An Roinn Oideachais
Department of Education

Evaluation of the Support Teacher Project

Contents

1. Introduction

This report presents the findings and recommendations of an evaluation of the Support Teacher Project following a series of Special Educational Needs (SEN) inspections in DEIS primary schools. The report is intended to inform decision making in the Department's Social Inclusion Unit (SIU) and in the Special Education Section as they seek to determine the most effective and efficient allocation of additional resources to schools. At school level, the findings and recommendations about the role, purpose and function of the support teacher are intended to be useful in identifying and sharing best practice in the schools. They are also intended to inform the further development of the current role, especially with regard to the promotion of inclusive practice in schools. Currently, forty teachers are employed across forty-three DEIS primary schools as support teachers. Funding for the posts is provided by the Department's Social Inclusion Unit (SIU)[1]. This resource is provided in addition to those teachers allocated to the schools arising from participation in the DEIS programme and the schools' special education teacher allocations.

1 The Department, through SIU, funds 40 posts at a cost of approximately €2.6 million annually

2. Background

The Support Teacher Project has its origins in the *Teacher Counsellor* scheme which was established by the Department of Education and Science in 1995 in Dublin's North Inner City. The *Teacher Counsellor* scheme was initiated following submissions from schools serving areas of concentrated disadvantage, predominantly in Dublin and Cork, seeking additional support in managing the behaviour of a certain cohort of pupils. As a result, twenty-seven teachers, initially known as teacher counsellors, were appointed in September 1996 'to cater for the holistic development of both disruptive and withdrawn pupils' (DES, 1998)[2]. The provision was designed to enable schools to teach both these pupils and their peers more effectively.

Following an evaluation carried out by the Department of Education and Science in 1998, a number of changes were made to the scheme. A further pilot project was initiated, and the initiative was rebranded as the 'Support Teacher Project.' The teacher counsellors were renamed and were thereafter referred to as 'support teachers'.

The introduction and extension of the Support Teacher Project predates many of the recent significant system reforms in primary schools. These reforms include Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) - the action plan of the Department of Education for tackling educational disadvantage, the establishment of the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) and the National Council for Special Education (NCSE), as well as the more recent revised allocation process for special education teachers (SETs) in mainstream schools. Many schools participating in the DEIS programme have received very significant increases in their SET allocations in recent years. The SET also has a role in supporting pupils with behavioural needs. The number of special needs assistants (SNAs) supporting behaviour in schools has also increased very significantly in recent years.

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2 Department of Education and Science, (1998), Evaluation of the Teacher/Counsellor Project.

While the Support Teacher Project continues to exist as a stand-alone programme, it is evident that neither the overall effectiveness of the programme nor the work of support teachers in schools has been the subject of evaluation work conducted by the Department's Inspectorate in recent years. In this context, therefore, it is timely to examine, evaluate and report on how effectively support teachers address the needs of pupils whose behaviour is of concern or of those pupils who are disengaged and how the work of support teachers intersects with the role of other teachers' work in the school, including the special education teachers and other available supports.

3. The role of the Support Teacher

The role of the support teacher is to cater for the holistic development of pupils whose behaviours are of particular concern or those pupils who are disengaged, and to promote the implementation of measures to alleviate the effects of the behaviour of those pupils on their own education and on the education of others. Some of these pupils may have identified special educational or additional needs. However, a professional diagnosis of those needs is not a prerequisite for support teachers to work with them.

The role of the support teacher was outlined in a job specification provided for the pilot scheme by the Department's Special Education Section in 1998 (Appendix 1)[3]. The job specification described the nature of the work of the support teacher as both preventative and supportive. The job description outlined that the support teacher should be concerned with advising on and participating in whole-school strategies on behaviour management and in the prevention of behaviours of concern in the school. It was also suggested that the support teacher should be involved in supporting small groups and individual pupils who exhibit persistent behaviour difficulties in the classroom. In order to fulfil this role, the support teacher was advised to develop an appropriately-adapted curriculum to give pupils an experience of success in core curricular areas and to develop their self-management skills. This could be done through a range of therapeutic activities in the more aesthetic and creative aspects of the Primary School Curriculum. The implementation of approaches to address issues related to behaviour management, as well as cooperating with classroom teachers in the delivery of appropriately adapted programmes, were identified among the responsibilities of the support teacher.

