT**

**Bunclody Vocational College
Bunclody, County Wexford
Roll number: 71620H**

Date of inspection: 27 March 2012



**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

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

Dates of inspection	26 & 27 March 2012
Inspection activities undertaken <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review of relevant documents• Discussion with principal and teachers• Interaction with students	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Observation of teaching and learning during eight class periods• Examination of students' work• Feedback to principal and teachers

MAIN FINDINGS

- The quality of teaching and learning was very good in the observed lessons.
- A whole-school commitment to inclusion guides all practices and procedures.
- The school's allocated resource and learning support hours are used for their intended purpose.
- The staff's capacity to ensure inclusive education and to promote differentiation continues to develop.
- The school has begun a review of current assessment practices.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- The school should endeavour to minimise the number of teachers engaged in resource teaching while developing a small core team of special educational needs (SEN) specialists.
 - The development of whole-school policies and practice to promote and monitor development in literacy and numeracy across the school should be prioritised.
 - It is recommended that the school engage in an individual planning process for students with complex needs.
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INTRODUCTION

Bunclody Vocational College is a co-educational post-primary school under the management of County Wexford Vocational Educational Committee. It caters for 160 students with a range of ability and needs from diverse backgrounds. The school is part of the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) programme which provides supports to students in completing their second-level education and in achieving their full potential.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- Overall the quality of teaching and learning was very good with a positive learning atmosphere in each class room visited.
- Support teachers were affirmative of student efforts and were caring and patient in their interactions. Students engaged well in learning. They were well-behaved and co-operative, completing work as requested and answering when asked.
- Lessons targeted the improvement of literacy or numeracy skills, or provided specific subject support. A key feature was the good practice of setting learning tasks that were appropriate to students' needs and abilities. Differentiation was also seen in questioning and in the levels of responses accepted.
- Learning outcomes were stated orally. Information and instructions given were clear and there was good use of repetition to ensure understanding. Information and communication technology was used effectively to support learning in a number of lessons.
- Good practice in co-teaching was observed in two mathematics lessons. Roles were well co-ordinated and there were good transitions between activities. Teachers reported positive experiences of co-teaching and multiple benefits for both teachers and students. The school is recommended to extend the use of co-teaching as an alternative method of support in other subject areas.
- Class work and homework were set and corrected appropriately. Student work was kept in folders and used productively to monitor progress and to inform planning.
- The school provides training and practice opportunities for students requiring accommodations in examinations.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- The school implements an open admissions policy. The management and the staff demonstrate a commitment to inclusion which guides all practices and procedures.
- The Special Educational Needs and Learning Support Policy provides a good overview of the provision, as well as guidance in related areas. This document should include the role and responsibilities of the special educational needs (SEN) co-ordinator, the date of ratification by the board of management, and a date for review.
- The SEN co-ordinator and a resource teacher deliver the majority of the support teaching. The remainder of the hours is divided between ten subject specialists. The school should endeavour to keep this latter number to a minimum while continuing to develop a small core team of SEN specialists. It is recommended that the SEN team be timetabled to meet weekly.

