Evaluation of Provision for Pupils with Special Educational Needs

REPORT

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<th>Ainm na scoile / School name</th>
<th>Scoil Mhuire Ar Chnoc na hAoine</th>
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<tr>
<td>Seoladh na scoile / School address</td>
<td>Knocknaheeny</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Cork</td>
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<td>Uimhir rolla / Roll number</td>
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Date of inspection: 31-10-2019
WHAT IS AN EVALUATION OF PROVISION FOR PUPILS WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS?

The Evaluation of Provision for Pupils with Special Educational Needs (SEN) is a focused evaluation of provision for pupils with special educational needs in mainstream primary schools. As this inspection model places a particular emphasis on the quality of learner outcomes for pupils with special educational needs, most of the time spent in the school by inspectors is given to visits to mainstream classes and support settings.

HOW TO READ THIS REPORT

During this inspection, the inspector evaluated provision for pupils with special educational needs under the following headings or areas of enquiry:

1. The quality of learning of pupils with special educational needs
2. The quality of teaching of pupils with special educational needs
3. The management and use of resources received to support pupils with special educational needs

Inspectors describe the quality of each of these areas using the Inspectorate’s quality continuum, which is shown on the final page of this report. The quality continuum provides examples of the language used by inspectors when evaluating and describing the quality of the school’s provision in each area.

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.

CHILD PROTECTION

During the inspection visit, the following checks in relation to the school’s child protection procedures were conducted:

1. The name of the DLP and the Child Safeguarding Statement are prominently displayed near the main entrance to the school.
2. The Child Safeguarding Statement has been ratified by the board and includes an annual review and a risk assessment.
3. All teachers visited reported that they have read the Child Safeguarding Statement and that they are aware of their responsibilities as mandated persons.

The school met the requirements in relation to each of the checks above.
Evaluation of Provision for Pupils with Special Educational Needs

Date of inspection  17-10-2019

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<th>Inspection activities undertaken</th>
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<td>Discussion with principal and teachers</td>
<td>Analysis of parent questionnaires</td>
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<tr>
<td>Meeting with SEN team</td>
<td>Observation of teaching and learning</td>
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<td>Meeting with SNAs</td>
<td>Examination of pupils’ work</td>
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<td>Review of relevant documents</td>
<td>Interaction with pupils</td>
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<tr>
<td>Analysis of parent questionnaires</td>
<td>Pupil group discussion</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Feedback to principal and teachers</td>
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SCHOOL CONTEXT
Scoil Mhuire is an urban, Catholic, coeducational primary school located in Knocknaheeny on the northern side of Cork city. The school participates in Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS), the action plan of the Department of Education and Skills for educational inclusion. At the time of the evaluation, there were 257 pupils enrolled. Staffing includes an administrative principal, thirteen mainstream class teachers, ten special education teachers, a behaviour support teacher and a home-school-community liaison teacher. There are also eight whole-time equivalent special needs assistant posts in the school and one part-time post. The school has a special class for pupils with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), a class for pupils with mild general learning difficulties and an early-start class for preschool pupils. The early start class was not included in this evaluation.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

FINDINGS
- The quality of learning of pupils with special educational needs (SEN) observed during the evaluation during was good. There is scope to further develop the approach to the longitudinal monitoring and recording of pupils’ progress, especially for pupils with the greatest levels of need.
- The teaching observed throughout the school was of a high quality; good examples of monitoring the impact of some interventions on the learning outcomes of pupils were noted.
- Pupils were observed to enjoy their lessons and learning and they commented very positively on the support they receive; scope to develop approaches to inclusion were observed in some settings.
- Teachers have engaged both individually and collectively in a good range of continuous professional development; mechanisms to formally share the range of experience and expertise amongst the SEN team would enhance provision.
- Detailed and comprehensive policies to guide and structure the provision of support for pupils are in place.

RECOMMENDATIONS
- The school should align its approach to individual planning and recording of progress more closely to the structure and content of the student support files in the continuum of support process.
- The impact of the range of approaches employed to team teaching on pupils with the greatest levels of need should be systematically monitored and recorded.
• The whole-school structures in place to promote a more inclusive educational experience for pupils within the special class for mild general learning difficulties should be further developed.
• The mechanisms in place to maximise the impact of individual teachers’ experience and expertise on teachers’ collective practice should be extended.
• The school should review the sections of the admissions policy dealing with the enrolment of pupils with SEN and admission to the special class for pupils with ASD to ensure that they are compliant with the terms of the Department of Education and Skills Circular 13/2017.

DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. THE QUALITY OF LEARNING OF PUPILS WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS
The quality of learning of pupils with SEN observed during the evaluation was good. The pupils engaged enthusiastically in a broad range of activities that were generally well structured and were targeted at enhancing learning outcomes, particularly in aspects of literacy, numeracy and social skills. They displayed emerging understanding of key skills and content areas, which were consistent with the learning targets established for them in individual and group education plans. In mainstream classes, support settings and special classes, pupils were supported and challenged through respectful and positive interactions. In the class for ASD, pupils were observed to be engaging positively in a range of appropriate learning activities. Regular and beneficial links have been established between this class and mainstream classrooms facilitating integration for pupils in some instances. Pupils in the special class for mild general learning disabilities were observed to be making progress. It is recommended, however, that the whole-school structures to ensure that these pupils experience a more inclusive educational experience be further developed.

Pupils were observed to enjoy their lessons and learning and they commented very positively on the support they receive in various settings. They displayed a strong motivation to learn which was, in almost all cases, linked to their sense of achievement and to positive learning experiences. While the school maintains a variety of individual pupil records, the current system does not facilitate clear and efficient longitudinal monitoring and recording pupils’ progress, especially for pupils with the greatest levels of need. It is recommended that the school align its approach to individual planning and recording of progress more closely to the structure and content of the pupil support files in the continuum of support process.

2. THE QUALITY OF TEACHING OF PUPILS WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS
The teaching observed throughout the school was of a high quality. Elements of DEIS improvement targets were reflected in teachers’ planning in classrooms and in special education settings. Teachers prepare, facilitate and implement a range of tasks in an effective manner and have a good understanding of pupils’ strengths and areas requiring assistance. Support for pupils is provided primarily through in-class interventions and withdrawal of pupils individually and in small groups. It was noted that the impact of interventions such as station teaching is closely monitored through the use of pre and post assessments. It is recommended that the impact of the range of approaches employed to team teaching be systematically monitored and recorded, particularly for pupils with the greatest levels of need. Some scope was also noted to extend the range of approaches implemented in some special education settings with pupils who have consistently low literacy levels.
The school has commenced implementing aspects of the continuum of support process. Where practice was most effective, classroom support plans were well developed and effective, differentiated teaching was provided for children requiring additional support. Pupils at school support plus level had individualised support plans containing clear and achievable targets which were appropriately informed by relevant assessment data. Scope to further develop approaches to diagnostic assessment and specific assessment for pupils with ASD was noted. While teachers generally prepare good written planning to support their work, planning in settings for pupils with SEN should be completed on a weekly basis. Examples of pupils receiving additional support from more than one teacher were noted. Where this occurs, it is recommended that a single support plan be collaboratively developed and reviewed for these pupils.

3. THE MANAGEMENT AND USE OF RESOURCES RECEIVED TO SUPPORT PUPILS WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

The overall quality of management and use of resources to support pupils with SEN is good. The very recently appointed principal is working closely with the special education needs coordinator to systematically review all aspects of provision. Learning environments are attractive, accessible and suitable for all learners. The current building programme, which is nearing completion, will ensure further enhancement of facilities, especially for the pupils in the special class for ASD. A good range of resources including information and communications technology has been procured to support teaching and learning.

Teachers have engaged both individually and collectively in a broad range of continuous professional development (CPD). It was noted that formal meetings of the SEN team have commenced in the recent past. This practice is commended as there is a need to extend the current mechanisms in place to maximise the impact of individual teachers’ experience and expertise on teachers’ collective practice. This is particularly relevant in the areas of diagnostic assessment, formative interpretation of assessment data, target-setting and reviewing and recording pupil progress.

There is evidence of positive partnership with parents in the provision of support for pupils with SEN. The school reports consultation with parents during the formulation and review of individual education plans and documents are signed by SETs, class teachers and parents. In questionnaires received from parents as part of the evaluation, the majority of respondents expressed very positive views of the school’s provision for their children. The special education needs assistants were observed to be deployed strategically in the school and there is evidence that they work collaboratively and effectively with the teaching staff to meet the needs of pupils with SEN.

