

Department *of* Education



A Report by the Education and Training Inspectorate

A Survey of
The Provision for Pupils with
Special Educational Needs
in Mainstream Schools

Inspected: 2001-2002



Providing Inspection Services for

Department of Education
Department for Employment and Learning
Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure

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1. THE MAIN PURPOSES OF THE SURVEY WERE TO:

- i. evaluate the provision for pupils with special educational needs in a sample of primary and secondary schools;
- ii. identify the main trends and characteristics including the particular strengths and weaknesses, in relation to current practice.

2. QUANTITATIVE TERMS USED IN THE REPORT

A number of quantitative terms are used in the report in the presentation of the findings.

These terms should be interpreted as follows:

almost/nearly all	more than 90%
most	75%-90%
a majority	50%-74%
a significant minority	30%-49%
a minority	10%-29%
very few/ a small number	less than 10%

In assessing the various features of provision, the Inspectorate relates its evaluations to four performance levels which may be interpreted as follows:

GRADE

1. Significant Strengths	good (ranging to outstanding)
2. Strengths outweigh weaknesses	satisfactory (ranging to good)
3. Weaknesses outweigh strengths	fair (ranging to satisfactory)
4. Significant weaknesses	poor

3. INTRODUCTION

3.1 The report is based on evidence from a sample of 20 secondary schools and 40 primary schools drawn from each of the Education and Library Board (ELB) areas; (see Appendices 1 and 2). The survey evidence was gathered by the District Inspectors (DIs) during district inspections of the schools (schools had a minimum of four weeks written notice). During these visits, which were of one day's duration, the inspectors held discussions with principals, the special needs co-ordinators (SENCOs), special needs teachers, class and subject teachers; they observed lessons, and examined pupils' educational plans and other relevant curriculum documentation.

3.2 *BACKGROUND TO THE CODE OF PRACTICE FOR SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS*

The Education (Northern Ireland) Order 1996 introduced a Code of Practice (the Code) for Special Educational Needs that provided a framework within which all schools in Northern Ireland were expected to devise strategies for meeting the pupils' special educational needs. The Code's structures and procedures are designed primarily to improve the quality of the provision made for children with special educational needs. The fundamental principle of the Code is that the needs of all the pupils who have special educational needs either throughout, or at any time during, their school careers, must be addressed. The Code recognises that there is a continuum of provision, which may be made in a wide variety of different forms, and that the needs of most pupils will be met in mainstream education, and without a statutory assessment or statement of special educational needs. A draft Code was introduced in March 1996; many schools used this time to begin to review their provision and practice in relation to support for special needs. The new statutory legislation focusing upon the Code has been operative since September 1998.

3.3 *DEFINITION OF TERMS WITHIN THE MEANING OF THE CODE*

The Code defines 'special educational needs' as:

- ◆ a learning difficulty which calls for special educational provision to be made.

The Code states that 'learning difficulty' means that the child:

- ◆ has significantly greater difficulty in learning than the majority of children of his or her age *and/or*
- ◆ has a disability which hinders his or her use of educational facilities.

Approximately half of all children with statements of SEN are in mainstream schools or units.

3.4 THE CODE'S GENERAL PRINCIPLES FOR EFFECTIVE PROVISION

- ◆ The learning needs of the children with special needs must be addressed.
- ◆ The learning should be matched to the special needs of the children.
- ◆ The children should be taught in the context of safe and secure relationships.
- ◆ The children with special needs should have access to a broad and balanced curriculum.
- ◆ There should be a partnership amongst the school, the parents and the external support agencies.
- ◆ The special provision should be flexible and integrative, meeting individual needs.
- ◆ The children should experience success and make appropriate progress.

3.5 FEEDBACK FROM SCHOOLS ON THE DISTRICT INSPECTION PROCESS

In order to provide information that might allow the Inspectorate to improve further the effectiveness of the district inspection, the participating schools were asked to evaluate the usefulness of the inspection exercise. A copy of the evaluation form is included as Appendix 3.

A total of 19 responses were received from the secondary schools, and 38 from primary schools. Almost all of the returns indicated that the schools valued the district inspection and found it a helpful way of reviewing their provision for pupils with special educational needs. Twenty-seven of the returns also contained additional written comments; the majority expressed positive views about the experience of inspection.

In the primary schools, features commonly reported as useful were:

- i. the development of professional working relationships between the schools and the DI through detailed feedback/discussion at the end of the inspection;
- ii. the district inspection helped the staff to focus on and to evaluate their provision for pupils with special needs;
- iii. the confirmation from the Inspectorate that many of the schools were making good progress in developing their provision for pupils with special educational needs;
- iv. the external affirmation and encouragement given to SENCOs for the work that they were doing.