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3 Job Specification: Support Teachers. Special Education Section II, Department of Education and Science, 1998.

4. Evaluating the work of Support teachers

The findings in this report are informed by three main sources of evidence:

- Information arising from ten Special Educational Needs-Primary (SEN-P) inspections in DEIS schools which have support teachers, which was inputted into the Inspectorate's information management system

- The published SEN-P inspection reports arising from these inspections

- The outcomes of a structured focus-group meeting with the inspectors who conducted the SEN-P inspections following their completion.

Given the nature and focus of the work of support teachers, the SEN-P inspection model was selected to quality assure the work of support teachers at individual school level and to gather information to inform this composite report. The schools selected for inspection were located in Dublin and Cork and the sample comprised a range of co-educational and single sex schools, junior and senior schools as well as schools which cater for all primary age grades. During the SEN-P evaluations, inspectors evaluated the quality of the outcomes for pupils with special educational and additional needs, and evaluated how well the schools used the resources they receive for pupils. This provided the Inspectorate with an opportunity to focus in particular on the role of the support teacher in the context of the additional supports being provided to the schools to meet the needs of pupils with special educational and additional needs.

In that regard, inspectors observed support teachers at work in classrooms and in other learning settings in the school. Inspectors also provided opportunities to the support teachers to discuss their work; this included discussions about their role, purpose and function. Similarly, interviews with school management offered opportunities to discuss the work of support teachers. The following areas provided the context for these activities:

- Whole-school management of support teacher provision

- The role of the support teacher in providing support to pupils

- How individual pupils and groups of pupils were selected for additional support

- How support was provided to individual pupils and groups of pupils

- How the support teacher linked with other teachers and agencies.

Following each SEN-P inspection, reporting inspectors were required to complete and return an additional data sheet which focused only on the work of the support teacher in the school. The data sheet required the inspector to provide evidence-based information on the areas listed above.

These areas, in turn, provided the basis for structured discussions at a focus group meeting of inspectors which was scheduled when the inspections were completed. At this meeting, each inspector was offered the opportunity to provide further detail and insights on these five areas having had the opportunity to reflect on their inspection notes.

5. Report structure

The findings in this report represent the results of the evaluations as indicated by analysis of the various sources of evidence. The findings are based on a variety of sources related to the SEN-P evaluations carried out during a short timeframe between late 2019 and early 2020. The evidence base relies heavily on inspectors' judgements about observed practice in classrooms and other learning settings, their interactions with teachers, learners and school management, the collection of data and an analysis of the overall effectiveness of provision for learners with SEN in the schools. The analysis identifies strengths and challenges in each of the five areas of focus and provides an opportunity for discussion among inspectors of the particular issues relevant to each area. Where percentages are not presented in numeric form, they are represented by the qualitative terms explained in the following table:

More than 90%	Almost all
75% - 90%	Most
51% - 74%	Majority / more than half
50%	Half
25% - 49%	Less than half / a significant minority
16% - 24%	A small number / less than a quarter
Less than 15%	A few

Evaluative commentary on the quality of provision is presented in line with the Inspectorate's five-point Quality Continuum (Appendix 3).

6. Findings

6.1 Whole school management of support teacher provision

Each school inspected had a policy to guide practice in special educational needs provision and the quality of these policies was judged to be good or very good in all instances. There is no stated requirement for schools to provide a whole-school policy for support teacher provision. However, most, though not all, had a policy to guide the work of the support teacher. Most of these plans, in turn, were reported by inspectors to be effective in guiding provision, though it was noted, both in published reports and reiterated by inspectors during the subsequent focus group meeting that a small number of these polices needed to be reviewed and updated. Inspectors found no written policy in place for support teacher provision in two of the schools. In one of these, the absence of a written policy was judged to have impacted negatively upon the practice followed in the school. As a means of guiding provision effectively, it is recommended that all participant schools ensure that they devise and review regularly a succinct plan for support teacher provision.

