



5 February 2019

Dear Principal/Chairperson,

I am writing to inform you that, following a process of consultation with the relevant education partners under the provisions of Section 13(8) of the *Education Act 1998*, the Minister for Education and Skills, Joe Mc Hugh T.D., has approved the commencement of the **Evaluation of Provision for Students with Additional and Special Educational Needs in Post Primary Schools** with effect from **01 March 2019**.

Evaluations of Provision for Students with Additional and Special Educational Needs in Post Primary Schools will be carried out by the Inspectorate of the Department of Education and Skills in a sample of schools annually. The inspections focus in an in-depth way on the following areas relevant to special educational needs:

- the learning outcomes of students with additional and special educational needs in post- primary schools
- the learning experiences of students with additional and special educational needs in post- primary schools
- the extent to which schools are using the resources they receive to effectively identify and meet the needs of these students
- the extent to which the structures and systems that school management have put in place foster inclusion, equality of opportunity and the holistic development of all students with additional and special educational needs

The inspection framework is based on *Looking at Our School 2016: A Quality Framework for Post Primary Schools*, which was published by the Department in September 2016. It focuses specifically on the standards and statements of effective practice that directly impact on the learning outcomes and experiences of students with additional and special educational needs. The framework also reflects a number of important developments in relation to provision for students with special educational needs in post-primary schools. These include:

The resource allocation model: The resource allocation model, introduced to schools in 2017, moves away from allocating resources to individual students based on a diagnosis of disability. Resources are now allocated to schools based on their school profile which includes their predicted level of need. This approach affords greater freedom to schools in deploying their resources, while outlining six principles which should inform the deployment process. These principles emphasise the importance of schools developing robust procedures to identify and meet students' learning needs, to monitor their progress and to ensure that those with the greatest level of need should have access to the greatest level of support.

The new evaluation model will ensure consistency and coherence between the evaluation of provision for students with additional and special educational needs and the resource allocation model for schools.

Guidelines for Schools: Supporting Students with Special Educational Needs in Post-Primary Schools: In order to support schools in implementing the resource allocation model the Department issued *Guidelines for Schools: Supporting Students with Special Educational Needs in Post-Primary Schools* in September 2017. This document provides guidance to schools on the use, organisation and deployment of additional teaching resources for students with special educational needs. It situates effective provision for students with special educational needs within an inclusive whole-school framework which emphasises effective teaching and learning for all and good collaboration and engagement between schools, parents¹ and students. The *Guidelines* provide schools with six principles to inform the deployment of the additional teaching resources they receive and a six-action process designed to assist schools in the allocation of these resources. They also contain a number of useful templates for schools, including a school provision plan template and a self-reflective questionnaire.

The Continuum of Support: In implementing the resource allocation model schools are expected to use the *Continuum of Support*. The continuum is specifically designed to assist teachers in mainstream schools to identify needs and to develop and evaluate interventions to meet those needs. The continuum encompasses a graduated solution-orientated framework of assessment and intervention in schools.

The introduction of a similar model of evaluation at primary level in 2016: The Evaluation of Provision for Pupils with Special Educational Needs in Primary Schools was introduced in September 2016. The new model at post-primary will provide a whole-of-system approach to the evaluation of provision for learners with special educational needs.

Appendix 1.9 of the *Guide to Inspection in Post-Primary Schools* (September 2016) sets out how the inspections are conducted and is available at www.education.ie. The features of the model are set out in summary below:

Normally, a school will receive ten working days' notice of a Child Protection and Safeguarding Inspection.

During the inspections, inspectors will:

- Evaluate teaching and learning in mainstream and support settings
- Meet with
 - special Education Teachers
 - special Needs Assistants
- Conduct a:
 - student focus group meeting
 - parent focus group meeting
- Review assessment data
- Review whole-school plans relevant to special educational needs

¹ parent is taken to include legal guardians and others who act in loco parentis, for a student.

Following the inspection:

- Each inspection will result in oral feedback to relevant school personnel and a written report on the inspection findings
- In line with the procedures for the publication of inspection reports, schools will have an opportunity to factually verify and respond to the draft report and the final report will be published on the website of the Department of Education and Skills.

The Evaluation of Provision for Students with Additional and Special Educational Needs Inspections are carried out in accordance with Section 7(2)(b) and Section 13(3)(a)(i) of the *Education Act 1998* and the *Code of Practice for the Inspectorate* (Department of Education and Skills 2015) which is available at www.education.ie. During the inspection, a school's board and its staff are obliged to accord the inspectors 'every reasonable facility and co-operation' in the performance of their duties (Section 13(7), *Education Act 1998*).

The inspections are also carried out in accordance with the Code of Practice for the Inspectorate. This code, which is available at www.education.ie, provides a commitment that all inspections will be underpinned by four key principles:

- A focus on learners
- Development and improvement
- Respectful engagement
- Accountability

These principles were an important reference point in the development of the new evaluation model and will govern all aspects of the implementation of the model.

I hope you find this information helpful.

Yours sincerely,

Harold Hislop
Chief Inspector

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