An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna  
Department of Education and Skills

Evaluation of Provision for Students with 
Additional and Special Educational Needs in Post-Primary 
Schools

REPORT

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<tr>
<th>Ainm na scoile / School name</th>
<th>Holy Family Community School</th>
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<tr>
<td>Seoladh na scoile / School address</td>
<td>Kilteel Road</td>
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<td>Rathcoole</td>
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<td>Co Dublin</td>
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<td>Uimhir rolla / Roll number</td>
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Date of inspection: 20-09-2019
EVALUATION OF PROVISION FOR STUDENTS WITH ADDITIONAL AND SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS
The Evaluation of Provision for Students with Additional and Special Educational Needs (SEN - PP) is a focused evaluation of provision for students with additional and special educational needs in mainstream post-primary schools. As this inspection model places a particular emphasis on the quality of learner outcomes for students with additional and 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 students with additional and special educational needs under the following headings or areas of enquiry:
1. The quality of learning outcomes of students with additional and special educational needs
2. The quality of learning experiences of students with additional and special educational
3. The quality of the management and use of resources received by the school to support students with additional and special educational needs
4. The quality of the structures in place to foster inclusion, equality of opportunity and the holistic development of all students with additional and 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 a mandated person.

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

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date of inspection</th>
<th>20-09-2019</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Inspection activities undertaken</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Discussion with principal and teachers</td>
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<td>• Meeting with SEN team</td>
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<td>• Meeting with parents of students with additional and special educational needs</td>
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<td>• Review of relevant documents</td>
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<td>• Analysis of parent questionnaires</td>
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<td>• Observation of teaching and learning</td>
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<td>• Examination of students' work</td>
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<td>• Interaction with students</td>
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<td>• Student group discussion</td>
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<td>• Meeting with special needs assistants</td>
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<td>• Feedback to principal and teachers</td>
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**SCHOOL CONTEXT**

Holy Family Community School is a mixed mainstream post-primary school under the joint patronage of Dublin and Dún Laoghaire ETB, Spiritan Education Trust and the CEIST Education Office. It is situated in an urban setting in Rathcoole, Co. Dublin and its current enrolment is 960 students. Holy Family Community School has 72 teachers and an allocation of 268 Special Education Teaching (SET) hours equating to 12 whole-time teacher equivalents (WTE). There are 6.5 whole-time special needs assistants (SNAs) to provide supports for students identified with additional and special educational needs (SEN). Fourteen lessons were visited across junior and senior cycle programmes. Lessons included whole-class groups, small-class groups, and one-to-one tuition; supported through team-teaching and withdrawal integrated into the mainstream timetable.

**SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:**

**FINDINGS**

- The quality of learner outcomes for students with special educational needs (SEN) is satisfactory overall; with scope to develop active methodologies with a variety of approaches to support all students with SEN.
- The learning needs of students with SEN were valuably met in a significant minority of lessons.
- The quality of learner experiences for students with SEN is satisfactory overall; provision for targeted support requires improvement.
- The special education needs co-ordinator (SENCO) and the SEN core team are highly qualified and experienced; however the most expert SEN teachers in the school only support students with SEN in a few lessons.
- The management of resouces to support students with SEN is fair; immediate action is required to adjust the significant minority of the SET allocation that is being used to create mainstream options at senior cycle.
- There are good structures in place to foster inclusion, equality and the holistic development of students with SEN; however small changes are required in the admissions policy in order to reflect the current Resource Allocation Model.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Learner outcomes and experiences for students with SEN should be further developed through greater use of active methodologies that are differentiated through tasks and approaches that are targeted to meet students’ diverse needs optimally.
• The school should further develop their planning by creating individualised student support plans that contain specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, time-bound targets (SMART). These targets should be communicated with all staff, students and parents and be progressively reviewed.
• The school should further develop team-teaching approaches that are informed by collaborative planning and that incorporate methodologies which support the needs of students with SEN.
• Senior leadership, together with the board of management, should immediately review the use of the additional teaching allocation provided to the school to support students with SEN, and ensure that SET allocation is used in their entirety for their intended purposes; all practice should comply with Circular Letter 0014/2017 and the associated guidelines *Supporting Students with Special Educational Needs in Post-Primary Mainstream Schools*.
• Senior leadership should make changes to the admissions policy, for students with SEN to align it more closely with the current Resource Allocation Model.

**DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. **THE QUALITY OF LEARNING OUTCOMES OF STUDENTS WITH ADDITIONAL AND SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS**

The overall quality of learning outcomes for students with SEN was satisfactory; with significant variation ranging from fair to very good.

