



An Roinn Oideachais
Department of Education

Towards High-Quality Learning Experiences for All

Provision for children and young people with special educational needs in primary and post-primary schools



Department of Education Inspectorate
www.gov.ie/DEInspectorate

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Foreword



I am pleased to present *Towards High-Quality Learning Experiences for All: Provision for children and young people with special educational needs in primary and post-primary schools* on behalf of the Department of Education Inspectorate. Inspection is a key component of the quality assurance of education provision in Ireland. Its focus is on promoting improvement in the learning and wellbeing of children and young people and on advancing goals of equity and inclusion. The Inspectorate shares findings from inspections with the education system to support the overarching education, inclusion and equity goals to which educators and policy makers in Ireland aspire.

This report presents the findings from inspections of provision for children and young people with special educational needs conducted in 2023. The inspections were conducted in seventeen primary schools and twelve post-primary schools. The inspections found instances of effective practices in many schools, including positive relationships between children and young people and their teachers, good opportunities for children and young people to work together and to engage in active learning, and consistent implementation of effective whole-school approaches.

The inspections also highlighted some areas that require improvement. For example, the way in which many of the post-primary schools inspected timetable the support classes for children and young people with special educational needs runs the risk of the delivery of supports being disjointed. Better use needs to be made of student support files to document the strengths, interests and needs of children and young people; and, overall, there is scope for information in student support files to be used more effectively in planning and delivering appropriately customised programmes of work for these children and young people.

This thematic inspection report calls for a whole-of-system response to supporting schools to meet the needs of children and young people with special educational needs in the most inclusive environment possible. It makes a number of recommendations to address the main areas for improvement identified through the inspections.

The Inspectorate's aim is to assist the Irish education system to provide high-quality learning experiences for all children and young people, including students with special educational needs. It is very grateful to the teachers, school leaders, children and young people and parents who shared their views and ideas about the work of their schools during these inspections. The Inspectorate values these views and engagement highly and looks forward to improvements in school provision and in inclusive educational practices for all children and young people in mainstream primary and post-primary schools.

Yvonne Keating
Chief Inspector
September 2024.

1. Introduction

This report presents the findings from twenty-nine inspections of the quality of education provision for children and young people with special educational needs in mainstream schools.¹ In that context, it also places a particular focus on how these children and young people are included in their schools and classrooms.

The inspections, carried out in seventeen primary schools and twelve post-primary schools, focused on the quality of teaching, the learning of children and young people with special educational needs, and the school's management and use of resources to support them. In the post-primary schools, the inspectors also examined the effectiveness of structures to foster the young people's inclusion and holistic development.

1.1 Context

The Department of Education is committed to providing high-quality education and to improving the learning experiences of all children and young people.² It provides a wide range of supports to all schools to enable children and young people with special educational needs achieve their potential in the most inclusive environment possible. These resources include additional teaching resources and access to Special Needs Assistants and Assistive Technology in accordance with the identified needs of the children and young people.

Céim, the Standards for Initial Teacher Education, require all Initial Teacher Education programmes to provide a module on inclusive education, as one of seven core elements which must be covered on all Initial Teacher Education programmes.

The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) also offers an extensive teacher professional learning programme, which includes seminars on:

- assessment and planning
- student support files
- co-teaching / team teaching³
- leading inclusive schools

¹ This is the total number of evaluations of provision for pupils/students with special educational needs conducted in primary and post-primary schools in 2023.

² Department of Education Statement of Strategy 2023-2025

³ Co-teaching or team teaching involves two or more teachers working together to plan, conduct and evaluate the learning activities for the same group of children and young people. There are various forms of co-teaching (lead and support, station teaching, parallel teaching, alternative teaching, teaming). This report uses the term team teaching to refer to any situation where two or more teachers were working together with the same group of children and young people.

The NCSE also offers support visits to assist school leaders, special education teachers, class / subject teachers and whole-school staff to provide high-quality learning experiences for children and young people with special educational needs.

