



*The Education and Training Inspectorate -
Promoting Improvement*

**Providing Inspection Services for
Department of Education
Department for Employment and Learning
Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure**



Education and Training Inspectorate

Report of a Follow-up Inspection

An Evaluation of the Quality of Special Educational Needs Provision in Special Units attached to Mainstream Schools

March 2013

FOLLOW-UP TO AN EVALUATION OF THE QUALITY OF SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS PROVISION IN SPECIAL UNITS ATTACHED TO MAINSTREAM SCHOOLS

The focused inspection in September 2010 highlighted strengths in the quality of the teaching and learning, the good levels of achievement of individual pupils which enabled a majority to integrate into mainstream classes and learn alongside their peers and, at the post-primary level, to gain accreditation and successfully achieve placement in further education. The overall provision of units was evaluated as an important aspect of the continuum of provision to support pupils with moderate learning difficulties to maintain their position in mainstream schools.

The inspection identified the need for improvement in the following two key areas:

- to develop consistency in strategic planning across the Education and Library Boards (ELBs) and
- to provide further staff development opportunities to support staff working with pupils with complex needs, such as behavioural and emotional difficulties.

In the interval since the inspection, the following key actions, which affect the work of the units, have taken place:

- ELBs have written action plans which include development opportunities to help teachers working with pupils with moderate learning difficulties and complex needs;
- staff in units have accessed a range of training for key areas including autism, social, emotional and behaviour needs, speech and language disorders and the use of assistive technology;
- cluster groups have been established and are beginning to generate a sense of cohesion within the ELBs;
- the North Eastern Education and Library Board (NEELB) appointed a co-ordinator to oversee and develop protocols for unit provision and manage a training programme for staff; and
- individual schools have raised the profile of unit provision within school development plans and provided more effective opportunities for integrated teaching, where this is practical.

The Education and Training Inspectorate carried out monitoring visits to 23 schools with units, observed some 64 lessons and held discussion with ELB officers who hold responsibility for this provision.

The quality of teaching and learning observed was mostly of a good or better quality. It is evident, since the last inspection, that there is a stronger focus on assessment and tracking of learning outcomes and a greater emphasis on encouraging collaborative working between unit and mainstream staff.

The following are the most important improvements since the original survey:

- strategic planning within the NEELB has developed significantly and is an exemplar of effective and cohesive practice; and

- schools have addressed appropriately unit provision within their school development plans and established better monitoring procedures and provision of training which is having a positive effect on learning outcomes.

Nonetheless, strategic planning across the ELBs has not been achieved and little progress of this development is evident.

Once again, there is a wide variation in ELBs' views of unit provision and a marked difference between the idea of a formal unit and the more flexible concept of learning support centres or services.

The findings indicate that the concept of unit provision for pupils with MLD needs to be revisited and clarified, and conceptualised within a new vision of what constitutes learning support provision for pupils with complex learning differences and difficulties, in mainstream schools.

The evidence suggests that agreeing a clear strategy across the ELBs in consultation with schools, parents and the Department of Education is the most important factor in reducing the variation in provision and developing a shared and common approach.

The overarching aim should be to continue to build the skills and capacity of schools to respond to a wider range of pupil needs linked to a strategy to enable each pupil to experience inclusive and shared learning over their school career.

CONCLUSION

In the areas inspected the quality of teaching and learning within MLD provision remains of a good standard while strategic planning across the ELBs remains an area for action and improvement. The Education and Training Inspectorate will monitor the progress on the area for improvement.

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