Four primary schools rated the exercise as neither good nor poor. All but one school considered the requests for information made reasonable demands on the school. Two schools did not find the district inspection helpful as a way of reviewing aspects of the school's work. A few schools suggested improvements, including:

- i. the need to extend the duration of district inspections (one day was considered not to be enough);
- ii. the need for fuller written reports.

In the secondary schools all schools responded positively to the district inspection. Features commonly reported as useful were:

- ◆ the professional relationship between schools and the DI;
- ◆ the focus given to special educational needs in the district inspections helped re-focus the school's thinking;
- ◆ the help afforded to principals and SENCOs as a result of the visit.

4. MAIN FINDINGS

- 4.1 The Inspectorate's 1999 report "Children with Special Needs in the Primary School" reported that in 73% of the schools sampled, the provision was judged to be satisfactory or better; in this report the figure has risen to 83%. This change in provision may be attributable, in a large part, to the increased profile given by schools to the provision for children with special educational needs in the wake of the introduction of the Code. Although the provision for special educational needs in most of the primary and secondary schools visited in this survey is reported as being satisfactory or better, in a minority of schools the weaknesses outweighed the strengths. In a small number of both primary and secondary schools in this sample, the provision for special educational needs remains poor.
- 4.2 In all the schools that were visited there is a policy which reflects the Code. In the majority of these schools the provision for special educational needs is given appropriate attention in the school development plan. In only a minority of schools have evaluative criteria been identified and used to measure progress.
- 4.3 Almost all of the schools surveyed used a variety of means to identify those pupils with special educational needs. These methods included:
- ◆ teacher observation;
 - ◆ tests published by the National Foundation of Education Research (NFER);
 - ◆ screening/standardised tests;

- ◆ in the case of secondary schools, information provided by primary schools and information obtained from entrance tests for year 8 pupils in English and mathematics.
- 4.4 In a majority of the primary schools, the use made of diagnostic testing to inform subsequent teaching and learning was fair; there were significant weaknesses in the use made of diagnostic testing in a minority of the primary schools visited. In the vast majority of secondary schools little use was being made of data collected from diagnostic testing to inform teaching and learning. There was evidence to show that when the data was shared with subject teachers many were unsure of how to use the information to improve the teaching and learning.
- 4.5 Although nearly all the schools ensure that education plans exist for pupils with learning difficulties at stage 2 and above, many of the plans remain too general in nature and do not focus adequately on the strengths and needs of the pupils. Many of the education plans that were scrutinized contained little more than decontextualised, discrete tasks which did little to help the pupils in all areas of the curriculum. Many subsequent education plans showed little progression, and, too often they were not reflected consistently or sufficiently in the teachers' day-to-day planning.
- 4.6 In most mainstream classes, at both primary and secondary level, an appropriate emphasis was placed on the importance of good relationships between the teacher and pupils. During the visits, the pupils' responses were valued, and differentiated teaching and learning was evident as a result of support given by the teacher.
- 4.7 One of the more common models (usually in the primary schools) for supporting pupils who need extra help with their learning is through sessions when small groups of pupils are withdrawn from their mainstream class for short periods of more individualised support. Withdrawal lessons were observed in 32 primary schools and seven secondary schools. In the majority of the primary schools, support was limited to reading and writing activities; few children received help with their difficulties in mathematics. In a minority of the primary and secondary schools visited, there was an undue emphasis placed on repetitive phonic work; at secondary level, much of the work was decontextualised from the experiences in the main subject areas from which the pupils were withdrawn. In a significant majority of secondary schools good use was made of software programmes, in particular when supporting the pupils in developing their literacy and numeracy skills.

- 4.8 In-class support (a model wherein the class teacher ensures that those pupils who are less secure learners are given individual support within mainstream lessons) was observed in eight primary schools and four secondary schools. In all these schools the in-class support observed had significant strengths. The teachers worked hard to provide a coherent experience for those pupils receiving support. They planned and worked together enabling the pupils to receive tailored support while continuing with the main elements of the class work. Useful links had been established between the SENCO and subject teachers so that the teaching could be well focused on identified needs and could reflect the targets identified in the pupils' education plans.