There was good evidence that, in most cases, both school management and individual class teachers were aware of the role, purpose and function of the support teacher. Most of the schools inspected benefitted from considerable additional resources in the form of special education teachers (SETs). In almost all of these schools, the SET team and support teacher worked collaboratively on developing policies to manage all available resources effectively. In most of the schools, the policies relating to the work of the support teacher confirmed how the support teacher's role intersected with that of the SET team. In a small number of schools, the support teacher was very much part of the SEN leadership team and worked closely with the SEN coordinator to manage resources effectively. As a means of ensuring that the range of supports offered to pupils is as coherent as possible, all schools availing of the resource should give consideration to encouraging support teachers to participate actively in SEN leadership teams.

Most schools structured their resources such that support teachers focused their attention on pupils whose behaviour, and its impact on other pupils, was a cause of concern in the school, while SETs focused their attention on pupils whose literacy, numeracy and other learning-related difficulties were of most concern. Inspectors generally found this practice to be both effective and in line with the job specification for the role of the support teacher.

Almost inevitably, some pupils present with both learning and behavioural needs and, in these circumstances, it is important to ensure that the pupils' needs are addressed in a coherent and planned manner. In that regard, there was good collaboration evident in the schools between SETs and the support teacher, and the quality of provision offered by support teachers in most instances was found to be effective or very effective.

It is recommended that schools with support teachers should devise and regularly review succinct plans to guide their work. These plans, in turn, should inform the school's special education and behaviour policies.

6.2 The role of the support teacher in providing support to pupils

In most schools, the support teacher was found to be hard working, dedicated and committed to fulfilling the role and responsibilities associated with the position. In these schools, the support teachers' primary focus was on the promotion of good behaviour throughout the school. One example of this was reported as follows:

> *The activities undertaken by this teacher are highly effective in providing ongoing support and promoting positive behaviour among the school population.*

In that regard, support teachers were found to have incorporated both preventative and restorative interventions across the school. This was viewed by inspectors as working effectively and in line with the job specification. It is also important to note that the interventions provided were highly valued by the class teachers and the principals in most of the schools.

Almost all support teachers devote the majority of their time to working with individual and targeted pupils on the development of individual behaviour interventions. Somewhat

surprisingly, given that it is part of the job specification, there was a reported limited role for the support teacher in developing the schools' overarching behaviour policy. A small number of support teachers helped to coordinate whole-school behaviour policies. There were, however, some examples of reported good practice in this regard; one support teacher had responsibility for overseeing the design and implementation of the behaviour policy for the whole school and another was the leader of the Discipline for Learning (DFL) initiative.

In line with the specification for the role of support teacher, inspectors observed a good balance between preventative and restorative work. In terms of preventative work, support teachers were observed using a range of evidence-based, manualised or off the shelf programmes including:

- Friends for Life
- Roots of Empathy
- Fun Friends
- Mentoring for Achievement

Support teachers offered these programmes to classes at various levels, and both support teachers and school management reported the impact of the interventions to be positive. Where these interventions were observed by inspectors, they commented positively about the levels of pupil engagement with these programmes. The teachers used the context of lesson activities to stimulate purposeful conversations around issues. Inspectors reported that the interventions observed were very valuable in that they contributed to the development of a more positive disposition to learning among the pupils. They also noted the evidence of high-quality pupil engagement in a wide variety of appropriate learning activities.

Support teachers were also observed working effectively with individual pupils and small groups of pupils to develop skills to improve their behaviour, their social and emotional literacy and their mental health. This support was provided to those pupils who exhibited persistent behaviour difficulties to enable them to participate effectively in class activities and to prepare them for an effective and successful transition to post-primary school.

