An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Evaluation of Provision for Pupils with Special Educational Needs

REPORT

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<th>Ainm na scoile / School name</th>
<th>Merlin Woods Primary School</th>
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<tr>
<td>Seoladh na scoile / School address</td>
<td>Doughiska Road</td>
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<td>Doughiska</td>
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<td>Galway</td>
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<td>Uimhir rolla / Roll number</td>
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Date of inspection: 06-03-2019
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, inspectors 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

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| Inspection activities undertaken | • Analysis of parent questionnaires  
• Observation of teaching and learning  
• Interaction with pupils  
• Pupil group discussion  
• Feedback to principal and teachers |

**SCHOOL CONTEXT**

Merlin Woods Primary School is a co-educational mainstream primary school operating under the patronage of the Catholic Bishop of Galway, Kilmacduagh and Kilfenora. Currently, it has an administrative principal, fifteen mainstream classes, two classes for pupils with autistic spectrum disorders (ASDs) and ten special education teachers (SETs). There are also ten special-needs assistants (SNAs). At the time of the evaluation, there were 415 pupils enrolled.

**SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:**

**FINDINGS**

- Good-quality learning outcomes are in evidence for pupils with special educational needs (SEN).
- The overall quality of teaching is good.
- The management and use of the resources received to support pupils with SEN is effective; there is scope, however, to review policies and provision.
- The principal and staff are commended for the creation of a very attractive school environment.
- While all teachers prepare written plans for their work, short-term planning practices need to be reviewed at whole-school level.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

- The SEN policy, assessment policy and code of behaviour should be reviewed to reflect current school practice and to promote an inclusive school culture.
- All SET timetables should be reviewed to ensure balance and variety in the interventions and supports provided for pupils with SEN at every class level.
- Short-term planning practices should be monitored at whole-school level in order to ensure compliance with *Guidelines for Primary Schools: Supporting Pupils with Special Educational Needs in Mainstream Schools* and with Rule 126 of *Rules for National Schools*. 
DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. THE QUALITY OF LEARNING OF PUPILS WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS
The overall quality of learning of pupils with SEN is good. During the evaluation, lessons were observed in mainstream classrooms, special classes and support settings. Pupils with SEN displayed a high level of participation and engagement, particularly in their learning in the support settings, where they were positively affirmed. In the junior and middle classes, pupils participate in a range of in-class and withdrawal intervention sessions for literacy and numeracy. In the senior classes, pupils with SEN are withdrawn for support lessons in most cases and consideration should now be given to providing more in-class interventions in these settings.

In the classes for pupils with ASDs, pupils were observed engaging positively and participating actively in well-structured lessons. Autism-specific methodologies and visual learning approaches are employed during lessons. Good arrangements are in place to support the integration of pupils with ASDs in mainstream settings and reverse integration is a growing aspect of SEN provision in the school. Commendably, pupils in the classes for pupils with ASDs are linked to mainstream classes with a view to supporting opportunities for integration.

In the group discussion with a sample of pupils who are accessing support, almost all spoke positively about the supports that they receive and indicated that they enjoy their learning across the curriculum. Pupils also expressed an interest in forming a student council and the school is advised to explore this further.

2. THE QUALITY OF TEACHING OF PUPILS WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS
The overall quality of teaching of pupils with SEN is commendable. During the evaluation almost all of the lessons observed were well structured and purposeful and teachers demonstrated effective classroom management skills. Good use is made of approaches such as group work, pair work and team teaching. A strong spirit of collaboration was evident during in-class intervention lessons.

All teachers prepare written plans. However, short-term planning by SETs is completed on a fortnightly rather than a weekly basis, and in some mainstream settings short-term planning is done on a monthly basis. The school is reminded that all short-term planning in special education settings should be completed on a weekly basis, in accordance with Guidelines for Primary Schools: Supporting Pupils with Special Educational Needs in Mainstream Schools. Furthermore, in mainstream settings, short-term plans should be prepared on a fortnightly basis in compliance with Rule 126 of Rules for National Schools.

