An Roinn Oideachais
Department of Education

Evaluation of provision for students with additional and special educational needs in post-primary schools
Report

REPORT

Ainm na scoile/School name	Ashton School
Seoladh na scoile/School address	Blackrock Road Cork
Uimhir rolla/Roll number	81008W
Dáta na cigireachta/ Date of evaluation	09-11-2022
Dáta eisiúna na tuairisce/Date of issue of report	20/02/2023

What is an 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 on the findings and recommendations of the report; the board chose to accept the report without response.

Actions of the school to safeguard children and prevent and tackle bullying

<table>
<tr><td colspan="2">During the inspection visit, the following checks in relation to the school's child protection and anti-bullying procedures were conducted:</td></tr>
<tr><td>Child Protection</td><td>Anti-bullying</td></tr>
<tr><td>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.</td><td>1. The school has developed an anti-bullying policy that meets the requirements of the Anti-Bullying Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools (2013) and this policy is reviewed annually.
2. The board of management minutes record that the principal provides a report to the board at least once a term on the overall number of bullying cases reported (by means of the bullying recording template provided in the Procedures) since the previous report to the board.
3. The school's anti-bullying policy is published on its website and/or is readily accessible to the board of management members, teacher, parents and pupils/students.</td></tr>
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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	7,8,9-11-2022
Inspection activities undertaken • Discussion with principal and teachers • 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 in thirteen lessons • Examination of students' work • Interaction with students • Student focus group meetings • Meeting with special needs assistants • Feedback to principal and teachers

School context

Ashton School is a co-educational comprehensive school, under the joint patronage of the Church of Ireland Bishop of Cork and Cork Education and Training Board (CETB). At the time of the evaluation the school had an enrolment of 544 students and provided the Junior Cycle programme, an optional Transition Year (TY) and the Leaving Certificate (Established). 180.4 special education teaching (SET) hours or just over eight whole-time teacher equivalents (WTE) per week, were allocated to the school to provide additional supports to students identified with special educational needs (SEN). This additional allocation included 0.45 WTE or 9.9 SET hours per week to provide for students with English as an additional language (EAL) needs.

Summary of main findings and recommendations:

Findings

- Overall, learning outcomes were of a very good quality.
- Learner experiences were very positive, with all lessons observed characterised by secure and calm learning environments.
- Action is required to improve the management, use and organisation of the additional resources received to support students with SEN in the school.
- The work involved in the coordination of provision for students identified with SEN was of a very high standard, with a very significant level of planning, preparation and communication with parents, students, and teachers undertaken.
- Very good structures were in place to support inclusion, equality and the holistic development of students in the school.

Recommendations

- Some of the SET resources were not used for their intended purposes and a significant proportion of the SET hours were yet to be allocated at the time of the evaluation. The board of management should oversee a strategic review of the provision and the deployment of teachers to ensure that the entire additional teacher allocation provided to the school to support students is utilised effectively.
- As provision for students with SEN was fragmented across a large number of teachers and the support provided was not always aligned to the specific needs of individual students, the principal should establish a core teaching and planning team for SEN.
- In-house continuing professional development (CPD) was provided for teachers, however, formal CPD should be provided at whole-school and individual teacher levels, particularly in the areas of autism, team teaching and inclusive classroom practices.
- Whilst team teaching was provided, it was only in a small number of lessons. A team teaching model of provision should be developed in the school to complement withdrawal and/or to minimise the need to withdraw students from subjects.

Detailed findings and recommendations

1. The quality of learning outcomes of students with additional and special educational needs

Overall, learning outcomes were of a very good quality.

Students were clear with regard to the learning underway in lessons observed. This was supported in many instances through the effective use of learning intentions at the start of lessons. It was suggested that, in some instances, the inclusion of specific skills to be learned as part of the learning intentions might have been worthy of consideration.

Students were supported in their learning through teachers' use of multiple resources in order to engage them and aid their understanding of topics being explored. The ability of students to engage with these resources was underpinned in no small part by teachers' levels of preparedness which were universally of a high standard.

Students displayed consistently high levels of respect for themselves, their peers, and their teachers in lessons. They were very competent when undertaking group work activities in lessons. As a further development in their understanding of this key skill of working with others, it is suggested that further exploration of structured co-operative learning activities might be undertaken by teachers.

Teachers used digital technology effectively in lessons through the adoption of audio-visual resources, but also through their use of the school's digital platform. High-quality visuals were provided in some support lessons to aid student learning.

Support for students' literacy skills was often observed in the form of, variously, guided reading activities, supports for note-making, a focus on key vocabulary, pre-reading, and prediction exercises. The potential for targeted displays of vocabulary to aid students' thinking about their subject could be explored in some teacher base rooms. It was suggested in some support lessons that the development of word walls or word banks would have further enhanced student learning. It was also suggested that success criteria would have provided a scaffold for students to engage in the development of skills and in the completion of given tasks.

In support lessons observed there was a very good emphasis on the development of students' oral communication skills. In some of these lessons it was very positive that teachers focused on the specific needs of the students. In these instances students' organisational skills were supported and well-planned interventions to enhance student wellbeing were provided. In one lesson My Friends Youth programme was very well used.

2. The quality of learning experiences of students with additional and special educational needs

Learner experiences were of a high standard. Secure and calm learning environments characterised all lessons observed. This was a very positive and striking feature which encouraged and facilitated students to contribute positively in lessons in almost all instances. It was suggested on occasion that specific strategies to support students with autism should be explored, developed and utilised by teachers to ensure the experience for these students was also positive.

Very good relationships between teachers and students and between students themselves were observed. In general, teachers displayed good knowledge of their students and their interests.