Support was provided for children from ethnic minority backgrounds in seven of the primary schools and in one secondary school. Pupils in five of the primary schools and one of the secondary schools received support for English as an additional language. In nearly all of these schools, the provision ranged from satisfactory to good. Additional withdrawal support often came from Education and Library Boards' (ELBs) peripatetic teachers, and the lessons observed were effective in meeting the needs of the individual. In the secondary school visited, the head of the English department, appropriately, assumed responsibility for the overall management of the provision for English as an additional language.

- 4.9 In the vast majority of primary and secondary schools, the parents were suitably involved in most aspects of the identification, the work provided and the review procedures. The parents were widely consulted and were particularly involved in the review procedures at least twice a year. One school had employed a social worker to link with the families of those pupils being given extra support to ensure that all relevant parties were kept fully informed.

In nearly all the schools, the teachers who held the position of SENCO were clear about their administrative roles. Most had been provided with a clear job description. All had provided the schools with a policy for special needs and fulfilled the relevant administration tasks effectively. All the SENCOs who were interviewed as part of the survey have received in-service training in the application of the Code. Much of this training has been disseminated by them to help inform other teachers of the Code's procedures.

- 4.10 A small number of SENCOs have a clear picture of the breadth and specific nature of the provision for, and the progress made by, the pupils; others have no procedures in place for systematically monitoring and reviewing the policy,

provision and progress. In a significant majority of the schools, there is a need for mainstream teachers and subject teachers to be more familiar with procedures to monitor the progress of all the pupils. Few schools at secondary level plan for the co-ordination of support across all subject areas. There is also a need to develop a shared responsibility among staff for matching work more consistently to the specific needs and abilities of all pupils. In a majority of the schools, the SENCO has informally given advice to staff to help them to explore different teaching strategies. However, also in a majority of the schools, few opportunities existed to allow the SENCO to have effective links with class teachers; lack of dedicated time was the most commonly reported reason.

- 4.11 A significant minority of the schools made good use of their classroom assistants in supporting both the designated pupils and the teachers with whom they worked. Although almost all schools used classroom assistants appropriately, in a small number of schools the classroom assistants identified to help with those pupils who have special educational needs contributed little to the support of the pupil or the teacher.
- 4.12 With the exception of one school, all principals can account for the spending of targeted monies for support. Most of the money is directed towards additional staff, the appointment of classroom assistants, extra resources and computer programmes to help those pupils in need of additional support.

5. CONCLUSION

5.1 STRENGTHS

The following features characterised those primary and secondary schools where there were significant strengths in relation to the provision for special educational needs:

- ◆ the school has a policy for special educational needs which is reflective of the Code and is implemented consistently throughout the school;
- ◆ good use is made of a wide range of diagnostic procedures to enable the teachers to devise appropriate support, well matched to their difficulties and abilities, for those pupils who need additional help;

- ◆ education plans have been devised for those pupils at stage 2 and above;
- ◆ the school provides in-class and/or withdrawal support, depending on the identified needs of individual pupils;
- ◆ provision for special educational needs is highlighted in the school development plan;
- ◆ training in implementing the procedures and principles set out in the Code has been provided for all staff;
- ◆ the work is well focused on the pupils' individual needs;
- ◆ all funding for special educational needs, within the school's budget, is used explicitly for that purpose;
- ◆ the parents are kept well informed of their children's progress.

5.2 AREAS FOR DEVELOPMENT

The survey has established a number of areas for development; these will need to be addressed in a co-ordinated way by SENCOs, mainstream and subject teachers, principals and the curriculum advisory and support service (CASS). A number of these issues echo the issues identified previously in the Inspectorate reports, 'Children and Their Learning' (1998), 'Children with Special Educational Needs in Primary Schools' which was published in 1999, and 'Secondary Education, English' which was published in 1994.

Assessment: there is a need for:

- ◆ the use of a wider range of diagnostic tests in order to discern with greater precision the pupils' specific learning difficulties and to modify their education plans accordingly;
- ◆ more effective monitoring and evaluation of the work completed by the pupils which goes beyond checking the completion of set tasks and allows for a more precise review of progress and the identification of the necessary next steps in teaching and learning;
- ◆ a more consistent approach to record-keeping to track progress and inform future planning based on the pupils' needs.

Planning: there is a need:

- ◆ for more effective use of the information gained from diagnostic testing to inform planning, teaching and learning;
- ◆ to ensure that the education plans cover all aspects of the pupils' needs, including behaviour and social skills;
- ◆ to involve the pupils in the setting and reviewing of targets.

Learning and teaching: there is a need for all teachers to:

- ◆ provide a better match of work to the needs and ability of the pupils;
- ◆ raise their expectations of the standards which the children can achieve;
- ◆ ensure that education plans are reflected in the normal day to day curriculum;
- ◆ make more use of the full range of ICT in supporting the teaching and learning of those pupils with special educational needs.

