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

REPORT

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<th>Ainm na scoile / School name</th>
<th>Tullow Community School</th>
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Date of inspection: 14-03-2019
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 needs
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

**Date of inspection**
14-03-2019

**Inspection activities undertaken**
- Discussion with senior management team
- Meeting with SEN team
- Meeting with parents of students with additional and special educational needs
- Review of relevant documents
- Analysis of parent questionnaires
- Observation of teaching and learning
- Examination of students’ work
- Interaction with students
- Student group discussion
- Meeting with special needs assistants
- Feedback to principal and teachers

**SCHOOL CONTEXT**
Tullow Community School operates under the patronage of Kilkenny and Carlow Education and Training Board (KCETB), the Brigidine Sisters and the Patrician Brothers. The school has a current enrolment of 632 students. The school offers the Junior Cycle, the Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP), an optional Transition Year (TY) programme, the established Leaving Certificate, the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) and Post Leaving Certificate (PLC) courses.

**SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**:

**FINDINGS**
- The overall quality of learner outcomes was good, with significant variation ranging from fair to very good.
- The quality of learner experiences was good overall, with significant strengths in some lessons observed.
- The management and use of resources received to support students with SEN requires improvement, so that all students with SEN can access appropriate timetabled support.
- Some highly effective structures to support inclusion were observed and the school is keen to build on these so that inclusion, equality and holistic development are central to the experience of all students.
- Amongst the staff there is a high level of interest in improving professional skills so that capacity is built to fully address the additional needs of students.
- The school has experienced a number of staffing issues, which have impacted the provision of support.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**
- Management, should ensure that the full teaching allocation provided to support students with SEN, is used solely for its intended purpose and that all practice complies with Circular Letter 0014/2017 and the associated Guidelines for Post-Primary Schools: Supporting Students with SEN in Mainstream Schools.
- There is a need for management and all teachers to access continuous professional development on the new model of provision for students with SEN so that effective planning, provision and the establishment of a core team of trained special education teachers (SET) in the mainstream school can be realised.
- Senior leadership, in collaboration with the SET, should ensure that students who access support lessons are grouped according to similarity of need and according to the principle that
the students with the greatest level of need should have access to the greatest level of support.

- Mainstream teachers should access student support files so that lesson planning can be informed by the identified priority learning needs and agreed targets of individual students.

DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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

- The overall quality of learner outcomes in the lessons observed was good. However, there was significant variation and outcomes ranged from fair to very good.
- Good or very good outcomes were in evidence when there were high levels of motivation and engagement brought about by planned opportunities for students to contribute to the lesson, take an active role in learning activities or tasks, or to collaborate and discuss with their peers. These effective practices were observed in a number of lessons.
- In some lessons, there was scope to activate students’ motivation and engagement by contextualising the learning so that it related to the lives of the students, or by differentiating the learning so that appropriate challenge was provided for all. In a minority of lessons, there was a strong focus on teacher instruction and a need for greater balance between teacher voice and student voice.
- Support lessons are provided to groups of students who have exemptions from Irish or who do not study a foreign language. However, in the support lessons observed, the needs of the learners were diverse, and while the lesson objectives may have been appropriate for some students, for others they were not aligned with the students’ needs and outcomes were limited.
- Learning outcomes for students identified with ASD who access the supports provided in the special class setting were very good. Students, through their interactions with each other, with their teachers and with SNAs demonstrated progression in their communication and social skills and all were benefiting from integration with the mainstream classes. These students were achieving and sometimes surpassing their intended learning. They clearly enjoyed the carefully planned learning activities and demonstrated achievement with pride.

2. THE QUALITY OF LEARNING EXPERIENCES OF STUDENTS WITH ADDITIONAL AND SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

- Overall the quality of learning experiences of students with additional needs was good. In some highly effective lessons students were purposefully engaged in meaningful learning activities, they demonstrated very high levels of interest and participation, appropriate challenge was provided and students were supported where necessary.
- In all lessons, interactions amongst students and between students and teachers were respectful and the atmosphere was conducive to learning. Students asked and answered questions and contributed their opinions confidently and were interested in the opinions of others.
- There was evidence of the identification of priority learning needs and the setting of targets for some students but this practice needs to be developed and extended across all students
with additional needs. For students in the mainstream classes the identification of priority learning needs should be informed by evidence gathered from a range of sources including students, teachers, parents, data yielded by routine attainment testing and professional reports where available. Targeting the specific skill deficits of individuals or groups and addressing those deficits as appropriate in support and/or mainstream lessons should be a key focus of provision.

- A team of valued and dedicated SNAs provide assistance to students across all levels of the school. This team meets weekly and is represented on the care team and on the literacy team. The level of commitment to care is commendable and adds immensely to the quality of learning experiences.

- All mainstream teachers indicated knowledge of the individual student’s diagnoses but there was not always clarity about how students should be supported within the mainstream classroom. Many teachers indicated an interest in developing their skills in this area, and the school is advised to pursue in-school opportunities for teachers to further upskill in a range of relevant areas, including developing understanding of particular areas of SEN.