During the evaluations, support teachers were observed using a range of stimulating resources to make the programmes more interesting and motivating for pupils. Games and learning activities were purposefully used to stimulate conversations with pupils around relevant issues. A number of support teachers encouraged pupils to review their own progress using play therapy. Resilience building programmes from the Social Personal and Health Education (SPHE) programme were observed being implemented effectively with relevant pupils in some schools.

Some very good practice was noted during the evaluations. In one school, for example, the support teacher was supporting the reintegration of a pupil who was refusing to attend school by providing cookery lessons every morning as part of a reintegration plan. Interventions observed in other schools, including the use of sensory rooms, were found to be engaging for pupils, and evidence was provided that these interventions were having a positive impact on the behaviour of pupils across the school and on pupils in the target group.

However, some practice which was judged to be less effective was also observed. For example, in one school a support teacher was deployed to provide team-teaching sessions in literacy and numeracy and to support pupils' transition to a senior school. In that regard, there was little distinction between the work of the support teacher and that which might reasonably be expected of a SET or aspects of a home school community liaison teacher's (HSCL's) role. In another school, the support teacher was supporting pupils across one class level only. In both cases, inspectors made recommendations for the schools to review their practice to ensure more confluence with the stated job specification of the support teacher.

In another school, the support teacher was deployed as a mainstream class teacher as a means of lowering the pupil-teacher ratio. In this instance, the school reported that each of its five additional SETs had taken responsibility for addressing concerns arising from pupils' behaviour. It was recommended by the reporting inspector that this situation be rectified as soon as was practicable.

It is recommended that the role and responsibilities of the support teacher be aligned with the job specification for the role in order to have the maximum impact on the behaviour of individual pupils and on behaviour across the school.

6.3 How individual pupils and groups of pupils were selected for additional support

The Support Teacher Project is designed as a measure to allow schools to target individual pupils or small groups of pupils for additional support or attention. The adoption, therefore, of a universal approach where support teachers work with whole-class groups is not appropriate. Almost all schools adopted the principle of targeting pupils and, in the one case where a universal approach was evident, inspectors made a recommendation for the practice to be brought in line with the support teacher job specification.

One of the key functions of the support teacher is the selection of pupils for support. Practices in relation to the selection of pupils and the allocation of time from the support teacher were reported by schools to have developed over the past decade. These practices take account of the developments such as the *Continuum of Support* model of delivery of supports to pupils and the allocation of special education teachers (SETs) to schools. With the exception of the school which had adopted a universal approach to the delivery of support, there was good evidence of the application of the *Continuum of Support* process in the remaining schools. In most cases, support teachers provided support to pupils at the School Support Plus stage of the *Continuum of Support.* In that regard, the main feature of the work of the support teacher which distinguished it from the work of a SET was the focus on the impact of the pupils' behaviour on learning. Inspectors reported that in one school the support teacher worked very closely with the SEN and care teams, but that the role was primarily focused on the implementation of a whole school approach to behaviour management. As part of this role, the teacher supported the development of pupils' social skills and coping skills.

Schools provided a clear rationale for the inclusion of pupils in target groups, as well clear procedures to be followed in the selection of pupils for additional support. In most instances, pupils who were displaying extreme behaviours of concern were included in the target group. The selection of pupils for the target group was related to the range of issues with which pupils presented. Across the ten schools, these included:

- Anger management issues or problems with emotional regulation

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- Pupils who were affected by their family circumstances, including family mental health issues, and substance misuse issues
- Pupils who had been the victims of bullying and/or who had engaged in bullying behaviour
- Pupils who had self-harmed or who threatened to self-harm
- Pupils who had experienced a recent bereavement or trauma in their lives
- Pupils experiencing serious difficulties with social interaction, behaviour and emotional development.