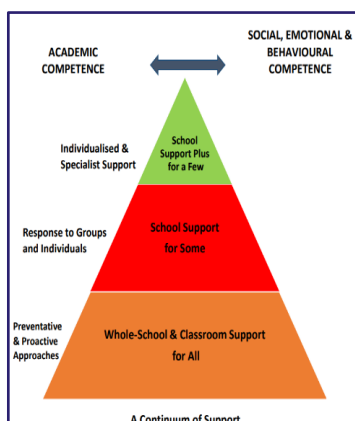
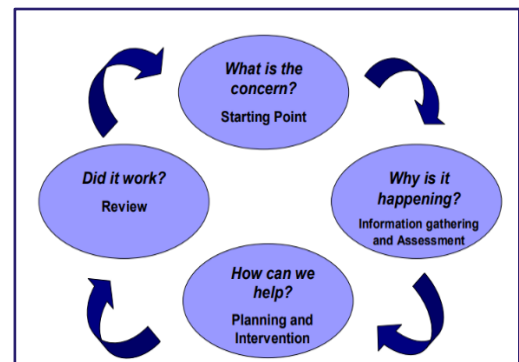
Oide, the support services for teachers and school leaders, provide a range of teacher professional learning programmes aimed at supporting teachers identify and meet the needs of children and young people with special educational needs. The full range of courses is available [here](#) and includes courses on team teaching, reading recovery and maths recovery.

The Department of Education also provides educational psychological services for schools through the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS). This service includes access to a range of teaching and assessment resources to further support provision for children and young people with special educational needs.

Department of Education Circulars 0013/2017 and 0014/2017 outline the additional special education teaching resources that are provided to schools to support the inclusion of all children and young people. The circulars require schools to use the additional resources, solely and in their entirety, to support children and young people with special educational needs.

1.2 Continuum of support

The Department of Education's Continuum of Support Framework is designed to assist schools to identify and respond to special educational needs. The Continuum of Support is based on a problem-solving model that enables schools to gather and analyse data, as well as to plan, monitor and review the progress of children and young people. It recognises that special educational needs occur along a continuum, ranging from mild to more significant, and from transient to enduring, and that needs may change over time. Consequently, children and young people require different levels of support depending on their identified needs.



The Continuum is designed to ensure that the supports that teachers provide to children and young people are incremental, moving from classroom-based interventions provided by the class or subject teacher to more individualised supports at the level of *support for some*. The final level, *support for a few*, responds to children and young people with the most significant needs. The Continuum emphasises the importance of teachers carefully monitoring progress and developing targeted student support plans. It also reinforces the need for teachers to collaborate closely with parents / guardians and with children and young people

in identifying the individual student's strengths, interests and needs and in agreeing related and relevant priority targets for them.

1.3 The profile of the primary schools inspected

Profile of the seventeen primary schools						
	Location	Boys/girls	DEIS Status	Enrolment	Type	No. of special classes
1	Urban	Co-educational	N	284	Denominational	0
2	Rural	Co-educational	N	222	Denominational	2
3	Rural	Co-educational	N	160	Denominational	2
4	Urban	Co-educational	N	409	Multi-denominational	1
5	Rural	Co-educational	Y	337	Denominational	0
6	Urban	Co-educational	N	90	Denominational	0
7	Urban	All girls	Y	231	Denominational	0
8	Rural	Co-educational	N	100	Denominational	1
9	Urban	Co-educational	Y	246	Denominational	1
10	Urban	Co-educational	N	153	Denominational	0
11	Urban	Co-educational	N	320	Denominational	0
12	Rural	Coeducational	Y	58	Denominational	0
13	Rural	Co-educational	N	375	Denominational	1
14	Rural	Co-educational	N	109	Denominational	0
15	Urban	Coeducational	N	409	Multi-denominational	2
16	Urban	Co-educational	N	576	Denominational	2
17	Rural	Co-educational	N	193	Denominational	2

Table 1.1 Profile of the seventeen primary schools (Y=Yes; N=No)

The enrolments in the seventeen primary schools ranged from fifty-eight children to five hundred and seventy-six. Sixteen of the schools were coeducational and one was an all-girls school. Fifteen schools were under religious patronage and the remaining two were multi-denominational. Four schools were in the DEIS⁴ programme. Eight of the schools were in rural areas and nine in urban areas. All seventeen schools were English-medium.

There were fourteen special classes in the schools, thirteen of which were for children with autism.⁵ One of these thirteen classes was an Early Intervention class for children with

⁴ Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools provides additional resources to identified schools to further assist them in reducing barriers to children and young people reaching their potential.

