An Roinn Oideachais
Department of Education

Evaluation of inclusive practices and provision for children with special and additional educational needs in post-primary schools

Report

REPORT

Ainm na scoile/School name	St Kevin's Community College
Seoladh na scoile/School address	Dunlavin Co Wicklow
Uimhir rolla/Roll number	70800E
Dáta na cigireachta/ Date of evaluation	21-11-2023
Dáta eisiúna na tuairisce/Date of issue of report	04/03/2024

What is an evaluation of inclusive practices and provision for children with special and additional educational needs?

The Evaluation of Inclusive Practices and Provision for Children with Special and Additional Educational Needs is a focused evaluation of provision for students with special and additional educational needs in mainstream post-primary schools. As this inspection model places a particular emphasis on the quality of learner outcomes for students with special and additional 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 special and additional educational needs under the following headings or areas of enquiry:

1. The quality of learning outcomes of students with special and additional educational needs
2. The quality of learning experiences of students with special and additional educational needs
3. The quality of the management and use of resources received by the school to support students with special and additional educational needs
4. The quality of the structures in place to foster inclusion, equality of opportunity and the holistic development of all students with special and additional 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.

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</td></tr>
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	members, teacher, parents and pupils/students.

The school met the requirements in relation to each of the checks above.

Evaluation of inclusive practices and provision for children with special and additional educational needs

Date of inspection	21-11-2023
Inspection activities undertaken • Discussion with principal and teachers • Meeting with SEN team • Meeting with parents of students with special and additional 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

*Observation of teaching and learning took place across first, second and fifth year mainstream and support lessons. Other year groups and the special class setting were unavailable for observation due to scheduled examinations and transition year work experience.

School context

St Kevin's Community College is a co-educational post-primary school under the patronage of Kildare and Wicklow Education and Training Board. It participates in the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) action plan for inclusion. The school has a current enrolment of 729 students and provides Junior Cycle, Junior Certificate School Programme, an optional Transition Year programme (TY), the established Leaving Certificate, the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) and the Leaving Certificate Applied programme (LCA). The school provides a special class for students with autism. The school has a mainstream additional teaching allocation of 152.5 teaching hours or 6.9 whole-time equivalents (WTEs), equal to almost seven full-time teachers, to provide additional supports for students identified with special educational needs. The school also has an allocation of 4.5 special needs assistants (SNAs).

Summary of main findings and recommendations:

Findings

- Learning outcomes and experiences were of a high quality overall; some innovative and exemplary practices were observed, while satisfactory outcomes and experiences were noted in a minority of lessons.
- Very good systems were in place to identify and plan to meet the needs of junior cycle students; senior cycle planning was less well developed.
- The management and use of resources was good overall; a well-qualified, experienced and dedicated core team of special education teachers (SET) has been established and this team works diligently with management to ensure ongoing improvements to practice.
- Considerable effort has gone into improving the management and use of resources and senior management are aware of the need for continued efforts to expand the SEN team and ensure that the full allocation of additional teaching hours is deployed optimally for its intended purpose.
- The structures in place to support inclusion, equality and holistic development of students with special and additional education needs were very effective, and a welcoming and inclusive ethos was evident throughout the school.

Recommendations

- Teachers should collaborate to further develop, share and extend the very effective teaching approaches and strategies observed in some lessons.
- Management and SET should lead the development of an agreed system of communication so that teachers have ready access to key information that can inform lesson planning and support high quality outcomes and experiences in all lessons.
- Management should maintain efforts towards the full and efficient deployment of all additional teaching hours for their intended purpose, and the further development of the core SEN team.
- Management and SET should work to devise a system of distributed individualised planning that extends into senior cycle and allows for greater access to parent and student voice.

Detailed findings and recommendations

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

Learner outcomes were of a high quality overall. Many very good and some exemplary learning outcomes were observed, as well as some satisfactory outcomes in a minority of lessons.

In general, levels of motivation were high. In most lessons students' expectations to achieve, and their enjoyment of achievement, was evident and there were instances where they demonstrated a very good understanding of the value of the work. At times they were observed making significant meaningful progress with challenging work, and they were proud of and keen to share their work.

Learner outcomes were most effective when student-centred planning facilitated development across a range of key skills, allowed students to collaborate, learn from each other as well as from tasks set, access content and use the language of the subject in a number of ways and reflect on achievement and learning. In some lessons, students were observed building strength incrementally in a range of key skills, and their enjoyment was clearly linked to a sense of making progress with meaningful learning.

