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

Ainm na scoile / School name	Cobh Community College
Seoladh na scoile / School address	Carrignafoy Cobh Co. Cork
Uimhir rolla / Roll number	70970G

Date of inspection: 18-09-2019

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Department of Education and Skills

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

Date of inspection	16, 17, 18-09-2019
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	• Observation of teaching and learning • Examination of students' work • Interaction with students • Student group discussion • Meeting with special needs assistants • Feedback to deputy principal and special education needs co-ordinator

SCHOOL CONTEXT

Cobh Community College is a co-educational college under the auspices of Cork Education and Training Board (ETB). The school has a current enrolment of 330 students. The school offers the Junior Cycle, Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP), an optional Transition Year (TY), the established Leaving Certificate (LCE), and the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programme. The school participates in the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) action plan. Overall, the school has 11.04 whole time teacher equivalents or 243 additional teaching hours per week to support students identified with additional and special educational needs (SEN). This includes 4.5 whole-time teacher equivalents (WTE) or 99 teaching hours to support students allocated a placement in the two special classes for students with autism spectrum difference (ASD) and one special class for students with moderate general learning difficulties (ModGLD). The school has an allocation of 7.5 special needs assistants (SNAs).

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

FINDINGS

- The quality of learning outcomes of students with SEN was good overall, although outcomes were negatively impacted in support lessons where groups of students being withdrawn were large in number and their needs very diverse.
- Learning experiences for students were good overall, and it was evident that a secure and positive learning environment had been created in lessons, however, learner experiences were adversely impacted in a number of lessons through the organisation of whole class groups.
- Action is required as a matter of priority with regard to the management and use of resources received to support students with SEN; this includes using the allocation to facilitate the formation of stand-alone JCSP class groups and not fully utilising the total teaching allocation to provide for students in the special classes.
- A significant number of the Special Education Teaching (SET) hours is being used for purposes other than intended.
- The school has many strengths in the provision of inclusive educational experiences for students, although reduced timetables are in use for some students with SEN.
- A core team of experienced and well-qualified teachers is in place and includes co-ordinating teachers for the special classes and for mainstream provision.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Senior leadership should ensure that students who are withdrawn to receive support are grouped according to similarity of identified learning need, so that those needs can be effectively supported and targeted by teachers, and thereby, student learning optimised.

- The board of management, together with senior leadership, should ensure that the full teacher allocation for SEN and for special class provision is deployed 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 Special Educational Needs in Mainstream Schools.*
- The management and use of the SET resources should be restructured so that the allocation is not used for mainstream class teaching and this includes the formation of stand-alone class groups.
- The school should reorganise SEN provision, to ensure that the practice of reducing a student's timetable and thereby shortening the student's school day should only be used in exceptional circumstances, and in full and informed agreement with the student's parents/guardians; focused interventions to enable the student access a full and meaningful educational experience should be planned for and provided, so that such students access their full entitlement of a complete school day and week.

DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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

The quality of learning outcomes of students with SEN was good overall. This incorporated a range of lessons, including numerous examples of very good practice and good practice. However, in a small but significant number of lessons action was required to improve student outcomes.

Learning outcomes were negatively impacted in the support lessons where groups of students who, due to exemption from the study of Irish, were being withdrawn. These groups consisted of a large number of students. The needs of the students within these groupings were very diverse. The class groups comprised students exempt due to a wide variety of assessed and identified learning needs and students who required support due to English as an additional language (EAL) needs.

Students who are withdrawn to receive support should be grouped according to similarity of identified learning need, so that those needs can be effectively supported and targeted, and thereby, learning optimised. Such organisation would make possible for teachers the effective and targeted planning of purposeful, focused learning opportunities for these students. At present, such planning practices are extremely challenging for teachers, again impacting negatively on students' learning outcomes.

In the case of students with EAL needs, these students should be provided with focused language support where they have opportunities to acquire and further develop their English language skills, with a particular emphasis on academic language proficiency. The placement of students in such support classes could be aided through the use of the *Post-Primary English as an Additional Language (EAL) Assessment Kit*. It is positive that the school is accessing additional support for students with EAL needs, to be provided by a qualified English language teacher. In this context, support for students who have already achieved basic interpersonal communication skills should be organised for lessons where these students are exempt from a subject.