⁵ Special classes are classes located in mainstream schools. They are designed to provide a supportive learning environment to children and young people who are unable to access the curriculum in a mainstream class, even with support, for most or all of their school day. They form part of a continuum of educational provision that enables children and young people with more complex special educational needs to be educated, in smaller class groups, within their local mainstream schools. Almost all special classes cater for children and young people with autism; a small number cater for

autism.⁶ The remaining special class was a special class for children with specific speech and language disorder (SSLD).

1.4 The profile of the post-primary schools inspected

Profile of the twelve post-primary schools						
	Location	Boys/girls	DEIS Status	Enrolment	Type	Number of special classes
1	Urban	Girls	N	857	Voluntary	0
2	Rural	Co-educational	Y	415	ETB	0
3	Urban	Co-educational	Y	209	ETB	0
4	Urban	Co-educational	Y	187	Voluntary	1
5	Urban	Girls	N	663	Voluntary	0
6	Urban	Girls	Y	492	Voluntary	0
7	Urban	Boys	N	743	Voluntary	0
8	Urban	Co-educational	N	720	Voluntary	0
9	Urban	Boys	N	429	Voluntary	2
10	Urban	Co-educational	N	731	ETB	1
11	Urban	Co-educational	Y	460	ETB	0
12	Urban	Co-educational	N	1221	ETB	3

Table 1.2 Profile of the twelve post-primary schools (Y=Yes; N=No)

Eleven of the twelve post-primary schools were in urban areas. The enrolments ranged from one hundred and eighty-seven to over one thousand, two hundred and twenty. Seven schools were co-educational, three were girls' schools and the remaining two were boys' schools. Five of the schools were in the DEIS programme. Five schools were under the patronage of Education and Training Boards (ETBs) and the remaining seven were voluntary secondary schools, one of which was a fee-charging school. There were seven special classes for young people with autism across the seventeen schools visited. One school had two special classes and another had three special classes with plans in place to establish a fourth. All were English-medium schools.

children with a hearing impairment, children with mild general learning disabilities or children with multiple disabilities. The full list of special classes is available [here](#).

⁶ The report acknowledges that there are different perspectives in relation to terminology when describing autism. Some use person-first language (child with autism) as this recognises that the presentation of autism can vary from person to person. Others refer to autistic children as this embraces the neurological difference of the person. Reflecting the age and stage of development of children in early intervention classes, this report uses person-first language.

2. The quality of teaching and learning


2.1 Teaching and learning in primary schools

The overall quality of the teaching and the learning of children with special educational needs was good in twelve of the seventeen primary schools inspected and very good in three of the schools. Significant shortcomings in both the teaching and learning of children with special educational needs were evident in two schools.

Strengths

In schools where teaching and learning were good, the learning environment was supportive and stimulating and relationships between children and their teachers were positive. Teachers used appropriate teaching approaches and the children engaged in well-planned individual and collaborative learning activities. The teachers provided the children with opportunities to learn through play, to use appropriate resources, and to apply their learning to real-life situations.

Where teaching and learning were very good, the children were able to discuss their strengths and successes as learners and the areas they felt they needed help with. In these schools, it was also evident that the children were making very good progress in their learning, particularly in relation to how they communicated and how their literacy and numeracy skills were developing.



Where teaching and learning were very good, the children were able to discuss their strengths and successes as learners and the areas they felt they needed help with.

Areas for improvement

Many of the primary schools used some of their special education teachers to team teach in mainstream classes. This involves two teachers working together in a class and can be very effective in supporting children with special educational needs to learn with their peers. In some primary schools, however, the team teaching was not adequately focused on meeting the needs of the children with special educational needs in the class. In those schools, there was a need for the teachers involved to plan their team teaching in a way that was more explicitly focused on meeting the individual needs of the children.

In a few schools, parents were not adequately involved by the school in the development of their child's student support plan and did not receive a copy of their child's plan. In a small number of schools, a whole-school approach to the development of functional literacy for children with special educational needs was not in evidence.

Quality of assessment

Six of the seventeen primary schools had effective assessment practices in place. In those schools, children were assessed using a broad range of strategies including diagnostic tests, running records, screening tests and self-assessment logs. Teachers analysed assessment data carefully and used it to establish targets and to plan programmes of learning for the children. Leaders in those schools had whole-school approaches to assessment in place and the teachers implemented these approaches consistently in mainstream and in support settings.

In the schools with very effective assessment practices, the children were able to use self-assessment strategies. This supported their ownership of their learning and the children appeared confident in asking the teacher for help when they needed it.

