An Roinn Oideachais
agus Óige
Department of Education
and Youth

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

REPORT

Ainm na scoile/School name	St Mary's School
Seoladh na scoile/School address	Greenhills Road Tallaght Dublin 24
Uimhir rolla/Roll number	18411U
Dáta na cigireachta/ Date of evaluation	01/10/2025
Dáta eisiúna na tuairisce/Date of issue of report	27/11/2025

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 pupils with special and additional educational needs in mainstream primary schools. As this inspection model places a particular emphasis on the quality of learner outcomes for pupils 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 inspectors evaluated provision for pupils with special and additional educational needs under the following headings or areas of enquiry:

1. The quality of learning of pupils with special and additional educational needs
2. The quality of teaching of pupils with special and additional educational needs
3. The management and use of resources received to support pupils 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

During the inspection visit, the following checks in relation to the school's child protection and anti-bullying procedures were conducted:	
Child Protection	*Bí Cineálta*
1. The name of the DLP and the Child Safeguarding Statement (CSS) are prominently displayed near the main door of the school / in the reception area. *Following the school's adoption of the updated procedures 2025, it is also required to display a student-friendly version incorporating the name of the DLP beside the CSS*. 2. The school's child safeguarding statement has been ratified by the board and includes an annual review and a risk assessment. 3. All teachers visited were aware of who to go to if they had a child protection concern.	1. The school has developed an anti-bullying policy using Appendix A of *Bí Cineálta, it is reviewed annually (or earlier if required) and includes a student/pupil friendly version that is displayed where students/pupils and the school community can see it.* 2. The school's anti-bullying policy is published on its website and/or is readily accessible to board of management members, staff, parents and students/pupils. 3. The board of management minutes record that the principal provides an update to the board at each ordinary board meeting that meets the requirements of *Bí Cineálta*

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	29/09/2025 - 01/10/2025
Inspection activities undertaken • Discussion with principal and teachers • Meeting with SEN team • Meeting with SNAs • Review of relevant documents	• Analysis of parent questionnaires • Observation of teaching and learning • Examination of pupils' work • Interaction with pupils • Pupil group discussion • Feedback to principal, deputy principal and teachers

School context

St. Mary's National School is a co-educational primary school located on Greenhill's Road, Tallaght, Dublin 24. It operates under the patronage of the Catholic Archbishop of Dublin. The school has an administrative principal, fourteen mainstream class teachers and eleven special education teachers, one of whom is shared with another school. At the time of the evaluation, there were 351 pupils enrolled in the school. The school has a diverse school population with pupils from thirty-five different nationalities attending the school. English is not the first language for over 40% of pupils.

Summary of main findings and recommendations:

Findings

- The focus on the promotion of wellbeing in the school was highly commendable. Staff members demonstrated a strong commitment to the promotion of inclusion.
- The quality of learning outcomes for pupils with special and additional needs was good.
- Pupils' learning experiences were of a good quality; an encouraging and supportive school culture was evident.
- The quality of teaching was good.
- The management and use of resources received to support pupils with special and additional needs were very good.

Recommendations

- School leaders and teachers should agree and implement whole-school approaches to support the incremental and systematic development of pupils' oral language skills.
- School leaders should ensure that pupils' priority learning needs are clearly identified in Student Support Files. Specific targets aligned to pupils' priority learning needs should be established and outcomes for learners should record progression in learning and inform the next steps in teaching and learning.

Detailed findings and recommendations

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

The quality of learning outcomes for pupils with special and additional educational needs was good. Pupils displayed high levels of participation in lessons where they engaged with enthusiasm in activities, games, tasks and discussions. Pupils were engaged in meaningful learning activities, and they were enabled to work independently and collaboratively. They were provided with a range of concrete resources to support their active engagement and understanding. Supports for pupils with additional and special educational needs were provided through a combination of in-class support, small group and individual withdrawal approaches. Interactions observed among pupils and between pupils and teachers were very respectful, positive and conducive to the pupils' sense of belonging and wellbeing.

