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	Loreto College
Seoladh na scoile/School address	Harbour Rd Mullingar Westmeath
Uimhir rolla/Roll number	63290Q
Dáta na cigireachta/ Date of evaluation	24-03-2023
Dáta eisiúna na tuairisce/Date of issue of report	11/09/2023

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
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

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.

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.

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 students.</td></tr>
</table>

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	24-03-2023
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 • Examination of students' work • Interaction with students • Student group discussion • Meeting with special needs assistants • Feedback to principal and teachers

School context

Loreto College Mullingar is an all girls' post-primary school under the trusteeship of Loreto Education Trust. The school has a current enrolment of 857 students. The school provides the Junior Cycle, an optional Transition Year (TY) programme, the established Leaving Certificate and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme.

Summary of main findings and recommendations:

Findings

- The quality of learning outcomes of students with additional and special educational needs (SEN) was good; good teacher-student rapport and excellent student behaviour were evident in all lessons observed.
- Good quality learning experiences were noted in the majority of lessons; where provision was most effective, approaches that supported all learners to participate actively throughout the lesson were evident.
- The management and use of resources received to support students with additional and SEN was good with some aspects requiring development.
- A suitably qualified core special education teaching (SET) team was in place at the time of the evaluation; the team shared the vision of senior management to develop the school as an environment that is inclusive and effectively meets the diverse needs of all students.
- The structures in place to foster inclusion, equality of opportunity and the holistic development of all students with additional and SEN were good.

Recommendations

- In the majority of lessons a greater range of strategies to support all learners would have enhanced learning outcomes. Teachers should identify effective, inclusive methodologies including differentiated approaches and should ensure these are embedded in all lessons.
- Further adaptation of teaching methodologies was needed in a significant minority of lessons in order to ensure all students were optimally actively engaged. Teachers should plan lessons to ensure all students experience engaging and participative lessons.
- Senior management in conjunction with suitably qualified SETs and mainstream teachers, and in collaboration with parents and students, should oversee further development of effective individual student support plans that support highly effective teacher planning.
- In order to develop provision further and to better support the range of needs within lessons, senior management should conduct an audit of CPD needs and provide CPD to ensure teachers are adequately equipped to skilfully provide SET interventions and to provide consistently inclusive learning experiences in mainstream lessons.

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

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

Good teacher-student rapport and excellent student behaviour were evident in all lessons observed. Teachers were aware of the broad needs of students and of general strategies to support a range of different needs. In some lessons, not all students were adequately supported in their learning as provision was not sufficiently supportive of their specific needs. Where students' individual needs informed teachers' planning, the positive experiences of the students resulted in improved outcomes and levels of motivation and participation. This is an area for development in some lessons.

Teachers were welcoming of students with diverse needs in their lessons. However, in the majority of lessons, inclusive and differentiated approaches required development. In these lessons a greater range of strategies and methodologies to support all learners would have enhanced the learning outcomes. Teachers should identify effective, inclusive methodologies and differentiated approaches and should ensure these approaches are embedded in all lessons.

Co-operative teaching was used as a key mechanism to support students with additional or special educational needs (SEN). A substantial proportion of the school's allocation for special education teaching (SET) was used to provide co-operative teaching within mainstream lessons, with two teachers working together to support students. In the majority of English and Mathematics lessons in first year, teachers work collaboratively. This approach has very good potential to support positive outcomes for many students in a highly inclusive way, although in the team-taught lessons observed this potential was not fully realised. It is recommended that teachers continue to engage with appropriate CPD and are facilitated to plan together to support students in the most effective and targeted manner, informed by well-developed student support files.

The use of digital learning technology (DLT) resources to enhance teaching and learning varied across lessons observed. In a small number of effective lessons teachers made good use of digital technology to reinforce the lesson content; however, in the majority of lessons DLT was underutilised and was predominantly used to display the eBook. There was an over-reliance on teachers using electronic slides in some cases, and this resulted in unnecessary periods of student passivity. Media clips, visual supports and visualisers added value to learning in a significant minority of lessons. Teachers should explore and share effective approaches to using DLT methodologies to support positive outcomes for all learners.