There was a clear need for improvement in assessment practices in eleven of the primary schools. A common weakness in those schools was that assessment data was not used to inform learning targets for the children and, as a result, the targets set for the children were too general and too broad, or not appropriately challenging. This meant that teachers were not always able to monitor the children's progress towards achieving their learning targets.

A related area that also required improvement was the need for teachers to monitor the children's responses to the various interventions they received in support settings more carefully and to amend their teaching approaches in response to how the children were progressing.

Teaching and learning in special classes in primary schools

Nine of the seventeen primary schools had special classes. There was evidence of effective teaching and good progress in learning in many of those classes. The children were progressing in learning across a broad curriculum and in some life skills, such as personal care. There were also some good examples of the successful inclusion of children in the special class into mainstream classes for a range of curriculum areas.

In some schools, however, the activities and curricular areas prioritised for inclusion were not best suited to the individual children's interests, strengths or needs. In some special classes, teachers had not established specific and measurable targets, based on the children's priority learning needs, to guide the learning activities.

2.2 Teaching and learning in post-primary schools

Strengths

In many of the post-primary schools, the relationships between the young people and their teachers and between the young people and their peers were very positive.

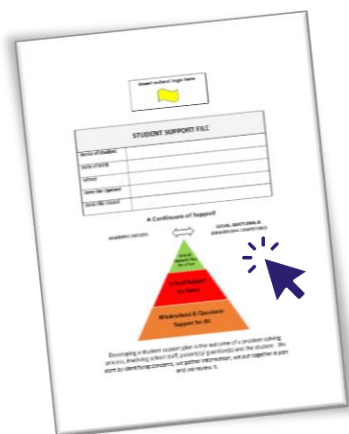
In schools where teaching and learning were effective, the teachers used appropriate teaching approaches and provided the young people with well-designed opportunities to be

active in their learning and to work together. In such schools, there were also examples of teachers using appropriate assessment-for-learning strategies during lessons. The strategies included teachers using a variety of higher-order and lower-order questions, enabling the young people to engage in self-assessment and peer-assessment, and providing constructive feedback to them on work, showing them how they could improve. Many teachers used digital learning technologies effectively to support young people's learning.

In schools where teaching and learning were effective, the teachers used appropriate teaching approaches and provided the young people with well-designed opportunities to be active in their learning and to work together.

Areas for improvement

Analysis of the inspection findings across the twelve post-primary schools inspected shows that the quality of teaching in many of the support settings was not as effective as it should be. In many of the schools, the lesson content and learning activities in the support settings were not sufficiently aligned with the young people's needs. Eleven of the twelve post-primary schools inspected did not have adequate systems in place to identify the young people's strengths and needs or to set appropriate targets to meet those needs. Further, in those schools, the young people and their parents were not sufficiently involved by the school in the process of identifying strengths and needs.



The student support plan is the recommended way for schools to record the interests, strengths, needs and progress of a young person with special educational needs as they progress through their schooling. It is specifically designed to keep all the information a school has on a young person together in an accessible way. Ten of the twelve post-primary schools had student support plans that did not reach a satisfactory standard. The targets in the plans suffered from being too broad, or unclear or did not align with identified needs. Consequently, the potential value of a student support plan to inform teaching and to support learning was not being realised.

Team teaching was evaluated in ten of the post-primary schools. Inspectors found some significant shortcomings in the way that team teaching was facilitated in those schools. For example, there was an absence of evidence of teachers planning together for how the team teaching would support the needs of the young people with special educational needs in the class. In many schools, several different teachers were timetabled for team teaching with the same class groups across the week; this was leading to disjointed provision for the young people. The inspections found that, overall, there were weaknesses in assessment practices across the sample of post-primary schools. A common shortcoming was that teachers were not analysing assessment data sufficiently and, as a result, there were poor links between

assessment data, the learning targets set for the young people and the interventions provided for them.

Teaching and learning in special classes in post-primary schools

Four of the twelve schools had special classes for young people with autism. Lessons in most of those classes were well structured and the teachers used autism-specific methodologies and active learning approaches. These approaches aligned effectively with the sensory needs of the young people. In some of the classes, however, the learning activities were not always sufficiently challenging.

