

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**

**Department of Education and Skills**

**Subject Inspection of Special Educational Needs  
REPORT**

**Mercy Secondary School**

**Inchicore, Dublin 8**

**Roll number: 60872A**

**Date of inspection: 27 September 2013**



**AN ROINN | DEPARTMENT OF  
OIDEACHAIS | EDUCATION  
AGUS SCILEANNA | AND SKILLS**

**REPORT  
ON  
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING  
IN SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS**

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**INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION**

<b>Dates of inspection</b>	26 and 27 September 2013
<b>Inspection activities undertaken</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Review of relevant documents</li><li>• Discussion with principal, teachers and special needs assistants</li><li>• Interaction with students</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Observation of teaching and learning during seven class periods</li><li>• Examination of students' work</li><li>• Feedback to principal and two co-ordinators</li></ul>

**MAIN FINDINGS**

- The quality of teaching and learning was either very good or good and many examples of very good practice were observed.
- The provision for students with special educational needs is inclusive, flexible and student-centred and effectively co-ordinated by two well-qualified teachers.
- The school's detailed special educational needs policy gives a good overview of the organisation of the provision.
- All students receiving support have an individual student profile but there are no measurable learning targets set.

**MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS**

- It is recommended that the school create a student register of all students in receipt of resource teaching and address the needs of students for whom English is an additional language.
  - The school should review all assessment practices and develop a whole-school assessment policy.
  - It is recommended that the individual planning process be further developed to include specific and measurable learning targets for each student.
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## **INTRODUCTION**

Mercy Secondary School is an all female, voluntary secondary school with a current enrolment of 181 students. At junior cycle, all students follow the Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP). Senior cycle students can opt for Transition Year or proceed directly to either the Leaving Certificate or the Leaving Certificate Applied. The school participates in the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) programme.

## **TEACHING AND LEARNING**

- The quality of teaching and learning in the observed resource and mainstream lessons was either very good or good and many examples of very good practice were observed. Resource lessons promoted literacy or numeracy development with the former focused on the acquisition of vocabulary and reading comprehension strategies and the development of written language skills. Numeracy lessons provided curriculum-related support by developing targeted skills
- Instruction was planned and purposeful, and appropriate to students' needs. Teachers employed assessment for learning strategies in the sharing of learning outcomes and in the provision of written formative feedback for students. Teachers also guided students in reflecting on their own learning.
- Good questioning techniques were employed by teachers, including skilful probing to expand answers. Differentiation was evident in the level of questioning and in the degree of individualised support. Teachers gave clear instructions and used visual information, repetition and reinforcement successfully to consolidate learning.
- Teachers were patient, and understanding. All student efforts were affirmed and there was an obvious respect for students. Positive attempts were made to keep learning relevant to the students' lives. Students were actively engaged in their learning and, under teacher direction, they partook in co-operative and collaborative learning. Most students actively engaged in their learning and no negative behaviour was observed.
- All teachers have access to a range of information on students with additional learning needs as well as information on specific disabilities. Some whole-school continuous professional development for teachers has been provided on autism and inclusion, and some individual teachers have attended other relevant courses.
- The school has two fulltime and two part-time special needs assistants (SNAs) who work under the direction of management and two special educational needs (SEN) co-ordinators. They correctly focus on helping students to become independent and to self-manage as much as possible. All SNAs keep daily diaries to monitor students and record relevant incidences. They have received some training but would welcome additional opportunities to develop their skills.

## **SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT**

- There is good provision for students with SEN. All junior cycle students partake in a range of JCSP initiatives which support attendance, retention, progression, and literacy and numeracy development. All first year students attend two weekly digital literacy classes in addition to their four English classes. Additional support for students with identified learning needs is provided through small resource classes, team teaching and

withdrawal. Senior cycle students avail of support through resource classes simultaneously timetabled with English and French, or through withdrawal.

- Two well-qualified and capable teachers meet regularly to organise and oversee the provision. These SEN co-ordinators liaise with, and provide support for both resource and mainstream teachers. They work closely with senior management and lead the student profiling and resource planning.
- Overall, the provision for students with special educational needs is inclusive, flexible and student-centred. The general allocation for high incidence is used to timetable an extra teacher which facilitates the creation of smaller classes and parallel resource classes. While most students with low incidence needs receive support, the school must ensure that hours allocated for all students with low incidence needs are used to provide intervention that targets each student's specific individual needs. It is therefore recommended that a register be created to list all students with additional learning needs, the nature of their needs and the kind of support they require, to show clearly how the allocated teaching hours are used to provide targeted support for each student.
- Some students with English as an additional language, who are exempt from Irish or not studying a modern foreign language, are not receiving targeted support. The English language needs of these students should be assessed so that targeted intervention can be planned and delivered. Some students with significant reading difficulties require targeted and structured intervention to support acquisition of basic reading skills. The school should address the specific needs of these students.
- In addition to the data provided by feeder primary schools, the school administers standardised tests to assess the reasoning and literacy skills of entering students. The school should now consider the assessment of numeracy skills through a criterion-referenced maths test. The combined results of these tests should be used as baseline data for planning and monitoring progress. The school is recommended to review all assessment practices in light of student needs to ensure that they support the school's efforts to plan and monitor learning outcomes for all students and, consequently, to develop a whole-school assessment policy to guide and reflect practice.

## **PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

- The school's detailed special educational needs policy gives a good overview of the organisation of the provision. This document provides an accurate description of the roles and responsibilities of all in the school community and declares the school's positive intention to engage with the National Educational Psychological Service's (NEPS) continuum of support.
- All students receiving support have an individual student profile which is initially prepared by the home-school-community liaison co-ordinator and added to by the two SEN co-ordinators. The profile details student difficulties and strengths in a number of areas and identifies priority learning needs. It is recommended that the profile be expanded into an individual education plan with long-term goals and short-term social, behavioural and academic targets, which are specific, measurable and time-bound. It is further recommended that all other students who are receiving support have learning goals or areas for development identified on an individual planning and learning programme (IPLP). This will guide instruction and provide a more accurate means of tracking progress.

- Each resource teacher plans and records on a school template and maintains their own records. Overall, teacher planning is student-centred and driven by identified student needs. The school should ensure that the resource teaching planning template can function as a planning and progress record with intended learning outcomes and an evaluation column should be included to record whether an outcome has been reached, is in progress or has not been attempted.
- The school is currently working with its NEPS psychologist to develop individual behaviour plans for three students. This collaborative approach is good practice.

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The draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation were discussed with the principal and the two 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.