Learner outcomes for students with SEN were effective and highly effective in a significant minority of lessons. These lessons contained a good variety of approaches and active learning methodologies that supported meaningful attainment. Students’ learning and skills development was supported through enjoyable use of groupwork. In the most effective lessons team-teaching facilitated; peer discussion, highly differentiated worksheets, student choice, an emphasis on literacy and questioning that developmentally supported progressive attainment of knowledge through self-assessment and individualised feedback. These highly effective approaches should be shared, to support more effective differentiated planning to meet the needs of students with SEN in all lessons.

In the majority of lessons students with SEN were not specifically targeted in lesson plans, intentions or approaches. Effective planning was evident in a few settings and led to high levels of on-task behaviour that supported well-being. These highly effective lessons were tailored to students’ needs through pre-teaching, collaborative planning between the mainstream teacher and SET and student-centred activities that supported progressive reasoning. The use of withdrawal support to provide literacy and numeracy lessons requires improvement. Learner outcomes in the majority of these settings require greater alignment of student needs with lesson content and approaches. Further development of planning for withdrawal and in-class support between SET and subject teachers is needed to facilitate integration of targeted supports in lessons for students with SEN.

It is positive that students with ASDs receive lifeskills lessons. These lessons supported highly effective student-centred flexible planning to build a variety of skills. There was a high level of awareness and knowledge of students’ needs in these lessons that were successfully used to provide curriculum and self-regulation supports. In these settings students were supported through highly targeted activities and self-reflection that facilitated self-management. However, there is scope to support the targets of this programme in the mainstream lessons. The school should extend and build on the capacity of all teachers to meaningfully include students’ holistic needs when designing learning approaches.
2. THE QUALITY OF LEARNING EXPERIENCES OF STUDENTS WITH ADDITIONAL AND SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

The overall quality of learner experiences for students with SEN was satisfactory, lessons ranged from fair to very good.

In almost all lessons engagement was supported through very respectful relationships that created and sustained on-task activity. Teachers identified learning intentions at the beginning of lessons in most lessons. Verbal questioning was effective in assessing prior learning of a small number of students. There is a need to develop a greater variety of approaches to assess learning of students with SEN in the majority of lessons.

In the highly effective lessons students experienced enjoyment through peer interactions, pair and group work. The students in the focus group expressed that they enjoy working with each other and would like more opportunities for group work. Groupwork and discussion were commendably used to support learning in the majority of mainstream lessons. However, in a significant minority of withdrawal lessons all students were not given opportunities to work together. When carrying out group activities, groups should be structured in order to build skills for all students with planned consideration of the need for peer interactions of students with SEN and ASD.

A few highly effective team-taught lessons supported the most valuable experiences for students with SEN. When choice was offered to students they challenged themselves and were seen to offer peer support. Movement during these activities supported emotional regulation and on-task activity. In the majority of lessons learning was more passive and the level of challenge was low. In these lessons appropriate amounts of individual support was given during activities but the support was not aligned with identified student needs. There was scope to enhance student experiences and challenge level to progressively support students with SEN in the majority of lessons through greater use of collaborative student-centred planning. The school should further develop team-teaching approaches that are informed by collaborative planning and incorporate methodologies that support the needs of students with SEN. There is capacity and expertise among staff to facilitate this improvement planning.

The SENCO and SEN team have made progress in planning and are moving towards an effective individualised planning system. Commendably the school have an online platform to securely share student profiles that outlines students’ strengths, testing data and recommendations from professional reports. It is valuable that a few students with the highest level of need have extensive plans that contain SMART targets. However, the majority of these student profiles do not outline SMART targets for most students receiving supports. To facilitate further development of targeted support and collaborative planning, the SENCO recognises the need to create SMART targets for all students with SEN. These plans should be communicated with all relevant staff, students and parents and be reviewed progressively in line with student needs and to ensure that students are progressing in their learning.

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

The management and use of resources to support students with SEN is fair.
The school has a significant allocation of additional resources to provide for students with SEN. The model of provision includes team-teaching, literacy and numeracy groups during language exemption time, additional small-groups are made in Mathematic and English from second year, small groups for curriculum provision and one-to-one lifeskills lessons.

A significant minority of SET hours are being used to provide additional senior cycle subjects and an additional Art group in all junior cycle years. These additional small groups do not provide students with the tailored supports they require and are not an appropriate use of the SET hours. The students in the student focus group expressed deep unhappiness that they are placed in these small withdrawal groups and this system is evidently impacting on student wellbeing. This provision is custom and practice in the school and requires improvement in order to appropriately and responsively meet the needs of students with SEN.

One highly qualified teacher co-ordinates SEN provision under guidance from the principal and deputy principals. There is a small core team in place and the majority of teachers in the school are timetabled for SEN provision. The school has experienced difficulties in employing teachers with additional SEN qualifications. The SEN core team consists of four teachers who are currently teaching students with SEN, in a few lessons. There is inadequate deployment of the most qualified teachers to support students with the highest level of needs. Strategic planning to further support students’ needs should be developed further. The senior leadership team should give consideration to the deployment of their most expert and experienced SEN teachers and align their skills with the needs of the students in accordance with the associated guidelines Supporting Students with Special Educational Needs in Post-Primary Mainstream Schools.

