

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Evaluation of Provision for Pupils with
Special Educational Needs

REPORT

Ainm na scoile / School name	Réalt Na Mara National School
Seoladh na scoile / School address	Mill Street Dundalk County Louth
Uimhir rolla / Roll number	20339E

Date of Evaluation: 14-10-2016



WHAT IS A EVALUATION OF PROVISION PUPILS WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS?

The Evaluation of Provision for Pupils with Special Educational Needs is a focused evaluation of provision for pupils with special educational needs in mainstream primary schools. As the model places a particular emphasis on the quality of learning outcomes for pupils with special educational needs, most of the time inspectors spend in a school during this evaluation is spent in 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:

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 was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the report; a response was not received from the board.

EVALUATION OF PROVISION PUPILS WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

INSPECTION ACTIVITIES DURING THIS INSPECTION

Date of inspection	14-10-2016
Inspection activities undertaken <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Discussion with principal and teachers• Meeting with special educational needs team• Meeting with special-needs assistants• Review of relevant documents	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Analysis of parent questionnaires• Observation of teaching and learning• Examination of pupils' work• Interaction with pupils• Feedback to principal and teachers

SCHOOL CONTEXT

Réalt na Mara National School is a co-educational vertical school under the patronage of the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Armagh. There are sixteen mainstream classes and five special classes for pupils with an autistic spectrum disorder (ASD) in the school. The school also has five support teaching posts for pupils with learning-support and special educational needs, and one teaching post for pupils with needs in English as an additional language (EAL). Provision was evaluated in the five special classes for pupils with an autistic spectrum disorder and in learning-support and resource-teaching lessons for pupils with learning-support and special educational needs.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

FINDINGS

- Overall, the access of pupils with special educational needs to education that aligns with their needs and the quality of the learning outcomes, as observed during the evaluation, are commendable.
- There is a strong commitment on the part of in-school management, teachers and special needs assistants (SNAs) to ongoing professional learning and continuous professional development in support of their provision for pupils with special educational needs; professional networking with special schools that enrol pupils with comparable challenging needs would further contribute in an ongoing way to teachers' and school leadership's learning.
- There are high levels of collaboration and team work evident among the teachers and the SNAs.
- Visual prompts were used very effectively in many of the learning-support and resource-teaching lessons to enhance pupils' conceptual understanding. At the time of the evaluation, visual cues were not used with absolute consistency and to their full potential among the pupils with ASD in the special classes.
- The school's preparation of individualised plans for all pupils with additional learning needs is greatly commended; there is scope within plans to monitor the progression of learning more effectively.
- There is scope to improve the quality of assessment overall.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Enhanced use of visual cues and more purposeful mediating of visual schedules to pupils with an ASD are recommended to signal transitions more clearly and manage pupils' engagement with unregulated settings.

- More assessment tools, specific to the special class contexts, should be used to augment baseline assessments.
- The creation and maintenance of links with special schools are advocated strongly.

DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. THE QUALITY OF LEARNING OF PUPILS WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

- Overall, pupils with special educational needs and those receiving learning support and resource teaching are making good progress in line with their assessed abilities and needs.
- Active learning predominated in all settings during evaluation visits and is commendable practice. Very good care was taken to encourage pupils in their learning activity. Pupils were very enthusiastic in their learning and well focused.
- Many positive interactions among pupils and staff were observed and good awareness of the needs of individual pupils was articulated by the teachers, SNAs and in-school management.
- In some lessons observed in the special classes, information and communication technology (ICT) was used actively and productively. The use of ICT did not feature in a sufficiently frequent and consistent manner across lessons in all the classes. There is need for the use of ICT to feature more frequently in the learning experiences of pupils, especially in the light of the visual modalities of pupils with ASD.
- Whole-school initiatives such as *Literacy Lift-Off* and the use of station teaching have benefitted the learning of pupils with additional learning needs in the mainstream settings. Very high levels of engagement in learning were evident among the pupils during station teaching.
- Most parents who completed a questionnaire, administered as part of the evaluation, agreed that the school was helping their child to interact well with others, and to progress in their learning.
- Teachers have determined purposeful learning targets as part of coherent individualised planning to address pupils' needs. In most instances, target-setting was of a high standard and articulated desired learning outcomes with clarity, enabling monitoring of progression. However, in some individualised planning there is scope for improved target setting and for individualised plans to be used more actively to monitor the progression of learning. In such cases, targets were not sufficiently specific, or not related closely enough to a thorough baseline assessment of need to outline the next steps in learning and monitor progression. All targets should be outcomes-oriented, measurable, specifically linked to priority needs and their achievement carefully noted and dated by the teachers to record the progress made by pupils. In questionnaire responses, a few parents stated that they were unaware of their child's learning plan; the school should engage further with parents about this.