Where learning was very good, students had great clarity with regard to the learning that was underway throughout the lesson. This was often achieved through the deployment of clear learning

intentions on the part of teachers either verbally or on the whiteboard. This approach is worth adopting in other mainstream lessons where there was scope for development.

Learning intentions should also be used in support lessons and students should be facilitated in verbalising these as a means of providing greater clarity and ownership of work they will undertake. Visual prompts could also be used as a tool to provide additional understanding for students with more complex needs.

Very good practice was observed where teachers conscientiously linked to students' prior learning and pre-taught key vocabulary. On occasion, this was linked to the use of visual aids for students in well-developed learning environments. All of this encompassed very good support for students. In particular, where very good practice was observed, the knowledge displayed by teachers of their students enabled them to appropriately challenge and support them as necessary in achieving desired learning outcomes.

In very good lessons, students were supported to develop skills in working with others, both in pairs and in small groups. Where this worked most effectively students displayed clear facility in engaging with meaningful tasks with connections to their own interests, experiences and prior learning. In a special class for autism this was very well facilitated through purposeful and scaffolded tasks for students. The organisation of the group was carefully planned by the co-ordinating teachers, with groups comprising students with and without ASD, but whose needs were similar with regard to developing communication, social, and emotional skills. The outcomes for these students in managing themselves, their communication, and their relationships with others were very good in the context of the lesson observed.

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

Learning experiences for students were good overall. Students were comfortable with their teachers and it was evident that a secure and positive learning environment had been created in lessons. This was frequently underpinned by very positive teacher-student relationships. Interactions between teachers and students and between students themselves were universally respectful and supportive.

Learner experiences were further enhanced due to effective planning and preparation of materials and lessons by teachers. This included the provision of choice with regard to the use of student-developed mindmaps or notes grids in a particular lesson. This allowed students to develop ownership and management of their own learning and was highly effective. In addition, lessons were coherent and well-structured, again, providing a clear scaffold which enhanced students' learning experiences.

However, learner experiences were adversely impacted in a number of lessons through the organisation of whole-class groups. This involved the creation of class groups based on perceived lower ability identified through standardised ability and attainment testing administered prior to students' entry. This led to a sense of lower expectations in a number of these class groups. This was observed in lessons and communicated to inspectors during a meeting with a student focus group. It is recommended that this practice should cease as it is not in line with inclusive principles outlined in the *Guidelines for Post-Primary schools* which advise the meaningful inclusion of students in mainstream mixed-ability class groupings.

In special class settings, very positive structures and routines were very evident. This facilitated greater independence on the part of students in achieving everyday tasks, organising their work, and managing themselves.

In lessons where team-teaching was observed, this worked very well in ensuring students' needs were addressed with greater immediacy. In addition, team-teaching provided an excellent model of teamwork for students, while very good relationships between teachers were also beneficial in this regard. This extended to students' experiences during their lessons and added to a respectful and appropriately focused atmosphere.

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

Action is required as a matter of priority with regard to the management and use of resources received to support students with special educational needs.

The school's significant teacher allocation to support students identified with SEN is not being used in its entirety for its intended purpose. Approximately five whole-time teacher equivalents could not be identified on the overall school timetables, on teacher individual timetables, or on the school provision plan for SEN which were provided by the school. The board of management, together with the senior leadership team, should ensure that the full teacher allocation for SEN is deployed for its intended purpose and the practice complies with circular letter 0014/2017 and the associated *Guidelines for Post-Primary Schools: Supporting Students with Special Educational Needs in Mainstream Schools*.

It was reported that a number of the SET hours are being used to facilitate the formation of stand-alone JCSP class groups. As outlined in circular letter 0014/2017, these hours cannot be used for mainstream class teaching or to reduce the pupil teacher ratio in mainstream classes. The management and use of the SET resources should therefore be restructured to ensure that the SET allocation is not used for mainstream subject teaching which includes the formation of stand alone class groups.

Currently, the full teaching allocation to provide for students in the ASD classes is not being fully utilised for that purpose. Consequently, it was noted that some students with ASD cannot access the teaching support when necessary during the school day. Students with ASD should be provided with focused supports and interventions to support their individual and autism specific needs. It is recommended that the full teaching allocation available should be used for this purpose.

For one student accessing the supports of the special class for moderate GLD, a reduced timetable is in operation, whereby the student begins school late and leaves at lunchtime. For another student with a place in the ASD class, it was reported that there are times when there is no teacher available to provide ASD specific supports, which are necessary for the student to manage the full school day. As a result, on a considerable number of such occasions, the student leaves school early. These approaches have been in operation for these students for a significant amount of time.