It was suggested that teachers who provided support should engage with the students so as to ascertain the areas in which they needed to be supported. Where this was observed, the learning experience was very positive and encouraged student self-awareness, reflection and engagement. This approach should be extended to all support lessons as a means of not only

providing students with ownership of their learning but also as a means of providing teachers with specific areas to target and focus additional support.

Formative assessment and verbal feedback were a key part of a number of lessons. Teachers displayed a consciousness of the need to observe students' work and discussion, and intervene where necessary to move learning forward. On occasion, the potential to begin new topics with an exploration of students' prior learning about a topic could have been worthwhile. Such an approach could then lead to the consolidation and expansion of students' knowledge and skills.

3. The management and use of resources received to support students with additional and special educational needs

Action is required to improve the management, organisation and use of the additional SET resources received to support students with SEN in the school.

A significant proportion of the SET allocation was not being fully used for its intended purpose. Although well-intentioned, these hours were instead being used either for the provision of mainstream classes in Mathematics and English across the year groups, or were yet to be allocated.

The board of management and the principal should ensure that all of the additional teaching resources for SEN are used in their entirety to provide additional supports for student identified with SEN. The board of management should endeavour to recruit additional teachers, if needed, to allow for the full use of the additional resources.

A strategic review of the provision and the deployment of teachers should be carried out to aid the organisation and allocation of the entire additional teacher allocation provided to the school to support students. This review should be underpinned by a focused audit on the needs of the students identified with SEN on the school provision plan and the additional teaching supports required to optimally meet those needs.

The principal and deputy principal are committed to the development and improvement of provision. This was reflected in their leadership of inclusive teaching and learning strategies amongst the staff through the school self-evaluation (SSE) process and opportunities for teachers to reflect on whole-school and individual practices to improve the quality of student outcomes and experiences.

The work involved in coordinating provision for students with SEN was of a very high standard. A very significant level of planning, preparation and communication with parents, students, and teachers was undertaken by the co-ordinator and one other teacher on the SEN team. A high level of care, support, empathy and encouragement was provided to students by the co-ordinator as reported by parents and students met with as part of the evaluation.

A large proportion of the co-ordinator's time was given to this work, with a proportionally smaller amount of time given to teaching. Senior leadership should plan to provide a better balance in favour of teaching students on the co-ordinator's timetable. This is particularly relevant as the school has a limited number of teachers with additional qualifications in the area of SEN.

Very good systems were in place for the identification of in-coming students' needs informed by information gathered from a variety of sources.

The school had endeavoured to provide consistency of teachers to students receiving support, through timetabling mainstream subject teachers opposite subjects from which students were withdrawn. Support was therefore fragmented across a large number of teachers, with many of these teachers only having one or a very small number of support lessons on their timetables. In most of the support lessons observed, teachers provided support in the subject areas of English and Mathematics. Students and parents spoken with as part of the evaluation reported that this approach was not always aligned to students' specific needs and noted this as an area for improvement. To further aid planning for students with SEN and to provide the desired consistency and focused interventions to meet their identified needs, a core teaching and planning SEN team should be established.

The core team should share the planning and organisation of provision with the co-ordinator and meet regularly to review and monitor student outcomes. Members of the team should be allocated timetables mainly dedicated to special education duties and the provision of targeted interventions to students.

The main model of support was withdrawal of students opposite Irish, and/or from modern foreign languages, and/or from Religion. It was observed that this model of withdrawal did not achieve the optimal use of the additional SET resources. This needs to be addressed and it is recommended that in-class support be provided to support inclusion and to avoid overly depending on accessing students through withdrawal. Whilst team-teaching was provided, it was only in a small number of lessons. Students reported that they found team-teaching beneficial but it would be better if it was provided more consistently across lessons. A team teaching model of provision should be further developed to complement withdrawal and/or to minimise the need to withdraw.

4. The structures in place to foster inclusion, equality of opportunity and the holistic development of all students with additional and special educational needs

Very good structures were in place to support inclusion, equality and the holistic development of students in the school.

There were very good structures in place to ensure effective communication and collaboration between teachers in support of the inclusion of students. The school's digital platform was used as a key communication tool between mainstream teachers and the SEN department as well as within the SEN department itself.

CPD was encouraged and supported by the senior leadership team and was mostly provided by teachers in the school. Whilst this level of collaboration was positive, formal CPD should also be provided at whole-school and individual teacher levels, particularly in the areas of autism, team teaching and inclusive classroom practices. Capacity should be built within the core SEN team, when established, through members of this team applying for and accessing postgraduate qualifications in the area of inclusive and special education.

Very good work had been undertaken in developing an SEN plan for the SEN department. It is advised that this plan, following appropriate consideration and review by members of the school community and the board of management, could serve as the basis for a comprehensive inclusion policy. This should work well as the plan currently encompasses the numerous good practices which were already evident in the school. Beyond this, it is suggested that a whole school guidance plan should be adopted by the board as a means of encapsulating, consolidating, and communicating, the very good work currently being undertaken to support students across the school community.

Overall, the school provided a broad and balanced curriculum for students. The curriculum was open to all learners, allowing students to choose the subjects which best suited their interests and ambitions. In addition, students indicated that there was open access to clubs and sporting activates in the extra-curricular life of the school.

During a focus group meeting with parents, they emphasised that regular communication from the school was a key feature of their experiences. They were highly complimentary with regard to the nature of these communications, their frequency, and the empathy which they frequently encompassed. They were also very appreciative of the additional reports they received regarding their child's progress. It was very positive that parents were consulted and aware of the learning plans in place for their child.

The school maintains links with external agencies as a means of supporting its students. This is positive.

The draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation were discussed with the principal, deputy principal and SEN co-ordinator at the conclusion of the evaluation.

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.

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 *very good* 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. 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.