



An Roinn Oideachais
Department of Education

Focused evaluation of learning and provision for students with special educational needs in post-primary schools Report

REPORT

Ainm na scoile/School name	Loreto Secondary School
Seoladh na scoile/School address	Pembroke Hill Ballynagee Wexford.
Uimhir rolla/Roll number	63660A
Dáta na cigireachta/ Date of evaluation	05/12/2025
Dáta eisiúna na tuairisce/ Date of issue of report	10/02/2026

Introduction

A focused evaluation of learning and provision for students with special educational needs is conducted in post-primary schools and evaluates:

- The quality of the learning of students with special educational needs
- The quality of a specific aspect of the school's provision for students with special educational needs

The specific aspect of the school's provision that is evaluated is based on the published [Guidelines for Post Primary Schools: Supporting Young People with Special Educational Needs in Mainstream Classes](#).

This is a report on an evaluation conducted in Loreto Secondary School on 05/12/2025. The specific aspect of the school's provision that was evaluated was Assessment practices

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:	
<i>Child Protection</i>	<i>Bí Cineálta</i>
<ol style="list-style-type: none">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. <i>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.</i>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.	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. The school has developed an anti-bullying policy using Appendix A of <i>Bí Cineálta</i>, <i>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.</i>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 <i>Bí Cineálta</i>.

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

School context

Loreto Secondary School, Wexford, is a voluntary secondary school with 930 female students. It is under the trusteeship of the Loreto Education Trust. The school offers the Junior Cycle, an optional Transition Year programme (TY), the Leaving Certificate Established (LCE), Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP). At the time of the evaluation the school had an additional special education teaching allocation of 127 hours, approximately 5.8 whole-time teacher equivalents (WTE), 0.68 WTE for English as an additional language (EAL) teaching, 7.5 additional hours to support students from the Ukraine and a total of five special needs assistants.

Evaluation findings

The quality of learning of students with special educational needs

The quality of learning outcomes and experiences for students with special education needs was good overall with instances of very good practice and some key aspects that required improvement.

Strengths

- In the very good lessons, teachers used clear learning intentions, well-structured learning task sequences and effective success criteria that enabled students to understand what they were learning and how to progress. Additionally, teachers' high-quality explanations and affirming, improvement-focused formative feedback supported students to engage confidently and make very good progress.
- Overall, teachers demonstrated good and, at times, very good knowledge of students' identified needs. In all lessons, students experienced calm, inclusive and well-organised lessons with predictable routines. In very good lessons, teachers included planned approaches informed by and responsive to students' priority learning needs. Students were generally purposeful in their engagement with learning tasks and responded well to teachers' prompts, reassurance and individualised guided support. In about half of the lessons, explicit teaching of learning strategies, step-by-step scaffolding and student self-reflective activities effectively promoted students' self-reflection and incremental skill development.
- In a small number of lessons, highly effective teacher practice included universal design for learning approaches that provided visually rich aids for learning, a variety of multi-modal approaches to teaching and learning that effectively supported students' emotional regulation, understanding and participation and made learning tasks accessible and predictable for students with special educational, autism and EAL needs. In these lessons, teachers used their knowledge of students' priority learning needs to inform graduated, targeted instruction, circulation, frequent individual support and focused prompting. This contributed positively to students' ability to remain focused and experience success.
- Team teaching was used effectively to meet the needs of students in mainstream lessons. Team teachers collaborated effectively to plan for and monitor learning. They provided frequent, timely additional instruction and formative feedback by offering subtle, individualised assistance that created an inclusive learning environment. An example of an excellent positive behaviour-for-learning approaches was observed in which predictable lesson routines, peer-collaborative learning, problem solving and team-teaching approaches facilitated high levels of student participation, optimal engagement and a highly inclusive atmosphere. In this highly effective practice, carefully planned teacher instruction supported the development of independent and transferable student skills.
- Overall, teachers made good use of modelling, diagrams, templates, keyword reinforcement and structured demonstrations that guided students to organise information, apply subject-specific language and skills' development where they were observed to complete tasks to a good and very good standard. There was scope, however, in the majority of lessons, for greater use of structured peer learning, collaborative problem-solving and extension tasks to ensure that learning experiences were consistently challenging and that students had regular opportunities to verbalise their thinking and learn with and from their peers.

Areas for action

- Students benefited from positive relationships and some highly effective team teaching, but structured peer learning and explicit social-communication development were not consistently embedded. Teachers should extend collaborative peer learning and interactive approaches so all students, particularly those with social-communication, language, or

emotional needs, regularly engage in purposeful discussion, shared problem-solving, and co-construction of learning.