Overall, pupils with additional and special educational needs were making good progress in their learning. Whole-school literacy and numeracy initiatives in junior classes impacted positively on the learning outcomes of pupils with special and additional learning needs. Their engagement with programmes of learning to support the development of their wellbeing and social and emotional skills has contributed positively to their experience of school. School leaders and teachers demonstrated a clear understanding that effective learning is underpinned by the promotion of positive behaviour and the development of self-regulation skills. Staff showed an understanding that when pupils are supported in managing their emotions and behaviours, they are better prepared and ready to learn.

During the focus-group discussion, almost all pupils indicated that they enjoyed aspects of their learning and school life. Pupils spoke in positive terms about their lessons and how their special education teachers make learning easier. Pupils reported they felt safe in the classroom and on the yard and that they were treated with respect. Currently, a very small number of pupils are on a reduced timetable. School leaders and teachers engaged with parents and relevant agencies to address pupils' attendance at school. They developed plans in consultation with parents while they continued to support these pupils to extend their time in school towards the entire school day.

2. The quality of teaching of pupils with special and additional educational needs

The quality of teaching for pupils with special and additional educational needs was good. Teachers were good communicators and had high expectations of pupils' learning and behaviour. They had good subject knowledge and pedagogical skills.

Good quality teaching characterised by clear explanations and the effective use of subject-specific language by teachers was observed in almost all settings. While most teachers created opportunities for the pupils to engage in oral language activities, a significant number of pupils demonstrated a lack of confidence and competence in oral language skills. Where best practice was observed, discrete oral language and subject-specific language were planned for, recorded and taught explicitly. There was a clear need to develop pupils' oral language skills and competencies more systematically. It is recommended that school leaders and teachers collaboratively implement a whole-school approach to support the progressive incremental development of pupils' oral language skills. All pupils should be consistently provided with structured, differentiated opportunities to engage in oral language tasks.

Almost all parents who completed questionnaires administered during this evaluation indicated that their children felt safe and well looked after in school and most parents agreed that pupils were fully included and participated well in classroom and school life. However, erosion of contact time with pupils was evident from special education teachers' timetables. School leaders should ensure that additional teaching resources allocated to the school are used for the sole

purposes of providing additional support to pupils with identified needs. Special education teachers should review their timetables to ensure that teaching time is maximised.

Teachers gathered assessment data on pupils' learning from a range of sources. Assessment data supported language learning for pupils for whom English is an additional language. However, in Student Support Files pupils' priority learning needs were not always clearly identified and learning targets were too broad. School leaders and teachers should ensure that pupils' priority learning needs are clearly identified, and specific targets aligned to pupils' priority learning needs are established. Learner outcomes should be monitored to guide next steps in learning and ensure pupils receive appropriately challenging and supportive learning experiences. Teachers should use support plans to formally review and record pupils' progress in learning. While school leaders build and maintain positive relationships with parents, a significant minority who completed the questionnaires responded that they were not aware of or did not have a copy of their child's learning plans. Copies of support plans should be signed by parents and shared with them.

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

The management and use of resources received to support pupils with special and additional educational needs was of a very high quality. All teachers were committed to the care, inclusion and the holistic development of pupils. The leadership and management provided by the principal and deputy principal ensured a very coordinated approach to support pupils with special and additional educational needs. Resources, for the most part, were deployed effectively and flexibly to create an inclusive and stimulating learning environment for pupils with a broad range of learning needs. Special education teachers and SNAs were deployed strategically. Provision was monitored and reviewed as necessary to address pupils' emerging needs.