- Students reported that they are regularly expected to take down notes from the board, or at times, take down notes that are dictated orally. Teachers should be mindful of the writing difficulties of some of their students when requesting them to take down notes and consider how digital technologies can be used to support these students.

- Learning intentions were shared in all lessons. Where they were most effective, they provided clarity for learners, as well as a focus point for reflection on achievement. In some cases they were differentiated, and appropriate challenge was provided for all. Differentiation was observed in all lessons but there was scope to develop and embed this across learning activities and homework. Some students currently access differentiated tests. Teachers are encouraged to collaborate and share ideas on the use of these inclusive practices.

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

- The management and use of resources received to support students with SEN requires improvement. The school has a substantial teacher allocation to support students identified with additional needs but only a small proportion of this was being delivered at the time of the evaluation School management has experienced staffing difficulties over recent months and despite efforts to overcome these, they have been unable to fill all available positions. Of the hours that were delivered, not all are currently deployed in accordance with Circular Letter 0014/2017.

- The board of management and the senior management team should ensure that all of the available allocation is used for its intended purpose and the development of a core team of trained SET is a priority.

- Support lessons are delivered at Irish and foreign language lesson times to students who do not study these subjects. At junior cycle level parents and students reported that it would be helpful if there was greater continuity in the staffing of these lessons so that students would not have different teachers each day of the week. It is positive that efforts have been made to take this into account and there is now greater continuity.

- There is a need to reconsider the timetabling of support lessons so that these classes become opportunities for targeted interventions addressing identified priority learning needs. The provision of support lessons should not be limited to students who do not study Irish or
foreign languages, and decisions regarding provision should be informed by the needs of the individual students. As far as possible, students in support lessons should be grouped according to similarity of need and students with the greatest level of need should have access to the greatest level of support.

- Many teachers reported that they have engaged in training in SEN outside of school or that they have enrolled in courses to begin in autumn 2019. This level of interest and dedication to further skills development is commendable. Management should support and build upon the commitment of teachers, deploying all human resources in a way that maximises benefit to the students.

- It is very positive that in recent years management has arranged continuing professional development for all teachers on differentiation, assessment for learning and digital technologies. The fruits of these inputs are in evidence in the classroom and continuing development which specifically addresses the additional needs of some students will further support improvements.

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

- All parties reported that the establishment of the special classes for students with ASD has been a very positive development for the school. It has opened up a conversation about inclusion and added a new dimension to the school’s ethos. Most students who access the special classes spend most of their time in mainstream lessons and considerable planning and timetabled support goes into ensuring that mainstream teachers are supported in facilitating the meaningful inclusion of these students.

- As the work of the mainstream SET develops, routine monitoring of placement in the special classes should be approached with a view to handing over the placement to the mainstream SET whenever this is appropriate.

- A comprehensive transition programme supporting first-year students includes visits to primary schools, a pre-entry school visit in July for students with additional needs, an induction week led by Meitheal leaders from TY, production of a transition booklet and the uploading of student passports to the school’s intranet system so that teachers have access to information about their newest students. Most parents reported that the school managed their child’s transition to the school well.

- Students with additional needs have access to all school programmes and extra-curricular activities including board games, football, rugby, basketball, literacy club, book club and art club. Meitheal leaders are involved in these activities and all students are encouraged to participate. Some students reported that there is little to occupy them at break times and perhaps the school should consider facilitating them to set up additional activities themselves.

- A proactive literacy team, made up of teachers and an SNA who operate in their own time, has identified a need to focus on the reading comprehension skills of a number of students and have put in place an after-school study group to address this need. Management and the SET should explore ways to develop and build upon this excellent work within the school day.
- The board of management should ensure that school policies, including the Admissions Policy and the SEN Policy are reviewed in order to ensure alignment with the principles of the new model of SEN provision.

- It is very positive that reverse integration is currently in evidence whereby TY students work with the students within the special classes to improve the garden spaces around the school. Staff in the special classes and some in the mainstream classes are keen to develop further ideas along these lines. Some reverse integration of the teaching staff would have the potential to bring valuable learning experiences to students and staff alike.
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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<th>Level</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Example of descriptive terms</th>
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<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 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>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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<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 students’ 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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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 accepts the main content of the report and its recommendations but would wish to restate a fundamental point to the findings. The school in advance of being informed of this evaluation, had indicated to the DES that it was experiencing severe difficulties in retaining qualified teachers in this area which was severely impacting on its ability to deliver the necessary support lessons. The school at the time requested time and some consideration while it attempted to source appropriately qualified staff. Unfortunately, the evaluation was conducted shortly afterwards which in the Board's opinion has impacted on the findings.

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

School Actions:

1) As previously stated by the school it is the intention to be compliant with circular letter 0014/2017 as soon as practically possible but the school is constrained at the present time due to staff shortages which has resulted in us having to adapt our resource provision.
2) Professional development has already taken place in this area and it is intended that further CPD in this area will continue in the next academic year.
3) We have managed to retain extra staff in this area since the evaluation through recruitment and regular staff in the SEN department returning to work. This has led to an improvement in the appropriate provision of resources to identified students.
4) Support files and transition student files regarding SEN are available on the VS Ware system since September 2018.