The school has formulated detailed policies to guide and structure the provision of support for pupils. These policies are generally very clear and useful. However, it is recommended that the school review the sections of the admissions policy dealing with the enrolment of pupils with SEN and admission to the special class for pupil with ASD to ensure that they are compliant with the terms of the DES Circular 13/2017.
THE INSPECTORATE’S QUALITY CONTINUUM

Inspectors describe the quality of provision in the school using the Inspectorate’s quality continuum which is shown below. The quality continuum provides examples of the language used by inspectors when evaluating and describing the quality of the school’s provision of each area.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Example of descriptive terms</th>
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<tr>
<td>Very Good</td>
<td>Very good applies where the quality of the areas evaluated is of a very high standard. The very few areas for improvement that exist do not significantly impact on the overall quality of provision. For some schools in this category the quality of what is evaluated is outstanding and provides an example for other schools of exceptionally high standards of provision.</td>
<td>Very good; of a very high quality; very effective practice; highly commendable; very successful; few areas for improvement; notable; of a very high standard. Excellent; outstanding; exceptionally high standard, with very significant strengths; exemplary</td>
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<td>Good</td>
<td>Good applies where the strengths in the areas evaluated clearly outweigh the areas in need of improvement. The areas requiring improvement impact on the quality of pupils’ learning. The school needs to build on its strengths and take action to address the areas identified as requiring improvement in order to achieve a very good standard.</td>
<td>Good; good quality; valuable; effective practice; competent; useful; commendable; good standard; some areas for improvement</td>
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<td>Satisfactory</td>
<td>Satisfactory applies where the quality of provision is adequate. The strengths in what is being evaluated just outweigh the shortcomings. While the shortcomings do not have a significant negative impact they constrain the quality of the learning experiences and should be addressed in order to achieve a better standard.</td>
<td>Satisfactory; adequate; appropriate provision although some possibilities for improvement exist; acceptable level of quality; improvement needed in some areas</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fair</td>
<td>Fair applies where, although there are some strengths in the areas evaluated, deficiencies or shortcomings that outweigh those strengths also exist. The school will have to address certain deficiencies without delay in order to ensure that provision is satisfactory or better.</td>
<td>Fair; evident weaknesses that are impacting on pupils’ learning; less than satisfactory; experiencing difficulty; must improve in specified areas; action required to improve</td>
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<tr>
<td>Weak</td>
<td>Weak applies where there are serious deficiencies in the areas evaluated. Immediate and coordinated whole-school action is required to address the areas of concern. In some cases, the intervention of other agencies may be required to support improvements.</td>
<td>Weak; unsatisfactory; insufficient; ineffective; poor; requiring significant change, development or improvement; experiencing significant difficulties;</td>
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Appendix

SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

Submitted by the Board of Management
Part A Observations on the content of the inspection report

The Board of Management is very pleased that much of the good work done by the SEN Department and class teachers in St. Mary's on the Hill N.S. is acknowledged and affirmed by this inspection report. The report particularly commends the high quality of teaching, CPD of staff and the comprehensive policies in place in the school. The B.O.M. is also delighted that pupils were observed to enjoy their lessons and learning and they, together with the parent body, commented very positively on the support they receive.

The school's implementation of the DEIS Improvement targets was also recognised both in teachers’ planning in classrooms and in special education settings.

It was also observed that the school has aspects of the Continuum of Support in place and this is reflective of the school's commitment to provide the greatest level of support to students with the greatest level of need.

Part B Follow-up actions planned or undertaken since the completion of the inspection activity to implement the findings and recommendations of the inspection.

The board of management has confidence that the school will now align planning and recording of progress using the Student Support Files. This has already commenced in Junior infants and with any children currently going through the assessment process. These Student Support Files will enable mainstream and SEN teachers to address the specific educational needs of students in a more targeted manner, as recommended by the report.

The impact of the range of approaches used in team teaching and in-class support will be monitored and recorded, paying specific attention to the students with the greatest need.

The board of management also reports that approaches to diagnostic assessment and specific assessment for pupils with ASD has already begun with CPD, attended by the teacher in the ASD class.

The board of management will ensure a review of areas of the Admissions Policy dealing with the enrolment of pupils with SEN and admission to the special class for pupils with ASD as recommended by the report.

It must be also noted that school structures will be further developed to enable a more inclusive educational experience for pupils in the special class for MGLD. The planning of same and implementation of systems to allow for further meaningful integration has commenced.