In the two schools that had more than one special class, there was a lack of consistency between the special classes regarding how the teachers used autism-specific approaches, visual schedules, and supports for communication and independence. Those schools were advised by the inspectors to devise whole-school approaches to teaching young people with autism and to implement them consistently in all classes.

3. The management and use of resources

3.1 Management of resources in primary schools

The management and use of resources to support children with special educational needs was very good in seven of the seventeen primary schools. It was good in five of the schools and required improvement in the remaining five schools.

Strengths


In the primary schools where the management and use of resources was particularly good, school leaders implemented an effective whole-school approach to support children with special educational needs. This meant that they had agreed procedures for supporting children with special educational needs. Importantly, those procedures reflected the Continuum of Support model and were implemented consistently by the teachers in both mainstream and support classes.

School leaders in these schools deployed special education teachers in a variety of ways. For example, teachers provided the supports for children within the mainstream class as well as through small-group teaching and individual teaching. Critically, the nature of the support provided was based on the identified needs of the children. Teachers in these schools also demonstrated a commitment to professional learning through engagement with a variety of courses relevant to special educational needs. The administration of assessment tests and the organisation of special education timetables were efficient and purposeful.


Areas for improvement

In the five primary schools where the management and use of resources required improvement, teachers were not using the Continuum of Support effectively to identify the needs of the children with special educational needs or to inform the interventions they provided for them.

Some special education teachers in these schools were teaching significant elements of the mathematics and English curricula to mainstream classes. The deployment of special education



School leaders in schools where practice was particularly good deployed special education teachers in a variety of ways. For example, teachers provided the supports for children within the mainstream class as well as through small-group teaching and individual teaching.



Some special education teachers in schools where practice required improvement were teaching significant elements of the mathematics and English curricula to mainstream classes. The deployment of special education teachers in this way impacted negatively on the support available for children with the greatest needs in these schools.

teachers in this way impacted negatively on the support available for children with the greatest needs in these schools. In other schools, there was significant erosion of teaching time for children with special educational needs at particular times of the year. For example, some special education teachers spent substantial periods organising the special education timetable and administering assessment tests during these times.

In a small number of the primary schools inspected, teachers had inadequate opportunities to work together to plan for learning activities and to build the capacity of all teachers to meet the needs of children with special educational needs.


In almost all of the primary schools inspected, inspectors noted the positive contributions that special needs assistants (SNAs) made to supporting the care needs of children with special educational needs.

3.2 Management of resources in post-primary schools

The management and use of resources to support young people with special educational needs did not meet a satisfactory standard in nine of the twelve post-primary schools inspected. Positive practice in this regard was evident in the remaining three schools.

Strengths

In the schools where the management and use of resources was effective, school leaders had established a core group of special education teachers and a co-ordinating teacher to lead the planning for, and teaching of, young people with special educational needs. Many teachers in these schools had engaged with a variety of professional learning opportunities in the area of special educational needs. Some teachers were also working productively with relevant external professionals, for example, speech and language therapists, to meet the learning and development needs of the young people.



Many teachers in schools where practice was effective had engaged with a variety of professional learning opportunities in the area of special educational needs.

Two of these schools were participating in the Sustained In-School Therapy Support programme⁷ at the time of their inspection. The collaboration between teachers, and the multi-disciplinary teams that this project involves, supported teachers' practice effectively.

Areas for improvement


Eight of the post-primary schools inspected used their special education teaching resources to form smaller mainstream class groups and smaller subject groups or to provide additional subject option blocks at senior cycle. While this approach led to reduced student-teacher ratios and the provision of additional subject options, it had an evident negative impact on

⁷ The Sustained In-School Therapy Support programme is a pilot project, managed by the NCSE, designed to promote inclusive school environments and to build the capacity of school communities to meet the needs of children and young people.

the quality of teaching for those young people at the levels of *support for some* and *support for a few*. For example, in one school some young people at the level of *support for a few* received their additional support from SNAs. This is inappropriate as the role of the SNA is to support the care needs of students, to assist classroom teachers and special education teachers and to ensure that children and young people identified for SNA support are able to access education. All teaching, including additional teaching support, should be provided by teachers.⁸

In another school, fewer than half of the available additional teaching hours were used to provide additional support to young people. In this case, the young people with identified needs did not have access to the full breadth of the curriculum and were withdrawn from wellbeing lessons to receive support.