The teaching resources allocated to students in the Moderate GLD class and in the ASD classes should be reorganised to ensure the provision of a full and meaningful educational experience for all students in these classes. The practice of reducing a student's timetable and thereby shortening their school day should only be used in exceptional circumstances, and in full and informed agreement with the

student's parents/guardians. Students should be able to access the supports of the special classes if they need to. Focused interventions should be planned for and provided, thereby enabling students to access their full entitlement of a complete school day and week.

Mainstream support resources should also be used, as appropriate, to enable students to access the full school day. This is based on the principle of the students with the greatest level of need being provided with the greatest level of support. This includes a need for an examination of the deployment of SNAs and the restructuring of the current allocation of SNA support to focus on the primary care needs of such students in the school, before the secondary care needs of others.

It is good that some of the additional supports are timetabled in conjunction with the overall timetable, as informed by the SEN team. However, strategic planning for the effective deployment of teaching resources to support students' needs should be further developed. Student-centred planning and decision-making should be used to inform the timetabling of supports specific to the priority needs of the student.

It is very good that the school has initiated the development of learning plans for identified students. Further development, using the student support file process and the continuum of support framework, should ensure that students identified with the greatest level of need receive the greatest level of support. In addition, this should enable SETs to provide students with interventions focused on their identified and priority learning needs. The recent transfer by the new SEN co-ordinator of student learning plans and relevant information onto the school's confidential internal IT system is very worthwhile. This should further develop the capacity of all teachers to target specific needs effectively in all lessons.

Aspects of the Level 2 Learning Programme (L2LP) have been introduced for some students. The principal is very supportive of teachers' continuing professional development. In this context, further training and support should now be accessed by all teachers in the implementation and development of this programme as a tool towards more meaningful and effective inclusion in the school.

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

The school has many strengths in the provision of inclusive educational experiences for students. It was reported by co-ordinating teachers that the school has never refused a student entry to the special classes for autism. To facilitate the continuation of this very good practice, an annual review of allocated placements in this class should be undertaken. Parents spoke very highly of the school's support overall for their children. It is also very positive that students can access school-based activities and opportunities are provided for students with more complex needs to transfer their skills and generalise their learning in real-life settings.

A core team of experienced and well-qualified teachers is in place. This includes co-ordinating teachers for the special classes and for mainstream provision. The recent appointment of a new co-ordinator of mainstream SEN provision to an Assistant Principal 1 post is very good and demonstrates the school's commitment to providing for effective inclusion of all students. This new postholder builds on significant work undertaken in the past by the outgoing co-ordinator and her predecessors.

Very good initial work has been undertaken to enhance the organisation and planning for students with additional educational needs. The team is greatly enhanced by the expertise and support provided in the area of SEN by the very recently appointed deputy principal.

Currently support is fragmented across a proportionately large number of teachers. Consequently, co-ordination of this type of support is challenging. It is advised that a core teaching and planning team, as previously suggested by the SEN team and recommended in previous inspection reports, be developed in order to provide targeted support for students and to ensure continuity of provision. This core teaching and planning team should be facilitated with regular meeting time for this very important organisation and planning work.

The school has significant structures to support inclusion, incorporating its participation in the DEIS action plan, as well as key home-school links through the home-school-community-liaison co-ordinator. Beyond this, year heads, the class teacher structure and a student support team including the Guidance Counsellor and the school counsellor support students. In addition, early intervention and prevention programmes such as 'check and connect' have been introduced.

Policies linked to admissions for the school appear to be inconsistent with inclusive admissions practices reported and observed by inspectors. It is recommended that these policies be reviewed and changed to more fully reflect these inclusive practices. Conditional clauses for admission to the ASD and MGLD class should be removed. These are not consistent with the purposes and rationale for the establishment of these classes.

Parents reported that the principal operates an open door policy with regard to parents and the special class co-ordinators facilitate meetings with parents. The SEN team facilitates meetings with parents with regard to the creation, development, and review of education plans. This is very good practice.

Progression plans are explored and plans put in place for some students with very complex special educational needs. This is very positive.

The school has a number of assessment processes in place to support the identification of SEN and its DEIS plan. It is positive that the school is using some new assessment instruments and exploring the use of others. In this context, it is advised that a school assessment policy should be developed to streamline the utilisation of a variety of assessment approaches in line with a clearly defined and communicated school policy. This policy should clearly identify for all school partners, the purpose of gathering such data.

