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*The Education and Training
Inspectorate*

REPORT BY THE EDUCATION AND
TRAINING INSPECTORATE
ON

CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL
NEEDS IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS

1998/99

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REPORT ON SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS 1998-99

1. INTRODUCTION

The Education (Northern Ireland) Order 1996 introduced a Code of Practice (COP) for Special Educational Needs (SEN) which provided a framework within which all schools could devise strategies for meeting 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 principles of the Code are that: the needs of all pupils who may 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 finally, the Code recognises that the needs of most pupils will be met in the mainstream, and without a statutory assessment or statement of special educational needs.

A draft COP was issued for consultation in March 1996; many schools used this opportunity to begin to review their programme of support. The Code of Practice has been operative since September 1998.

This report draws on evidence from 92 inspections carried out in primary schools during the period of September 1998 and June 1999. Seventy three of these inspections were focused inspections, including 24 which focused specifically on the provision for special educational needs. The findings below are drawn from evidence gained from 19 general inspections and 24 focused inspections of special educational needs.

The schools involved were representative of both small and large schools and covered all the Education and Library Boards and management types.

The main purposes of the report are to:

- summarise the Inspectorate's findings on the quality of provision for special educational needs in a sample of mainstream primary schools inspected in 1998/9;
- identify some of the main trends, including the particular strengths of the provision being made.

A number of quantitative terms are used in the report to present 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 relate their judgements to four performance levels which may be interpreted as follows:

GRADE

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

2. ANALYSIS OF MAIN FINDINGS

Of the schools inspected:

- the provision for special educational needs was judged to be satisfactory or better in some 73% of the schools inspected;
- in a minority of schools the provision for special educational needs was fair;
- a significant minority of schools organised the provision for special educational needs on a whole-school basis with all teachers being involved in the process;

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- SEN support was provided in a significant minority of schools through out-of-class sessions and in-class support by the SEN teacher; most schools, however, continue to provide support through withdrawal sessions only;
 - while most schools provided some support for the children's literacy needs, in a significant minority of schools numeracy was also included in the provision for special needs;
 - although a majority of schools were using some form of screening test to identify those children in need of support, very few schools were using effective diagnostic procedures to enable them to devise appropriate and well-matched support for children with special educational needs;
 - a significant minority of schools provide special educational needs support at the earliest possible stage;
 - the parents were kept well-informed of their child's progress in a significant minority of schools; in a few schools, parents were involved in defining, and supporting, specific targets for their child;
 - a minority of schools were involved in Reading Recovery programmes; the work observed was having a positive effect on the children's reading abilities;
 - most of the schools had invested recently in providing a good range of SEN resources;

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- in a small number of schools, the accommodation for out-of-class support was poor;
 - in a minority of schools, there was poor whole school co-ordination with superficial compliance of the COP, the work was not well matched to the children's needs and abilities and the children were making inadequate progress.

The following features were identified in those schools successfully providing for children with special educational needs:

- the school SEN policy was aligned to the COP and was fully implemented throughout the school;
- appropriate, flexible structures and procedures were in place to meet the needs of all the children;
- assessment and diagnostic procedures were in place which enabled the school to identify the children's special educational needs at the earliest possible stage;
- education plans were brief and informative with achievable targets sharply focused on identified needs and specified time-scales;
- where the Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCO) was maintaining the SEN register efficiently and effectively, he/she had invested time in developing simple and accessible record-keeping systems with paperwork kept to the necessary minimum;

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- there was an appropriate balance between out-of-class and in-class support by the SEN teacher;
 - out-of-class support was well-targeted, timetabled and supportive with minimum disruption to the children's learning in other areas of the curriculum;
 - there was effective liaison between the SEN teacher and the class teachers;
 - there was evidence of appropriate differentiation of tasks in classrooms;
 - there were regular reviews of the children's progress;
 - detailed records were kept and used to plan future teaching and to provide progress reports for the children and their parents;
 - there was good liaison with the parents and external agencies;
 - the SENCO's roles and responsibilities were defined clearly with regular time allocated for essential tasks including administration and support for class teachers;
 - the SENCO and all of the teachers had received relevant training in SEN;
 - good use was made of existing resources and Information Communication Technology (ICT) to support the children's learning;

3. CONCLUSION

This report outlines the findings of inspections of special needs provision across the five education and library board areas. It presents a range of factors which characterise good practice, and seeks to raise issues which need to be addressed. It is hoped that the report will bring SEN provision into sharper focus, and assist the Education and Library Boards (ELBs) Curriculum and Advisory Support Services (CASS), senior management, SENCOs and class teachers to audit and evaluate their practice and, where necessary, effect improvement.