Management: there is a need to ensure that:

- ◆ procedures are in place for monitoring and reviewing the policy, provision and progress being made in relation to special educational needs;
- ◆ the support programme also caters for those pupils who have been identified as experiencing difficulty with mathematical learning;
- ◆ there is an adequate time allowance for those who are in greatest need of support;
- ◆ the pupils who are withdrawn from class are benefiting from the whole curriculum;
- ◆ all staff receive training in teaching and learning strategies to support the pupils' learning;

- ◆ good practice is disseminated throughout the school;
- ◆ there is appropriate support for all teachers, but particularly the more recently appointed members of staff, in the management of special educational needs and in preparing educational programmes which have clearly defined targets for the pupils;
- ◆ there is good co-ordination between the class and subject teachers, the special needs teacher and the SENCO;
- ◆ the SENCO has an overall view of the learning and progress being made across the curriculum especially the effectiveness of the support offered at classroom level;
- ◆ there is adequate allocation of time for the co-ordination of the special educational needs programme;
- ◆ the parents are fully involved in supporting their own children.

It is intended that the report of the survey findings will assist the ELBs Curriculum Advisory and Support Services (CASS), senior management, SENCOs and class teachers to evaluate their practice and, where necessary, to effect improvement.

PRIMARY SCHOOLS

Annesborough Integrated, Castlewellan

Ballyholland, Newry

Belvoir Park, Belfast

Brackenagh West, Newry

Brookeborough, Enniskillen

Carryduff, Belfast

Christian Brothers', Armagh

Crawfordsburn, Bangor

Crievagh, Cookstown

Drumahoe, Londonderry

Groarty, Londonderry

Harmony, Lisburn

Hillhall, Lisburn

Holy Cross Boys', Belfast

Holy Family, Belfast

Kilmaine, Bangor

Kilmoyle, Ballymoney

Loanends, Crumlin

Loughash, Donemana, Strabane

Maralin Village, Craigavon

Maydown and Strathfoyle, Londonderry

Moorfields, Ballymena

New Row, Castledawson, Magherafelt

Olderfleet, Larne

Richmount, Portadown

Sacred Heart, Omagh

St Brigid's Crossmaglen

St Brigid's, Downpatrick
St Brigid's, Dungannon
St Catherine's Girls', Belfast
St Eugene's, Lisnaskea, Enniskillen
St Kevin's, Belfast
St Laurence's, Fintona
St McCartan's Convent, Clogher
St Patrick's, Crossmaglen
St Scire's, Trillick, Omagh
St Teresa's (Glebe), Sion Mills, Omagh
St Therese de Lisieux, Belfast
Suffolk, Belfast
Sydenham Infants, Belfast

POST-PRIMARY SCHOOLS

Aquinas Grammar School, Belfast
Hunterhouse College, Belfast
Clondermot High School, Londonderry
Drumragh Integrated College, Omagh
Duke of Westminster High School, Enniskillen
St Comhgall's High School, Lisnaskea
St Mary's College, Irvinestown
Garvagh High School
Ballymoney High School
St Patrick's College, Maghera
Crumlin High School
Wallace High School, Lisburn
Newtownbreda High School, Belfast
Glastry High School, Ballyhalbert
St Malachy's High School, Castlewellan
St Brigid's High School, Armagh
Newtownhamilton High School
Drumcree College, Portadown
St Mary's High School, Newry
St Joseph's High School, Newry

EVALUATION FORM: DISTRICT INSPECTIONS: SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS PROVISION 2000-2001

Name of School: _____ Reference Number: _____

Do you consider that:

1. The purpose of the District Inspection was clear? Yes No
2. The requests for information made reasonable demands on the school? Yes No
3. Special Educational Needs Provision was an issue of sufficient importance for the District Inspection? Yes No
4. The District Inspection was helpful to you (and others) as a way of reviewing aspects of the school's work? Yes No
5. The time spent on the District Inspection was valuable to the school? Yes No
6. In terms of professional value to the school, how would you rate the procedure of the District Inspection?

Please tick one box.

Good Neither Good Nor Poor Poor

7. Thank you for your comments. In order to help us review and develop our procedures further we would welcome any additional comments you may wish to make on the existing practice and future potential of the District Inspection.

Signed: _____ Date: _____

Please return completed form to: *Mrs E Wells, Inspection Services Branch
Department of Education, Rathgael House,
43 Balloo Road, Bangor, Co Down BT19 7PR*

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