In a minority of lessons, the learning activities were driven by the textbook or worksheets. In these lessons, students mostly worked individually to complete written exercises, and for some students learning outcomes were less successful as a result. At times there was a need to differentiate the activities further in order to address individual needs and enable students to learn in a way that promoted their individual strengths.

In a minority of lessons, there was a need for greater balance between teacher and student voice, greater clarity in the learning intention, and/or better planning to ensure tasks set were accessible and workable for all students. At times, there was a need for more extensive use of visuals to support learning, or more challenge for those that were readily able for tasks set.

Some very good assessment of students' individual needs was in place, and this formed the basis for decisions about targeted interventions to meet individual needs. Further development of interventions to target some specific skill areas was recommended.

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

Overall, learning experiences were of a high quality. In most lessons experiences were good, very good or exemplary, with some satisfactory experiences in a minority of lessons.

Interactions were very positive and respectful in all lessons. Relationships between teachers and students were strong. Most teachers demonstrated a good awareness of the individual needs of their students. Good or very good levels of engagement in learning were observed in almost all lessons.

Some innovative and targeted strategies were used very effectively to further develop language and communication skills and in these instances, students made incremental progress in developing a range of skills. Teachers should consider how best to share and extend these very successful strategies.

Some very good opportunities to reflect on learning were observed, including where students captured the skills and vocabulary of a topic, and made their own notes and visuals to summarise and reinforce learning. At times they were given carefully chosen options about how they would progress with a task. Students responded very well in these situations, and made selections that worked for them and allowed them to interact with content and demonstrate learning in different ways. In some support lessons students were observed mastering and adapting very useful strategies such as *5 Ws and 1 H* in ways that suited them and played to their strengths.

In most lessons students were presented with good or very good opportunities to work in pairs or in groups, and where this was well planned and structured it worked very effectively. Where structures were effective, students learned from each other, they used the key vocabulary in ways that were meaningful and memorable to them, and they enjoyed making progress with the content. When opportunities arose, they took responsibility for their own learning. At times, the oral input given by their peers gave rise to extended or more ambitious expectations and they surpassed the intended learning.

At times collaborative work was less thoroughly planned and experiences were less effective. In a minority of lessons, there was insufficient structure to the tasks set, or a need for greater attention to the seating arrangements and distribution of roles.

In many lessons note-taking from the board was observed. In discussions students said that this was their least favourite and least successful way to learn, and they reported that in some lessons it happens a lot. Teachers should consider the barrier to learning that this practice presents for students with literacy difficulties and, where possible employ technological solutions. Additionally, where appropriate, teachers should consider the benefits of supporting students to make their own notes, rather than note taking from the board.

Some exemplary practice was brought about by a universal approach to planning which sought to make the lesson meaningful and accessible to all learners. For example, in one lesson students worked in groups with assigned roles to research a topic, and then present to their peers. The task was supported by clear criteria such as using and understanding the correct vocabulary, access to the necessary information and options about how to record and present their work by using text and/or visuals. All students were purposefully engaged throughout the lesson, and their sense of enjoyment was clearly linked to their full participation and sense of achievement.

Digital technologies were used very effectively by some teachers to support learning in a number of ways. At times a photo or video clip was used to engage or to stimulate thought or discussion. In some instances video clips of teacher demonstrations were uploaded to the school platform to help students remember how to complete a process. Text-to-speech and speech-to-text software was used by some students. In one very effective lesson, students researched a topic online and presented to their peers in very engaging ways.

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

Overall, the management and use of resources was good, with some practice requiring improvement.

It was evident that considerable effort has gone into improving the management and use of resources over recent years. Changes to class groupings have been made in order to retrieve additional teaching hours from the mainstream timetable and deploy them flexibly for their intended purpose. A well-qualified and very committed core SEN team has been established and this team works with management to ensure that timetabling facilitated provision of supports at key times. Management is aware of the need to consolidate this team and grow the number of core team members.

However, at time of the evaluation, not all of the additional teaching hours were deployed for their intended purpose; a small number were used to deliver mainstream lessons or pastoral care. Management should ensure full and flexible deployment of all additional teaching hours for their intended purpose.

The principle that students with the greatest level of need should get the greatest level of support was clearly evident in the timetabling of interventions and supports. Junior cycle students that had exemptions from Irish or that did not study foreign languages were grouped according to similarity of need and accessed supports in carefully planned small groups. Some small groups accessed short term targeted interventions over a number of weeks. 1:1 supports were in place for students with more complex needs. It was very positive that timetabling was entirely driven by the needs of the students.

However, the supports delivered to senior cycle students were in need of further development. The school plans to extend levels of provision to senior cycle students; it is recommended that further development of senior cycle provision is prioritised.