In most schools, pupils were nominated for inclusion in the target group by the school care team or by class teachers. Some pupils had been identified for additional support by their parents or guardians. In a very small number of cases, individual pupils had requested additional support themselves. In a small number of schools there was no clear rationale for the inclusion of pupils in the target group nor were there procedures in place to add pupils to the caseload. In these schools there was no clear link to the school's care team where one existed.

Once selected for inclusion on the support teacher's caseload, case conferences were convened which involved the relevant teachers, parents and external agencies, where appropriate, to discuss the issues presenting and the most appropriate interventions needed to address them.

One of the features that emerged during the evaluation was the variation in the size of the support teacher's caseload in different schools. In general, the support teacher's caseload varied from ten to twenty pupils which is in line with the advice provided by the Department. Schools reported that the size of the caseload varied, depending on the needs of the pupils and the occurrence of a traumatic event in their lives.

It is recommended that schools include in the school plan a clear rationale and procedures for the selection of pupils for the target group of the support teacher.

6.4 How support was provided to individual pupils and groups of pupils

Most support teachers presented long-term and short-term plans to support their work. However, inspectors noted variation in the quality of planning documents presented. Where planning was judged to be effective, there was evidence of detailed consideration being given by the support teachers to the implementation of programmes across the school and for individual pupils.

Support teachers in more than half of the schools designed specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time bound (SMART) targets based on their observations and on the outcomes of pupils' assessment reports, and created learning targets for each individual pupil or group of pupils on the caseload. Typically, these targets focused on the development of pupils' social skills such as turn taking, collaboration, social problem-solving, working collaboratively, and communicating using social-typical cues. Inspectors also noted effective practice where targets were set to help pupils improve regulation of emotions, enhance awareness of cause and effect, and focus on positive behaviours.

During the evaluations, there was evidence that support teachers in the majority of schools used a range of teaching approaches, methodologies and resources to provide support for pupils, class teachers and the whole school. In these instances, inspectors judged the quality of support offered to be good or very good. The promotion of pupils' wellbeing was central to all support programmes. Support teachers used a variety of ways to organise the support. In one school, the support teacher had prioritised ten pupils for regular support. In another school, support teachers worked in blocks of ten weeks with identified pupils.

In most schools, the support teacher operated a range of appropriate programmes across different class levels to promote good behaviour in the classroom and in the playground. Relevant age-appropriate programmes were implemented with whole-class groupings by support teachers. In some instances, the support teacher visited individual classrooms, carried out observations and provided advice for teachers on the management of pupils' behaviour in that context.

Support teachers worked directly with pupils in whole-class settings, with small targeted groups, and provided individual support when required to cater for the specific behavioural and emotional needs of pupils. Support teachers reported observing pupils in mainstream classes to gain an understanding of the pupils' social, emotional and behavioural issues. Inspectors noted mainstream class teachers' views, that support teachers provided practical advice to them on appropriate strategies to use to manage the behaviours of concern being displayed by those pupils. This practice is very much in line with the specification for the job.

In a significant minority of schools, support was predominantly provided on a withdrawal basis. In these instances, pupils were withdrawn to participate in individual programmes to address their specific needs. Much of this support was provided in the areas of social interactions and emotional and behavioural development. The outcomes of various activities were tracked by most of the support teachers and a record of regular meetings held with teachers and parents was maintained.

A small number of support teachers did not use the *Continuum of Support* and implemented a separate planning process to support those pupils on their caseloads. In these cases, it was noted that plans contained broad, general targets which did not provide clear and specific information to track pupils' learning outcomes. Inspectors noted that the learning outcomes of pupils in the target group were clearly tracked in only half of the schools. In these instances, support teachers were advised to track individual pupils' learning progress. This suggests that while many interventions are provided for the pupils who need them, the impact of those interventions needs to be monitored and recorded more effectively across the schools.

It is recommended that the learning targets in support teachers' plans be stated in specific, measurable and attainable terms in order to guide their work and support the tracking of pupils' learning progress.