The Continuum of Support guided and informed the school's approach to the delivery of supports for pupils with additional educational needs. School leaders recognised that special educational needs occur along a continuum and that needs may change over time. They used the Continuum of Support framework well to flexibly allocate the highest level of supports to those pupils with the greatest level of needs. The classroom support stage on the Continuum of Support framework was used very effectively to address and communicate pupils' emerging learning needs to parents. Commendably, class teachers met with a school support team to discuss progress at the end of an instructional term where the next steps in learning for pupils on classroom support were agreed. These structures and the use of the staged approach to support pupils with additional and special educational needs was a significant strength embedded in whole-school practice.

The school had a range of policies to support the provision of supports for pupils with special educational needs. The whole-school plan on special educational needs provided effective guidance to inform teachers' practice in developing a co-ordinated approach to provision. Commendably, school leadership and members of the special education team have commenced a process to review the whole-school plan for special and additional educational needs. This will be developed collaboratively by school leaders in consultation with teachers, SNAs, parents, pupils and the board of management, considering recent publications and revised guidelines to guide and inform all aspects of provision.

Members of staff are encouraged and provided with opportunities to engage in continuing professional development. Very good levels of collaboration were noted between teachers and SNAs to support pupils' wellbeing and engagement in learning. The SNAs contributed positively to the care and inclusion of pupils. The school engaged meaningfully with relevant external agencies for support and advice. Very effective practices were established to support transitions for pupils. Almost all parents who participated in the group discussion during the evaluation, reported that their children have had a very positive experience in school and indicated that the wellbeing and care of pupils is a significant strength of the school.

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	Examples of descriptive terms
Excellent	**Provision that is excellent** is exemplary in meeting the needs of learners. This provision provides an example for other schools and settings of exceptionally high standards of provision.	Excellent; exemplary; outstanding; exceptionally high standard; with very significant strengths
Very good	**Provision that is very good** is very effective in meeting the needs of learners and is of a very high standard. There is potential to build on existing strengths to achieve an excellent standard.	Very good; of a very high quality; very effective practice; highly commendable; very successful
Good	**Provision that is good** is effective in meeting the needs of learners. There is need to build on existing strengths in order to address the aspects to be developed and achieve a very good standard.	Good; of good quality; effective practice; competent; useful; commendable; good standard; strengths outweigh the shortcomings; appropriate provision although some possibilities for improvement exist
Requires improvement to achieve a good standard	**Provision that requires improvement to achieve a good standard** is not sufficiently effective in meeting the needs of learners. There is need to address certain deficiencies without delay in order to ensure that provision is good or better.	Fair; less than effective; less than sufficient; evident weaknesses that are impacting on learning; experiencing difficulty; shortcomings outweigh strengths; must improve in specified areas; action required to improve
Requires significant improvement to achieve a good standard	**Provision that requires significant improvement to achieve a good standard** is not meeting the needs of learners. There is immediate need for significant action to address the areas of concern.	Weak; poor; ineffective; insufficient; unacceptable; experiencing significant difficulties; serious deficiencies in the areas evaluated; requiring significant change, development and improvement to be effective

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 and Staff of St. Mary's N.S. welcome this report and are pleased with its positive findings. We are particularly encouraged by the recognition of the school's strong focus on promoting pupil well-being, described as highly commendable and by the very positive feedback from parents who identified their child's well-being and care as key strengths.

We also value the acknowledgment of our staff's commitment to inclusion and holistic development of all pupils. This report's observation that effective learning is underpinned by positive behaviour and self-regulation skills reflects our shared ethos and daily practice.

Finally, we are pleased that the management and use of resources to support pupils with special and additional needs were recognised as being of a very high quality.

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 Board accepts the recommendations of this report and is committed to their full implementation.

A whole-school approach to the progressive development of pupils' oral language skills will be planned and advanced.

Work is already underway to further develop Student Support Files, with a particular focus on identifying pupils' priority learning needs, setting specific and measurable targets, and recording progress. Staff have engaged in professional learning through the NCSE, and the school has sought support from its NEPS psychologist to further enhance practice in this area.

The Board of Management acknowledges the dedication and professionalism of the school staff, along with the support of pupils and parents, in fostering a positive, inclusive, and nurturing school environment.