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

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

Good quality learning experiences were noted in the majority of lessons. Further adaptation of the teaching methodologies was needed in a significant minority of lessons in order to ensure all students were optimally actively engaged for the full duration of the lessons. Where provision was most effective, approaches that supported all learners to participate actively throughout the lesson were evident. The range of methodologies used within lessons to support the engagement of all students is an area for whole-school focus.

Students' participation in classroom activities was monitored well by teachers and good circulation among the student cohort helped to improve student participation levels. Teachers provided one-to-one support to students when necessary.

Students who were exempt from Irish or were not attending another subject, were provided with one-to-one or small group lessons. In the group support lessons observed, teachers worked hard to provide meaningful support considering the range of needs within the groups but learning experiences were not optimal. Support lessons should be organised in a way that enables SETs to work with students in a targeted manner, ensuring that those with the greatest level of need receive the highest level of skilful support.

The overall quality of assessment was satisfactory. While good examples of student-centred learning was observed in some lessons when students worked in groups or in pairs, there was scope to increase the opportunities for students to work more effectively as part of a group in order to enhance their learning. Teachers should explore and implement more effective use of group work and peer assessment to facilitate a move away from more didactic teaching and to provide opportunities for students to develop as more independent learners.

Oral questioning was the dominant methodology used to check students' progress, knowledge and understanding. Best practice was evident when the questions posed challenged students to apply and evaluate information. In many instances student answering was brief with teachers then expanding on the answers themselves. A greater use of higher order questions with appropriate wait time would further develop learners' experiences. There is scope to develop and embed assessment-for-learning (AFL) methodologies throughout the school. The benefits of DLT as an assessment tool could be considered further to support this work.

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 additional and special educational needs was good.

It would be worthwhile to re-conceptualise the use of the continuum of support and to identify the students with needs who do not require support outside of effective, inclusive mainstream lessons at the support for all level. This is in line with current guidance and asserts that all teachers have primary responsibility for the progress and care of all students in lessons, including students with SEN. This would also serve as a basis for the further development of inclusive classroom practice in mainstream lessons.

A core team of SETs were in place and they provided support to other teachers who are timetabled to provide SET to the wider teaching community. The school used standardised and summative tests to assess students' learning. Additionally, teachers could refer students for support and a referral form had been developed for this purpose. A suitably qualified co-ordinator for SEN was also in place. The team shared the vision of senior management to develop the school as an environment that is inclusive and effectively meets the diverse needs of all students. Teachers accessed general information about the students in their lessons either directly from the core team or on the school's digital portal.

The school had an 'anchor teacher' model in place where each year group had an anchor teacher who represented and attended to the needs of the students within their year group. The members of the core SET team also acted as anchors. The anchors provided support to in relation to matters related to additional educational needs (AEN) and aimed to support students with emergent or established needs in their year group. Subject teachers were aware of the anchor colleague for each year group and reported very positive engagement with the core team. They valued the support provided by the anchors. However, the student focus group discussions held as part of the evaluation suggested that there is a need to review the communication of this model to students who receive or require support so that they are aware of the identity and role of the anchor teachers.

At the support for 'a few' and for 'some' levels of the continuum, students' needs are largely met through smaller group support, and often at times when students are exempt from Irish or are not attending another subject. While teachers worked hard in these group lessons, the efficacy

of the model was limited as teachers tried to meet a wide range of needs and provision was not sufficiently targeted, this model of support should be reviewed in favour of an approach that provides support in a manner that is more closely aligned to the specific needs of students. Additionally, a small number of SET hours were used to provide subject support at senior cycle. SEN provision should be restructured to ensure that support is meaningfully planned and sufficiently aligned to students' identified needs, in all cases, using the resources in their totality for their intended purpose.

Some good work had taken place in the development of student support files by members of the core team. To enhance the usefulness of the student support files for all students with identified needs, subject teachers should contribute to the development of the file by building on targets, identified by the SET team and should include targets for their subject. Senior management in conjunction with suitably qualified SETs and mainstream teachers, and in collaboration with parents and students, should oversee further development of effective ILPs that support highly effective teacher planning.

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

The school provided good care to students. Positive rapport between all members of the school community was evident throughout the evaluation.