This use of SET hours should be reconsidered as a matter of priority as SEN provision in the school is not optimal and students’ individual needs are not adequately supported through this provision. Senior leadership, together with the board of management, should review the use of the additional teaching allocation provided to the school to support students with SEN, and ensure that SET allocation is used in their entirety for their intended purposes; all practice should comply with Circular Letter 0014/2017.

4. THE STRUCTURES IN PLACE TO FOSTER INCLUSION, EQUALITY OF OPPORTUNITY AND THE HOLISTIC DEVELOPMENT OF ALL STUDENTS WITH ADDITIONAL AND SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

There are good structures in place to foster and support inclusion, equality and holistic development in the school. From meetings with the students, parents and review of data gathered from questionnaires high levels of happiness in the school are evident.

Senior management encourages and builds capacity in staff through frequent CPD. They also support access to ongoing SEN CPD for many staff. The SENCO, principal and SEN core team meet regularly to discuss arising SEN needs. The SEN core team provide very supportive school-led training in the areas of inclusion and SEN through whole-school initiatives, which were commendably evident in lessons.

There are many additional resources that contribute to inclusion in the school. Students can avail of guidance and counselling in accordance with their needs. Parents and students spoke very highly of the beneficial impact of this service. Teachers run a wide variety of lunchtime clubs which cater for
both active and quiet activities. Students commented that their strengths and talents are celebrated in the school particularly in Music. Senior management have supported the training needs of a team of SNAs very effectively. The SNA team are highly valued in the school and feel empowered to share their observations and ideas with management through formal and informal regular meetings. Senior management facilitate and support SNAs to put initiatives such as a lunch group, into action very effectively. Valuable friendships have formed and naturalised to outside of school which are highly valued by students and parents.

It is very effective practice that transition planning begins in fifth class with feeder primary schools. Commendably the school recognises the need to make small changes to their admissions policy to bring it in line with their school’s practices and the Resource Allocation Model. The current policy requires that parents provide all up to date reports to apply for appropriate resources from the Department of Education and Skills. This may place undue pressure on parents of students with SEN and needs to be clarified to reflect NCSE procedures. The only additional resources that may be needed are assistive technology or SNA access, which the school can apply for in accordance with NCSE guidelines.

The school has fostered very good relationships with outside support agencies and the visiting teacher service. The visiting teachers provide valuable target setting support to mainstream teachers. This creates highly commendable outcomes and experiences for these students. This type of individualised target setting would be highly beneficial to all students with SEN and additional needs in the school.
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>
<th>Example of descriptive terms</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Very Good</strong></td>
<td><em>Very good</em> 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><strong>Good</strong></td>
<td><em>Good</em> 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 students’ 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><strong>Satisfactory</strong></td>
<td><em>Satisfactory</em> 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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<td><strong>Fair</strong></td>
<td><em>Fair</em> 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 students’ learning; less than satisfactory; experiencing difficulty; must improve in specified areas; action required to improve</td>
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<td><strong>Weak</strong></td>
<td><em>Weak</em> 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
Area 1  Observations on the content of the inspection report

The Board of Management acknowledges the findings and recommendations in the report. The Board is pleased with the strengths identified, particularly in relation to staff expertise and the culture, structures and practices of the school that foster and support inclusion, equality and holistic development. The Board is also pleased that the inspectors noted “the high levels of happiness in the school”. The Board considers that the school’s existing SEN provision model has contributed to those high levels of happiness. The Board is disappointed with the narrow scope of the inspection model, which did not appear to capture the full range of supports available to students with SEN and the strong advocacy role of the school for the students with SEN.

Area 2  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 is planning to implement the recommendations in the report:

- Senior management is making every effort to access staff CPD in the areas of target setting, SEN planning, team teaching and active teaching methodologies.
- The senior management team is actively involved in expanding the SEN Core Team with more defined roles and responsibilities for team members.
- The creation of individualised student support plans continues for students with diagnosed and identified needs.
- The use of additional teaching allocation provided to support students with SEN is under review. Following the inspection, changes were made to the second year and fifth year timetables to improve compliance with the DES Guidelines.
- Timetable planning for 2020/2021 has begun using the DES Guidelines. The number of teachers timetabled for SEN provision. Will be reduced and the most expert and experienced SEN teachers will be as effectively deployed as teacher supply allows.
- The school delayed the review of its Admissions Policy is currently under review and will be amended to reflect school practice and to clarify for parents that professional reports are required only for SNA and assistive technology applications.