- While assessment practices were well developed and teachers knew students' priority learning needs, this did not always translate into clear strategies for mainstream lessons or reflect students' strengths and interests. Special education and mainstream teachers should ensure assessment informs practical strategies recorded in support plans. Most lessons required more visually rich, contextualised, and differentiated approaches so all students, including EAL learners, can access supportive and challenging tasks effectively.

The quality of assessment for students with special educational needs

The quality of assessment for students with special educational needs was good.

Strengths

- The special education core team demonstrated a well-structured and effective approach to assessment and screening, enabling early identification of students' priority needs through formal and informal assessments, collaborative meetings and multi-layered transition support procedures. Induction days provided quiet spaces and advance planning for students with physical, sensory, and emotional needs. EAL assessment, using the Common European Framework of Reference benchmarks, supported accurate identification of language needs by the EAL coordinator, however there was scope to extend teaching strategies across mainstream lessons.
- It was very good that overall, students with the greatest level of needs benefited from increased access to special education teaching through team teaching, small-group withdrawal, sensory interventions and check-and-connect mentoring. Strategies to support student Wellbeing, emotionally aware teacher planning and the use of visual teaching approaches were reported by students and parents to have improved engagement and confidence, reflecting strong inclusive practice and responsiveness to individual needs.
- Collaboration between the special education core team, senior leaders and mainstream teachers was a significant strength. Regular meetings facilitated strategic and responsive problem solving, informed by assessment data, teacher referrals and parental input, directly aligned to very good decisions about special education teacher deployment. Professional learning in areas such as team teaching, behaviours of concern, and mentoring, further strengthened provision, although some inconsistencies remained in mainstream subject teachers' awareness of how to use their knowledge of students' identified needs when tailoring lesson approaches or when implementing agreed accommodations.
- Processes for assessment and placement on the *Continuum of Support* were effective, and targeted interventions improved student engagement and confidence. Senior management's consolidation of the special education team supported continuity of provision. Assessment-informed decisions were generally good and engagement with external agencies was very good, with positive examples of decisions relating to physical adaptations, transition supports, reasonable accommodations in certificate examinations and emotional support.
- The introduction of the LCA programme, in response to the changing profile of student needs, had a significant positive impact on students' experiences and wellbeing. This reflected adaptive practice and a commitment to inclusive pathways. Overall, the quality of assessment-informed decision-making and collaborative planning was good, and the school's capacity to respond to emerging needs was evident in the range of supports provided and the mostly positive feedback from students and parents.

Areas for action

- Assessment approaches informing identification and special education teacher deployment were very good overall. However, student support plans lacked specific targets, structured review cycles and detailed strategies for whole-school implementation. Student and parent voice was not systematically embedded and strengths and interests were inconsistently

documented. Many plans omitted clear review sections and actionable strategies for mainstream teachers. The special education core team should consolidate documentation into a single coherent support plan with strengths, assessed needs, specific, measurable, attainable, relevant and time bound targets and strategies for all teachers. These plans should be reviewed regularly with students and parents to ensure progressive, needs-led support.

- Collaboration in decision-making was very good. However, preventative and early in-class supports and team teaching were not consistently implemented and changes to students' learning programmes were sometimes made without a documented sequence of tiered interventions and review. The special education core team and senior leaders should create a clear decision-making pathway that integrates, monitors and reviews preventative, in-class and supplementary supports before any change is made to a students' learning programme. They should also plan strategically to expand team-teaching and use Level one Learning Programme and Level two Learning Programme when indicated by assessment data and where access to this inclusive programme would meet the students' needs.

The draft strengths and areas for development arising out of this evaluation were discussed with the principal, deputy principals and special education core team during and 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	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

Part A Observations on the content of the inspection report

The Board of Management welcomes this positive report. In particular, we are pleased to note:

- That very good knowledge of students' needs and that lessons were calm, inclusive and well organised.
- Evidence of highly effective teacher practice included universal design for learning approaches that provided visually rich aids for learning.
- Team teaching being used effectively to meet the needs of students in mainstream lessons.
- Positive relationships between teachers and students.
- That the SET team demonstrated a well-structured and effective approach to assessment and screening, enabling early identification of students' priority needs through formal and informal assessments, collaborative meetings and multi-layered transition support procedures.
- That students with the greatest level of need benefited from increased access to SET.
- Collaboration between the special education core team, senior leaders and mainstream teachers was a significant strength.
- That engagement with external agencies was very good.
- That the introduction of the LCA programme has had a significant impact on students' experiences and wellbeing.

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

Discussions around the areas for action outlined in the report have commenced. The SET team will liaise with senior leaders and the wider school community to implement recommendations around collaboration, assessment practices and differentiation. A review of student support plans and the sequencing of support will also be commenced with focus on implementing change in the new school year. The Board will support CPD where required to help implement the above.