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 of quality 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 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.	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 students' 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;

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 of Carrignafoy Community College, on behalf of all the stakeholders, wishes to acknowledge receipt of this report, and of the support of the inspectorate during and since their visit. The report affirms many of the good practices evident in the school, and the teaching staff and management were encouraged by many of the findings including the following:

- The school has many strengths in the provision of inclusive educational experiences
- The quality of learning outcomes of students with SEN was good overall
- Parents spoke very highly of the school's overall support for their children
- Learning experiences for students were good overall, and it was evident that a secure and positive learning environment had been created in lessons
- Where learning was very good, students had great clarity with regard to the learning that was underway throughout the lesson
- Interactions between teachers and students and between students themselves were universally respectful and supportive
- Learner experiences were enhanced due to effective planning and preparation of materials and lessons by teachers
- Team-teaching provided an excellent model of teamwork for students, while very good relationships between teachers were also beneficial in this regard
- A core team of experienced and well-qualified teachers is in place including a newly-appointed SEN co-ordinator at AP1 level and greatly enhanced by the expertise and support provided in the area of SEN by the Deputy Principal

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

- Carrignafoy Community College operates a continuum of provision for students.
  The needs of individual students are met using a tiered model of support. Students who have similar needs at both junior and senior levels are now grouped for support according to identified need, adhering to the DES Continuum of Support. The timetable has been adjusted to accommodate this approach, particularly at first- and second-year levels. Diversity of need in withdrawal situations has been minimised and group sizes reduced. Team-teaching continues to operate where academic and or social-emotional or behavioural needs are identified.
- Students in the ASD special classes are moving towards independence, and participation in mainstream classes is increasing proportionate to the individual profiles and abilities. Student support files are maintained and regularly reviewed with parents to track and monitor progress. Planning around curriculum provision and the reallocation of teaching resources is in progress for 2020/21. The school has accessed support and advice around ASD provision from NCSE. Planning is underway to apportion the full teacher allocation to the special classes for the coming academic year.
- Students with EAL needs are being provided with regular, timetabled language support classes from a suitably qualified teacher. Assessment of proficiency and evidence-based interventions are used to provide appropriate skills-based teaching and learning opportunities. Mainstream teachers are provided with ongoing progress reports. Timetabling fluidity allows for movement of students between levels as proficiency improves.

- The new senior management team has made provision to deploy the allocated resources and teachers to their intended purpose. While it has not been possible to reorganise the full school timetable for the current academic year, students who are most in need have been prioritised. Management are moving towards a needs-based provision. From the 2020 academic year, the SEN allocation will be deployed as is intended.
- Management, with the SEN co-ordinator, have availed of advice and Guidance from NCSE in relation to development of a core team and planning around SEN provision. Staff engaged in SEN will be streamlined and further in-school and sustained support is to be provided by NCSE.
- A substantial number of teaching and class timetables have been restructured to follow the principles and practices of Circular 0014/2017and guidelines for post-primary schools.
- The students formerly part of the first year JCSP standalone class have been redistributed among the other three first year classes. In curriculum planning for 2020/21, the school is expected to move towards mixed ability teaching. Of the current provision at junior level, the second year JCSP grouping will continue to third year, as is. It is not possible to transpose the subject options directly or facilitate integration into alternative subject areas. Management have considered this structural issue around the timetable and concluded that to alter the provision now would disadvantage students currently studying particular subject options. Current planning and restructuring around the management and use of the SET resources will ensure a wider curricular base with short course options at junior level and a cohesive approach to senior cycle provision.
- Currently, in exceptional circumstances, one student with complex needs attends school for an extended period daily. This period has been increased incrementally over the last three years, and management considers this to be a suitable approach as the student's capacity to attend for longer is increased; or until such time as the student finishes their education here. This timetable is created with the full co-operation and informed agreement of parents. The student's educational experiences are planned individually; tracked and monitored. Appropriate and regular integration with mainstream peers occurs. Otherwise, students in the MGLD class have full curricular provision, a needs-based approach with timetabled participation and inclusion in mainstream classes. Management have applied for NCSE support specific to the needs of the students in the MGLD class and JCT support to assist in the introduction of the L2LP programme as part of the Junior Cycle curriculum.