In all twelve post-primary schools, inspectors found shortcomings in how support lessons were managed and organised. For example, the support class groups were sometimes too large and without a clear focus, attempting to cater for young people who required support in a diverse range of areas including English as an additional language (EAL), social and emotional development, and literacy and numeracy skills. Some schools were not using the Continuum of Support and there was a mismatch between the level of need of some young people and the level of support they received. Another shortcoming related to the content of the support lessons; in several schools, the content of the support lessons was determined by the subject specialism of the teacher and was not aligned with the identified needs of the young people. A striking issue evident across many of the post-primary schools inspected was the number of teachers who had been allocated to provide support to the same young people or same grouping of young people. Essentially, in many post-primary schools, there were many different teachers timetabled to provide additional support; this meant that some young people received support from many different teachers; this led to inconsistency in provision.



In several schools where shortcomings were identified, the content of the support lessons was determined by the subject specialism of the teacher and was not aligned with the identified needs of the young people.

⁸ See [Special Needs Assistant \(SNA\) Scheme - Information for Parents/Guardians of Children and Young People with Special Educational Needs \(ncse.ie\)](https://www.ncse.ie/special-needs-assistant-sna-scheme)

4. Structures to support inclusion and holistic development

Most of the post-primary schools had effective structures in place to support the inclusion of young people and their holistic development. Just two schools had less than satisfactory structures to support this.

Strengths

Where inclusion and holistic development were very effective, schools had core special education teams in place that planned and led whole-school provision for special educational needs. Young people with special educational needs had access to the full curriculum and the subject choices offered by the schools. This included opportunities to access work experience through the Transition Year programme and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP). In some schools, teachers had also facilitated young people with significant needs to access work experience based on their preferred progression route after post-primary education.

Other elements of good practice included careful planning and delivery of programmes such as the Junior Cycle Level Two Learning Programme (L2LP) and purposeful support for inclusion provided by SNAs.

Areas for improvement

In the two schools where the structures were not as supportive of the young people's inclusion and holistic development, there were limited opportunities for subject teachers to engage with student support plans. Further, appropriate curricular programmes were not in place for some young people. For example, in one school, the L2LP provided was not aligned with the programme specification, with some young people completing the Numeracy and Communication and Literacy priority learning units only, rather than all five priority learning units. In one school, all young people in the special class were following the L2LP, although almost all did not meet the target group criteria. The Leaving Certificate Applied programme was not available to the young people in one school, despite it being a very appropriate programme for their particular strengths, interests and needs.

In a number of the post-primary schools, there were aspects of school policies that required improvement. Critically, in four schools, there were inappropriate conditional clauses in the admissions policies. For example, an enrolment policy for a special class for young people with autism stated that *'evidence must be provided that the student is capable of integration and a multi-disciplinary team must support this.'* The use of a criterion such as this, as a basis for admission to a special class, is not in line with the special class designation. In one instance, a reduced school day or shortened timetable was inappropriately included in the school policy as means to respond to behaviours of concern.

5. Summary findings, conclusions and recommendations

Summary findings

The inspections of provision for children and young people with special educational needs conducted in the seventeen primary schools and twelve post-primary schools during 2023 found instances of positive practices in many of the schools.

For example, at primary level, the overall quality of the teaching and the learning of children with special educational needs was good or very good in most of the schools. In the primary schools with special classes, there was evidence of good teaching and good progress in children's learning in many classes.

At post-primary level, the relationships between the young people and their teachers and between the young people and their peers were found to be very positive in many of the schools. Most of the post-primary schools had effective structures in place to support the inclusion of young people with special educational needs and their holistic development.

The inspections also highlighted areas that require improvement to ensure that all children and young people with special educational needs, whether in mainstream or special classes, receive a high-quality education.

For example, there was scope for improvement in **assessment practices** in almost two-thirds of the primary schools, and, overall, at post-primary level, there were weaknesses in assessment practices across the schools inspected. The main issue regarding assessment at both levels was that teachers were not using assessment data as effectively as they could to inform the learning targets set for the children and young people.

The inspection findings highlight the scope for improving **team teaching** in many of the primary and post-primary schools inspected; the main challenge here being to ensure that the use of team teaching in any classroom is carefully planned and designed to meet the identified needs of the children or young people in that classroom.

This finding also connects to findings regarding the effective use of **assessment information** and with the finding, across many of the post-primary schools, that the potential of the student support plan to inform teaching and to support learning was not being fully realised. In this regard, one of the shortcomings identified was the limited involvement of parents and children and young people in the development of student support plans.