The evidence indicates that provision for special educational needs remains variable but it is notable that a majority of schools are focusing on Special Educational Needs (SEN) in the context of the Code of Practice (COP) and establishing appropriate procedures and practices. There is, however, a need for the 27% of schools where the weaknesses in the SEN provision outweighed the strengths, to seek, where necessary, additional support, advice and training as they address the issues identified in their individual inspection reports.

The quality of provision for special educational needs although still variable, compares favourably to the findings outlined in the Primary Report: Children and their hearing (1992-1998) where the quality of provision was illustrated in Figure 36 as follows:

1992-98	
Grade 1	21%
Grade 2	44%
Grade 3	25%
Grade 4	10%

The analysis of findings in the subsequent year and outlined in this report represents improvement as follows:

1998/99	
Grade 1	27%
Grade 2	46%
Grade 3	27%
Grade 4	0%

In the previous report, it was reported that in some 65% of the schools inspected the provision was judged to be satisfactory or better; in this report the figure has risen to 73%. This improvement in provision is due, in large part, to the increased attention given by schools to the provision of special educational needs in the wake of the introduction of the Code of Practice and to the additional support given by those charged with the responsibility of improving the quality of provision in schools.

SCHOOLS INCLUDED IN THE 1998-99 GENERAL INSPECTION PROGRAMME

Ballyduff Primary School, Newtownabbey
Ballymagee Primary School, Bangor
Ballytrea Primary School, Stewartstown
Bocombra Primary School, Portadown
Fair Hill Primary School, Dromara, Dromore
Fountain Primary School, Londonderry
Gortin Primary School, Plumbridge, Omagh
Moneydarragh Primary School, Annalong
Oakgrove Integrated Primary School, Londonderry
Omagh Integrated Primary School
Primate Dixon Primary School, Coalisland
St Anthony's Primary School, Craigavon
St Brigid's Primary School, Altamuskin, Omagh
St Joseph's Primary School, Ahoghill
St Joseph's Primary School, Newcastle
St Mary's Girls' Primary School, Newcastle
St Mary's Primary School, Comber
St Ronan's Primary School, Newry
St Joseph's Primary School, Madden, Armagh

SCHOOLS INCLUDED IN THE 1998-99 PROGRAMME OF FOCUSED INSPECTIONS OF SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

Ballygolan Primary School, Newtownabbey
Ballymacrickett Primary School, Glenavy, Crumlin
Braid Primary School, Broughshane
Craigbrack Primary School, Eglinton, Londonderry
Bunscoil, Cholmcille, Londonderry
Creggan Primary School, Randalstown
Dundela Infants' Primary School, Belfast
Grange Primary School, Kilkeel
Hazelwood Integrated Primary School, Belfast
Kilskeery Primary School, Trillick, Omagh
Landhead Primary School, Ballymoney
Lough View Integrated Primary School, Belfast
Queen Elizabeth II Primary School, Pomeroy, Dungannon
St Bernard's Primary School, Glengormley
St Colman's Primary School, Lambeg, Lisburn
St Colmcille's Primary School, Claudy
St Jarlath's Primary School, Blackwaterstown, Dungannon
St Joseph's Primary School, Glenmornan, Strabane
St Patrick's Primary School, Aughagallon, Craigavon
St Patrick's Primary School, Gortin, Omagh
St Patrick's Primary School, Waterfoot, Glenariffe
Tempo Primary School, Enniskillen
Towerview Primary School, Bangor
Victoria Primary School, Carrickfergus

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