2. THE QUALITY OF TEACHING OF PUPILS WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

- The overall quality of teaching is commendable. All teachers demonstrate considerable interest and strong commitment towards developing provision for pupils with special educational needs. There are high levels of collaboration and team work among teachers

and the SNAs. A good range of teaching methodologies and approaches was observed across the various settings.

- The *Aistear* Framework is being used well to support, through play, the emerging language and socialisation skills of very young pupils with an ASD in the special-class setting. Using different weekly or fortnightly themes to frame the play experiences of the very young pupils with an ASD in the special-class setting would be helpful to support planning and assessment practices. This would also help in the staff's ongoing development of expertise in the implementation of *Aistear* for pupils with complex special needs.
- The learning-support and resource teachers place appropriate emphasis on the development of pupils' phonemic awareness and their phonological understanding in literacy and the development of their key mathematical skills. Lessons observed were well paced and very purposeful. Station teaching was characterised by judicious questioning and careful attention to the work and efforts of individual pupils in respect of sight vocabulary development and reading fluency.
- In discussion with a focus group of pupils, they expressed very positive opinions about the implementation of in-class support in the mainstream setting, and their preference generally for it, providing a very clear rationale in support of that preference. Taking the pupils' views into account, the use of in-class support in the mainstream setting should be further extended and strengthened.
- Visual prompts are used very effectively in many lessons to support conceptual understanding. Visual prompting and cueing were not used as effectively as they could have been among all the pupils with ASDs, to support their needs in respect of predictability, ongoing managing of transitions and reducing distractibility or anxiety. It was observed that there was need for enhanced use of the Picture Exchange Communications System (PECS) and more purposeful mediating of visual schedules to pupils were necessary to signal transitions more clearly and to manage pupils' engagement with unregulated settings.
- What assessment tools are to be used in the school's different special education settings, in order to provide a comprehensive information base for individualised plans for pupils, should be named and their purposes explained more clearly in the assessment policy. In support teaching settings, a good range of diagnostic tests is used and the teachers' use of checklists, based on specific objectives, are particularly effective in ascertaining progress and defining the next steps in learning.
- The use of assessment data to support the development of comprehensive individualised plans is not consistent across all settings at present. There is need for the role of diagnostic assessment in respect of pupils with ASDs to be outlined more explicitly to support the teachers in their assessment practice. These should be used along with tools already in the school, such as the Psychoeducational Profile – Third Edition (PEP3), to contribute to developing baseline assessments. Acquisition and use of the Assessment of Functional Living Skills (AFLS) and the Assessment of Basic Language and Learning Skills (ABLLS) should be considered.
- A protocol around the practicalities of administering ASD-specific assessments should be developed. The roles of various other members of staff in contributing practically to the assessment process should be included in it. The support of the Special Education Support Service (SESS) and Middletown Centre for Autism should be sought to further assist teachers in developing their expertise to provide for the needs of all pupils in these complex settings.

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

- The school is making good use of its existing resources for pupils with special educational needs. There is a strong commitment on the part of in-school management, the teachers and SNAs to ensuring access of pupils with special educational needs to education in line with their needs. During the evaluation, the teachers expressed their openness to attending continuous professional development courses.
- There is evidence of commendable collaboration and communication between support teachers and classroom teachers in planning for pupils' needs.
- The quality of classroom accommodation for the five special classes has scope for significant development. However, the board of management, in collaboration with the Department of Education and Skills, is progressing its plans to ensure new accommodation for the special classes through a capital building programme. The quality of display and organisation of the learning-support/resource teaching classroom as places for the learning of language and numeracy skills is very good overall.
- The SNAs play an effective role in supporting the access of pupils to the learning that is appropriate to their needs.
- Not all of the teachers have access to projectors in the learning-support/resource teaching rooms to support teaching and learning. The acquisition and use of additional projectors to enable the use of ICT with groups in these settings are advocated.
- Almost all parents, in the sample of parents who completed a questionnaire, agreed that their child felt safe and well looked after in school.

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 the school's provision of each area.

Level	Description	Example of descriptive terms
Very Good	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.	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
Good	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 <i>very good</i> standard.	Good; good quality; valuable; effective practice; competent; useful; commendable; good standard; some areas for improvement
Satisfactory	Satisfactory applies where the quality of provision is adequate. Overall, learners have access to a basic level of provision. 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.	Satisfactory; adequate; appropriate provision although some possibilities for improvement exist; acceptable level of quality; improvement needed in some areas
Fair	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.	Fair; evident weaknesses that are impacting on pupils' learning; less than satisfactory; experiencing difficulty; must improve in specified areas; action required to improve
Weak	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.	Weak; unsatisfactory; insufficient; ineffective; poor; requiring significant change, development or improvement; experiencing significant difficulties;