During the evaluation there were a number of 1:1 support lessons that were not delivered because the student was absent. There was a need to structure the delivery of supports so that when students were absent the teaching resource would still be fully deployed. Full and flexible utilisation of teaching resources, including the special class teaching resource, should be prioritised.

Team teaching was in place for a small number of class groups. The school plans to extend this inclusive practice. Continuing professional development (CPD) and ongoing collaboration to support optimal use of this valuable teaching resource are recommended.

Some valuable continuing professional learning (CPD) for staff has been delivered over recent years, including inputs on dyslexia for all staff, and on autism when the special class was opened. Regular inputs, updates and reminders for whole staff are given by SET.

The school has participated in the School Inclusion Model (SIM) project and this has added to staff learning. Some training on speech and language difficulties and a drop-in clinic for all staff was given by a Speech and Language Therapist. Training in the Vocabulary Enrichment Programme (VEP) and Lego Therapy was delivered for some. An Occupational Therapist guided the school to complete an accessibility audit and some improvements were put in place as a result. Year heads and some SET were trained in strategies to support organisational skills. Commendably, these strategies are now delivered inclusively for all, and followed up by further supports for some.

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

The structures in place to support inclusion, equality and holistic development of students with special and additional education needs were for the most part very good with further development of provision at senior cycle needed. Commitment to high quality provision was very evident in all discussions and focus groups, and a warmly welcoming and supportive learning environment was observed throughout the school.

A strong and very effective small core SEN team works diligently and collaboratively to plan and deliver supports, as well as to lead out on whole school provision. This team is very reflective and works to bring about ongoing improvements to practice. Inclusion of all students is prioritised and very effective links with outside agencies and professionals support the team to deliver high quality experiences and outcomes for individuals with complex needs.

Very good interventions were in place to support the transition from primary school and most students and parents reported that the transition had been managed well. The school's open day was reported as being highly inclusive and welcoming. School visits in advance of school opening, help with lockers and timetables, supports delivered by prefects, and interventions to support organisational skills were all found to be useful and helped young people to settle in.

Some very good screening and tracking was in place, and a very good range of testing was used to inform planning. Closer targeting of interventions to address specific identified needs and further monitoring to evaluate efficacy of interventions was recommended, but in general planning was informed by very good, detailed assessment of needs.

Individual support files and plans are in place for all junior cycle students placed at the Support for Few and Support for Some levels of the Continuum of Support. For senior cycle students this system was less well developed. For junior cycle students, teachers had access to useful information prepared by SET. While teachers had a good general understanding of needs, not all teachers demonstrated an understanding of how they might address needs, minimise barriers, or utilise strengths to best effect. Management, SET and teachers should collaborate to identify what system of communication will be most effective in ensuring teachers have ready access to key information on students' priority learning needs, targets, interests and strengths. Teachers should take this information into account when planning and delivering lessons, and collaborate with SET to recognise and affirm progress, setting targets for within their own lessons when appropriate.

Most parents were very appreciative of the efforts of teachers, SNAs and the Home School Liaison Officer to support young people and promote full participation. Almost all reported that their child was happy coming to school and was fully included in school life. They said their main point of contact was the year head and few reported any knowledge of individual plans. Some felt that their child needed more supports such as structured movement breaks, more 1:1 support, a separate exam centre, or greater access to a reader/scribe. It is recommended that a team of SET is established with distributed responsibility for individualised planning and communications so that parents and students have good opportunities to feed into planning, voice concerns and get a good understanding of provision.

Students also spoke very positively about the supports in place, the range of subjects available and the opportunities for active learning in some lessons. They also said they would like a greater say in some aspects of school life including school rules about the use of phones, uniform, and access to the bathrooms. Many lunchtime and after-school activities were in place including card and board games, an equestrian club, a range of sports, student-led coding, chess and a lego club.

Some work has gone into making school policy information more accessible to students; useful infographics were shared with students and parents making important messages more user-friendly. The school's code of behaviour is positively framed and keeps messages clear and simple. The Admissions policy requires amendment in order to fully reflect the inclusive ethos and practice of the school.

The draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation were discussed with the principal, deputy principals, the SEN co-ordinator and members of the core SET team 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;

Appendix

SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

Submitted by the Board of Management

Part A Observations on the content of the inspection report

The board notes the very positive findings of the inspection team.

The board notes the observations of the inspection team and will support the School Leadership Team in maintaining a genuinely inclusive learning environment.

The board will support the Leadership Team in ensuring that all resources are allocated to supporting educational provision within the SEN area.

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

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