

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

**Subject Inspection of Special Educational Needs
REPORT**

**Castlecomer Community School
Castlecomer, County Kilkenny
Roll number: 91360T**

Date of inspection: 26 April 2013



**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	25 and 26 April 2013
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 nine resource and mainstream lessons• Examination of students' work• Feedback to principal and teachers

MAIN FINDINGS

- The overall quality of teaching and learning was good and lessons were purposeful and appropriate to student needs.
- Student engagement in some lessons could be improved and learning enhanced with more active learning methodologies and the use of peer learning activities.
- The special educational needs and autism unit co-ordinators and their respective teams work effectively with the school community to plan and oversee the provision.
- The whole-school community supports the principles of inclusion, equality of access and participation, and respect for diversity and this is reflected in the policies and practices.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- Management should consider the provision of in-class support with a resource teacher working with a subject teacher as an alternative to multiple withdrawal sessions.
 - The special educational needs policy and the autism unit enrolment policy would benefit from further development.
 - A single planning and recording template should be used by resource teachers and the individual planning process for students with autism should be further refined.
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INTRODUCTION

Castlecomer Community School is co-educational with an enrolment of 608. It is established under the joint trusteeship of County Kilkenny Vocational Education Committee and the Presentation Order. The school offers a range of programmes including the Junior Certificate, the Transition Year (TY) programme, the established Leaving Certificate, the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programme and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- The overall quality of teaching and learning was good. Lessons were purposeful and appropriate to student needs. Resource lessons focused on the development of literacy and numeracy skills and targeted support for learning in subject lessons. The two lessons observed in the school's autism unit centred on the development of communication and behaviour, and social and independent living skills specific to students' needs.
- Teachers provided clear and simple instructions and employed differentiated questioning strategies. Repetition and reinforcement exercises consolidated learning. Many teachers effectively used visual and graphic supports to explain and reinforce verbal information. In most lessons, there was a good focus on the acquisition of general and subject-relevant vocabulary for comprehension, reading and writing. Teachers strove to make learning relevant to students.
- Teachers were patient, caring and supportive of their students. Significant individualised support was provided by teachers who gave particular attention to showing students how they could improve their work.
- Lessons featured a good balance of direct instruction, modelling, guided learning and independent work. 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. All teachers should be encouraged to do this.
- The majority of students were engaged in their learning. However, in some lessons student engagement could be improved and learning enhanced with more active learning methodologies and the use of peer learning activities. Although quiet, students were willing, co-operative and well-behaved. They answered and asked questions and completed set work to acceptable standards. They were most appreciative of the help and support given by their teachers.
- A range of assessment practices are in place including formal and informal diagnostic testing. Good practice was seen in the analysis of the data on literacy attainment and cognitive ability collected before entry to first year and the results of literacy and numeracy testing in sixth class to help the school establish a baseline for each student which can be used in monitoring future progress. The school is advised not to retest students too frequently and to use standard scores rather than reading ages to record literacy attainment. The school should now consider how best to gather information on the numeracy skills of incoming first years.
- The school is commended for piloting a strategy to target underachieving second-year students with assessment for learning (AfL) strategies to ensure that they receive constructive guidance about how to improve and how to develop their capacity for self-assessment and self-management.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- The whole-school community supports the principles of inclusion, equality of access and participation, and respect for diversity and this is reflected in the policies and practices. Evidence was provided that all students have equal access to a broad and balanced curriculum and a range of programmes. The allocated resource and learning support hours are used appropriately to provide support for targeted students.
- First-years are grouped in mixed-ability classes and students receiving learning support or resource teaching are withdrawn for tuition. Students who are exempt from the study of Irish attend learning support lessons instead of Irish. In second and third year, students are set in smaller classes for English, Irish and Mathematics. On entering senior cycle, students may continue to be withdrawn for support if necessary. The school should consider the provision of in-class support with a resource teacher working with a subject teacher as an alternative to multiple withdrawal sessions.
- The significant organisational, planning and administrative role of the two teachers who share the responsibility of co-ordinating the provision for students with special educational needs (SEN) is clearly described in the SEN policy. A SEN team consisting of the two co-ordinators and the school's guidance counsellor meets weekly and is well supported by senior management. There is evidence of good collaborative practice in planning and overseeing the provision.
- The SEN policy clearly outlines the vision, rationale and aims of the provision. The policy includes useful information on the organisation of the support, and the roles and responsibilities of staff. A section on the role of the mainstream teachers regarding planning, and the implementation of differentiation instruction and the use of inclusive strategies should be added when the policy is next revised.
- The school successfully hosts a designated unit for the support of six students with autistic spectrum disorders (ASD) and plans to expand the provision in the near future. The unit is well equipped and staffed, and provides a place for individualised instruction as well as respite and relaxation to meet the complex needs of the students. While students attend for some instruction in the unit, they are integrated into mainstream lessons with their peers as much as is possible and practical. Students enrolled in the unit are fully included in extracurricular activities such as the student council and the green school committee. The unit also provides for reverse integration by organising activities before and after school and during break times.. A well-structured transition programme for entering and exiting the school is in place.
- The ASD provision is overseen by a co-ordinator and an ASD team which includes an additional teacher and two special needs assistants (SNAs). The team is timetabled for weekly meetings. The school's ASD enrolment policy briefly but clearly explains the admission procedures. This document could be improved with a description of the work of the unit and the provision, particularly the autism-specific targeted interventions, and information on the roles of all personnel involved in the provision.
- The school has had an allocation of one or more behaviour support teachers since 2008. Currently eighteen students with individual behaviour plans (IEPs) are targeted for support in behaviour management, social skills and literacy development. The presence of this support from the National Behaviour Support Service has had a positive role in the development of a whole-school behaviour approach.

- Two SNAs are assigned to support students in mainstream lessons and two SNAs work in the ASD Unit. The SNAs are very aware of their roles and focus appropriately on promoting student independence and self-regulation. They liaise regularly with the SEN co-ordinators and the teaching staff, and are welcomed in classrooms.
- The school provides a range of positive supports for students who are academically gifted or exceptionally talented. These supports and the processes used to identify these students and to monitor their achievement against their potential should be outlined within the SEN policy or in a separate policy document.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- The SEN co-ordinator provides support for resource teachers to engage in developing an IEP for each student with high-level needs. Planning and provision are reviewed regularly by the SEN team. Resource teachers use a variety of templates and procedures to plan lessons and to record progress. It is recommended that a single planning and recording template be created and utilised across the school.
- The IEP for students enrolled in the ASD unit requires further development including more details regarding how the prioritised targets are to be evaluated. Steps should be taken to ensure IEP targets are measurable to facilitate an assessment function. While it is very positive that priority needs are autism-specific, there must also be space for academic targets as needed. It is recommended that mainstream teachers, SNAs and parents be involved in setting and implementing targets.
- A range of good supports are in place for all teachers. Student profiles, IEPs, teaching strategies, information on special needs and teaching strategies are easily accessible on the school's shared network. With the support of management, teachers have accessed a range of continuous professional development opportunities.
- The school has recently nominated a literacy link teacher and formed a literacy team. The team plans to meet regularly, to collect and analyse relevant data and to propose a whole-school plan for literacy development. The development of this plan should be prioritised. The school already successfully organises an annual literacy promotion for first-year students.

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; a response was not received from the board.