Commendably, the school has begun to use the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) student support file to identify and target learning needs, especially in support settings. In order to guide differentiation and tracking of pupil’s progress on a whole-school level, the school is advised to oversee and monitor the further implementation of classroom support across all mainstream settings.

Assessment practices are appropriate, although some possibilities for improvement exist. A variety of practices is in evidence in the recording of assessment data and in monitoring the progress of pupils. While a whole-school assessment calendar outlines the range of screening and diagnostic assessment instruments available in the school, there is no current, ratified assessment policy available. The school is advised to devise and ratify an assessment policy to guide teachers regarding
the appropriate assessment of pupils’ learning across all education settings. To inform classroom planning for differentiation and to identify the next steps in pupils’ learning, mainstream teachers are advised to analyse the information available from standardised tests, particularly in Mathematics.

3. THE MANAGEMENT AND USE OF RESOURCES RECEIVED TO SUPPORT PUPILS WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS
The overall management and use of resources received to support pupils with SEN is of good quality, with some areas for improvement. SETs are deployed throughout the school and provide support through a combination of in-class interventions and withdrawal of pupils. In some instances, several SETs are deployed to support one classroom. While the practice of SETs is of a high quality, there is scope for more balance and greater efficiency in provision across the school. The school is advised to review SET timetables in order to provide a broader and more balanced experience of support for all pupils at each class level. The current SEN policy and enrolment policies for both mainstream classes and special classes are not in accordance with Department of Education and Skills Circular 13/2017 and should be reviewed.

The school environment is very attractive and the indoor and outdoor facilities are used by pupils for wellbeing and learning opportunities. Commendably, the school supports all staff in availing of continuing professional development (CPD) in relevant areas of special education. Special-needs assistants (SNAs) were observed supporting pupils in integrating with their peers and accessing a range of experiences.

The management of behaviour, as observed, was good during the evaluation with teachers encouraging positive co-operation from pupils. It was noted, however, that the school employs after-school detention on occasion. This practice is not documented in the code of behaviour which has been ratified by the board of management. School leadership should review the use of after-school detention, taking into account its promotion of an otherwise positive school environment and duty-of-care issues.

Transitions for pupils with SEN are well supported and well managed. The transition of pupils with SEN to post-primary schools is planned for and this process includes preparatory visits to the local post-primary school, and consultations with parents and external professionals. The school has developed strong relationships with a range of external agencies and liaises effectively with them to access advice and to support transitions at all stages.

Responding to the Inspectorate questionnaire, almost all parents of pupils with SEN agreed that their child feels safe and well looked-after in the school and that the school is helping their child to progress with reading and writing. However, all parents did not agree that they were aware of their child’s learning plan or that they were consulted about the extra support that their child receives.
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 and staff of Merlin Woods Primary School welcome and acknowledge the report and are pleased with the findings of the inspection. The Board of Management is particularly pleased that the high standard of inclusion and strong spirit of collaboration are recognised and affirmed by the Inspectorate. We welcome the fact that students enjoy their learning and that a high level of participation and engagement was observed during the inspection. The Board is appreciative of the positive affirmations received from the parents in response to their questionnaires. The report’s findings and recommendations are valuable and welcome and will be used to guide our reflection and follow up.

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

Teachers have adjusted short-term planning practices in accordance with *Guidelines for Primary Schools: Supporting Pupils with Special Educational Needs in Mainstream Schools* and in line with rule 126 of *Rules for National Schools*. Whole staff training has been received from the National Council for Special Education on the use of the continuum of support and further training on the setting of SMART targets is to be delivered in September. In line with recommendations SET timetables are being reviewed in order to provide a broader and more balanced experience of support for all class levels. The practice of after school detention is under review with a view to establishing a behaviour management strategy that further promotes the positive and inclusive school environment which is already in place. Policy reviews are ongoing.
### 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.

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<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>Very Good</td>
<td><strong>Very good</strong> 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 <strong>outstanding</strong> 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><strong>Good</strong> 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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<tr>
<td>Satisfactory</td>
<td><strong>Satisfactory</strong> 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><strong>Fair</strong> 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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<td>Weak</td>
<td><strong>Weak</strong> 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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