It is commendable that most teachers on the core SEN team had a post-graduate qualification relevant to SEN and new members are accessing relevant training. In order to build capacity across the team and to develop provision further to support the range of needs within lessons, an audit of CPD needs should be drawn up. Suitable CPD should be provided to ensure teachers are adequately equipped to skilfully provide SET interventions, to provide inclusive learning experiences in mainstream lessons and also to prepare the school community for the special class that is expected to open in the coming school year.

The staff were caring towards students in the lessons observed and showed empathy towards students who presented with anxiety, which, it was reported is a concern for the school. The school have explored reasons that might contribute to students' anxiety including a survey of students' experiences of Covid-19 and how this period impacted on their wellbeing and learning. There would be merit in examining also the effectiveness of in-school support structures, the policies in place and students' experiences of learning in order to be able to address these anxiety-related needs in the most holistic and effective manner.

In the lessons observed students were generally comfortable in their engagement with their teachers although there is a need to support students to be more actively engaged and to create greater balance between teachers' voice and student participation in lessons. Senior management should conduct an anonymous survey that seeks to understand the experience of students at all levels of the continuum to support ongoing development of student experiences and outcomes.

The school was compliant with the anti-bullying checks carried out. However, there are procedural aspects that could be better communicated to students. In the focus group, students raised the matter of bullying and when asked, could not identify a nominated person that they could approach if affected by bullying. They agreed that the Guidance teachers were supportive and approachable although they were very busy and they all said that there would be one or two teachers that they might be able to confide in. The matter of bullying should be a focus for senior management and teachers generally and some consideration should be given to strengthening the approach to dealing with bullying behaviour and supporting student wellbeing.

A range of sports activities were available to students and there were various clubs and extra and co-curricular activities available for students. The recently formed social justice group were in the process of developing an area where neuro-divergent students could spend time at break times and other initiatives such as the ‘red card’ which allows students who need to self-regulate to leave the classroom for a short break were in place. Other activities such as music club and the orchestra were available to students. Students in the focus group valued the support provided by the Big sister/Little sister strategy although not all students availed of this in their first year.

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;

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 welcomes this report, which reflects the ongoing dedicated work of the SEN team and good work of mainstream teaching staff in providing for students with special educational needs in our school including the overall good quality of learner outcomes, learner experiences and structures in place to foster the inclusion and holistic development of students.

The BOM pays tribute to SEN Co-Ordinator, SEN team, teachers, SNAs, students and parents for contributing so much to the evaluation.

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 DES Inspectorate's recognition of the following aspects is particularly appreciated:

- The school met the requirements in relation to school's child protection and anti-bullying procedures.
- The quality of learning outcomes of students with additional and special educational needs (SEN) was good; good teacher-student rapport and excellent student behaviour were evident in all lessons observed. Good quality learning experiences were noted in majority of lessons and approaches that supported all learners to participate actively throughout the lessons were evident.
- The management and use of resources received to support students with additional and SEN was good.
- The qualified core Special Education Teaching (SET) team shared the vision of senior management to develop the school as an environment that is inclusive and effectively meets the diverse needs of all students.
- The structure in place to foster inclusion, equality of opportunity of all students with additional and SEN were good.

The school is committed to implementing each of the recommendations made during the course of the inspection in order to enhance learner outcomes, learner experiences and support for all of our SEN students.

To date we have made the following progress:

As part of our culture of staff development, we have conducted an audit of CPD needs of teachers to ensure they are equipped to skilfully provide SET interventions and to provide consistently inclusive learning experiences in mainstream lessons.

To support teachers in identifying effective, inclusive methodologies including differentiated approaches and ensuring these are embedded in all lessons, we have applied for CPD in this area with the PDST and JCIS. We will continue to focus on this through our SSE process, participation in TL21 and continued sharing of best practice at our staff meetings and Teachmeets (sharing of good practice) next year.

We are reviewing individual student support plans with subject teachers to develop targets that are subject specific and that support highly effective practice.

We have surveyed our entire student body with a view to affirming communication, identifying strengths and weaknesses, highlighting positive behaviours and supporting student wellbeing. With our form teachers, year heads and one good adult scheme we will continue to reinforce and reiterate anti-bullying procedures in place. We are also introducing a randomised student forum to gain further student voice.

We would welcome more supports from government agencies to help families and schools address the increase in student anxiety experienced worldwide post-pandemic.