The inspections show that there is a need for schools to **manage the resources** they receive to support children with special educational needs more effectively. For example, almost a third of the primary schools inspected were not managing their additional resources effectively. One of the issues here related to the use of special education teachers to teach Mathematics or English to mainstream classes, rather than as intended to support those children with the greatest level of need in the school.

The management and use of resources was also an issue in a significant number of the post-primary schools. Many of those schools were using special education teaching hours to form smaller mainstream classes, or to create additional subject-option blocks at senior cycle. A particularly striking finding in many of the post-primary schools was the use of a

large number of teachers to provide support to young people with special educational needs. Essentially, in many of the post-primary schools, too many different teachers were timetabled to provide additional support; this led to inconsistency in provision.

Conclusions and recommendations

- It is the responsibility of each individual school to ensure that the additional special education teaching resources allocated to them to support children and young people with special education needs are used for that specific purpose. As Circulars 0013/2017 and 0014/2017 make clear, **additional resources should be used, solely and in their entirety, to support children and young people with special educational needs**. The allocation of additional teaching resources to schools is an important component in providing high-quality learning experiences for children and young people with special educational needs.
- There is a need for a **whole-of-system response** to support mainstream primary and post-primary schools to better meet the needs of children and young people with special educational needs. This response should involve NEPS, the NCSE, the Department's Special Education Section, Oide, the Inspectorate, and representatives of teachers and school leaders, children and young people, and their parents.
- At a practical level, concerted, collaborative action is needed to **promote better use of the student support file** in primary and post-primary schools. The student support file enables teachers and schools to:
 - document and maintain records over time of the strengths, interests, and needs of children and young people with special educational needs
 - record clear, specific learning targets for children and young people with special educational needs
 - ensure continuity of support for a child or young person as they move through a school, if they move to another school, and when they transition from primary to post-primary school
- It is the responsibility of all teachers - classroom teachers, subject teachers and special education teachers, to use the student support file to ensure that relevant, meaningful and appropriately challenging learning experiences are provided for children and young people with special educational needs.
- One of the contexts in which student support files are particularly relevant is team teaching. This report has also highlighted **how the use of team teaching can be improved**. There is a need for whole-of-system support to enable special education teachers and mainstream or subject teachers who engage in team teaching to:
 - be clear about how team teaching will be used to meet the needs of children and young people on the Continuum of Support
 - establish and implement clear systems to collaboratively plan lessons and to review the effectiveness of the teaching approach
- This report has flagged several **issues regarding assessment** in the sample of the primary and post-primary schools inspected. These are not new issues. They have

been flagged in other thematic reports of the Department of Education Inspectorate.⁹ However, they are particularly pressing in the context of children and young people with special educational needs. In embarking on delivery of supports or a particular intervention, there is a need for the teacher to start from an assessment-based point of view; beginning a learning programme or intervention without a plan informed by assessment information is extremely problematic. There is a need to ensure that the level and type of support that children and young people with special educational needs receive are aligned with their identified needs.

- All schools need a **whole-school policy on assessment**. There is a need to consider how key actors in the system, including the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, Oide, the NCSE, the Department (including NEPS and the Inspectorate), the Teaching Council, management bodies, parent and student bodies and teacher representative organisations, can **streamline and consolidate one another's efforts to support schools to develop and implement whole-school assessment policies** that are responsive to the needs of the children and young people attending them.
- As noted above, the findings from the post-primary schools inspected point to the risk of disjointed provision for young people in support settings stemming from how delivery of supports is organised. To mitigate the **risk of inconsistency** in provision by having different teachers providing supports for the same young people or the same groupings of young people, there is a need to provide **guidance to post-primary school boards, school leaders and members of school management about timetabling additional supports. Timetabling of supports** should facilitate consistent, flexible and responsive provision and should ensure that the young people with the greatest level of need have access to the greatest level of support. In this regard, the establishment of a core team of special education teachers to meet the needs of young people with special educational needs would be beneficial.

⁹ [What Subject Inspections tell us about Junior Cycle implementation: A composite report on findings from subject inspections with a focus on Junior Cycle; Meeting Additional Language Needs: Whole-school and Classroom Approaches for Inclusive Language Learning \(EAL\)](#)