- The co-ordinator disseminates pertinent information and advice, and provides access to student files and a wide range of resources to support planning and teaching. In addition, the staff diary provides practical information on learning difficulties and teaching strategies.
- The school has a SEN register of students with a range of difficulties and disabilities as well as students targeted for literacy support. To address concerns about confidentiality, the register should use a coding system and list the support and teaching strategies each individual needs.
- Excellent records detail how the school's allocated resource and learning support hours are appropriately used. In line with best practice, the majority of the allocated hours are factored into the school timetable at the time of its initial construction.
- The provision for junior cycle students includes individual and small group support classes, co-teaching in many of the maths lessons, the option of Environmental and Social Studies in place of History and Geography, and a reduced timetable for exceptional students. All first-year classes are of mixed ability. Subject choice and exam level are facilitated from second year with setting. All junior cycle students follow the Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP).
- At senior cycle, students are supported through small-group support classes, co-teaching in foundation level Mathematics and assisted study classes. Students can progress to the established Leaving Certificate or the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme.
- The three special needs assistants (SNAs) are flexibly deployed. They work under the direction of the SEN co-ordinator to support the needs of individual students and to enable their access to the curriculum. Daily diaries are kept to record student progress and behaviour. The SNAs have a clear understanding of their care role and are welcomed in all classrooms.
- The school's capacity to ensure inclusive education and to promote differentiation in all lessons is developing. To this end, teachers have engaged in an impressive range of relevant continuous professional development opportunities.
- Work has begun on drafting whole-school policies and practice to promote and monitor development in literacy and numeracy across the school. This work should be prioritised. Some subject departments have begun to identify ways of promoting literacy and numeracy in their areas but all subject departments should be engaged in this activity. There is already a good range of JCSP literacy and numeracy initiatives in place and these should be built on.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- An effective programme is in place to support the transition of students with SEN.
- The planning of resource teachers is informed by student profiles prepared by the SEN co-ordinator, who is also available for consultation and support. The template used for planning facilitates regular reviews of student progress.
- The school has commendably begun a review of current assessment practices including updating the cognitive and achievement tests used after enrolment. The school has also begun to retest all students in literacy and numeracy in their second and fifth year. These innovations will assist the school in efficiently identifying students in need of support and

facilitate monitoring the progress of all students through junior cycle. The school is encouraged to only consider tests that are appropriate for their intended purpose and to use standard or percentile scores but not reading ages to record progress.

- It is recommended that the school engage in an individual planning process for students with complex needs. Individual plans should be developed in consultation with the students, their parents and their teachers. Targets should be considered to promote learning in areas such as social interaction, life skills and behaviour as well as academics.
- The value of formalising planning to support the transition of low-incidence students to post-school placements merits consideration.

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

Published November 2012.

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 of Bunclody Vocational College values this external evaluation regarding the quality of Learning and Teaching in Special Needs Education in our school. We welcome the fact that this report recognises the many strengths of our school and examples of good practice which include:

- The positive caring and very good learning atmosphere that existed in each class visited.
- The effective programme which is in place to support the transition of students with SEN and the commendable review of current assessment practices..
- The good practice of setting learning tasks that were appropriate to the students learning needs and abilities.
- The effective use of information and communication technology to support learning.
- The good practice of co-teaching and the caring and patient affirmation by teachers of students in their care.
- The appropriate setting and correction of homework.
- The provision of training and practice opportunities for students requiring special accommodation in State examinations.
- The impressive range of relevant continuous professional development opportunities engaged in by teachers.

The Board also wishes to commend the dedication and hard work of our SEN coordinator, SEN teachers and our SNAs. We appreciate and support the sentiment to reduce the number of teachers involved in SEN provision. This has been a goal of the current management of our College however , it is extremely difficult to do in a small school given that permanent and CID teachers also have to have any shortfall in their hours filled. The goal to reduce the number of teachers involved, and to train those who are, has also been hampered by recent cuts in education which are resulting in diminished supports for students. Regrettably we have had to lose the member of staff who was undertaking a Post Graduate Diploma in Special Educational Needs at the time of this inspection due to recent cuts in the Education sector. Cuts to guidance have also had a very negative impact on support for all students not just those with SEN.

The Board nevertheless welcomes the recommendations of this report and commit to considering all recommendations made as a possible blueprint for the further development of SEN provision in our school.

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 following areas have are being and/or have been addressed since the evaluation:

- The school have established a Literacy and Numeracy Committee and is currently engaged in developing a whole school strategy to promote the development of literacy and numeracy across the entire school population. Work is at an advanced stage in this regard.

The date of ratification of the schools current SEN policy is confirmed as March 13th 2012. This policy will be reviewed approximately one year from this date.