6.5 How the support teacher linked with other teachers and agencies

In most settings, the support teacher linked with key personnel in the school and with a range of external agencies. Good collaborative practices were observed during the evaluations between support teachers and

- Mainstream class teachers
- Special needs assistants (SNAs)
- Home, school, community liaison teacher (HSCLs)
- The SET team in the school.

Meetings with parents and guardians were held on a regular basis regarding any concerns about their child and to provide them with updates regarding their progress.

During the evaluations, support teachers provided evidence of having established and maintained links with external agencies included Child, Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), social workers and those involved in the Garda Youth Diversion Programme, where appropriate. Inspectors reported that links with external agencies formed a key part of the schools' approaches to supporting pupils.

7. Supports available for Support Teachers

While there is no formal induction programme or specific training provided for new support teachers, almost all reported that they benefit greatly from their membership of the Support Teacher Network which is based in Dublin West Education Centre. This support group organises speakers and invited guests to attend their meetings in order to familiarise support teachers with aspects of their role. Support teachers have also benefited from training provided by the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) in supporting pupils with social, emotional and behavioural needs. Given the existence of the support network and the potential for additional training to be provided by NEPS and other support services, consideration should be given to formalising a programme of professional learning opportunities for support teachers comprising the induction of new support teachers as well as ongoing professional learning.

Schools invested in programmes relevant to their needs and the needs of their pupils using funding provided by Social Inclusion Unit. Many support teachers reported that they had attended courses in a range of relevant programmes such as Friends for Life, PAX Good Behaviour Game training, Restorative Practices, Art Therapy, and Trauma management programmes. Other teachers reported attending courses on Play Therapy, Music Therapy, Antecedent Behaviour and Consequences, Anger Management, Zones of Regulation and Adverse Childhood Experiences. In addition, a number of support teachers had engaged in postgraduate studies in the area of behaviour management.

Support teachers demonstrated a commitment to developing their knowledge and skills to fulfil their duties effectively through continuous professional development (CPD). NCSE support services offer CPD programmes and courses on managing behaviour which are attended by support teachers. Support teachers report having received support from members of staff in their schools, including the principal, SETs, the SEN coordinator and from former support teachers. This has been particularly relevant where support teachers are newly appointed.

It is recommended that support teachers should undertake formal induction programmes and avail of ongoing professional learning opportunities aimed at ensuring the dissemination of best practice.

8. Conclusion

The Inspectorate observed support teachers' practice in a sample of DEIS primary schools and, overall, judged the work of the support teachers to add significant value to pupils' engagement with school and with learning. The majority of practice observed was very good, well-informed and targeted appropriately at pupils displaying behaviours of concern. However, notwithstanding this good work, there are broader considerations relating to the programme which require attention.

This is a standalone programme which pre-dates many supports that have been subsequently provided to schools to assist them in engaging pupils with significant special educational needs, including those with behavioural needs. One of the fundamental principles of the 2017 SET allocation model is the provision of the greatest level of support to the pupil with the greatest level of need. This suggests that pupils currently in receipt of additional support via the Support Teacher Project would be likely recipients of support via the SET model, were there to be no Support Teacher Project. Arguably, a case could be made for SETs to engage with the pupils currently accessing the Support Teacher Project as a means of building their skillsets and capacity to provide appropriate programmes for these pupils.

However, based on an analysis of observed practice, the Inspectorate recommends the retention of the Support Teacher Project as a discrete resource in schools serving areas of acute disadvantage, but that the resource should be used to provide integrated support within the special education framework. It is evident that without this provision there is a high risk that some of the pupils currently accessing the Support Teacher Project might not be successfully supported to remain in the school system. Additionally, this level of bespoke support enables the schools involved to reduce and manage the risk of other pupils' learning being impacted negatively arising from extreme behaviours of concern.

This is a limited resource which should be targeted at the schools serving the most disadvantaged communities. At the time of its initiation and subsequent expansion at the end of the 1990s, support teachers were allocated to DEIS schools based on the best

available evidence at the time. The Department is now in possession of considerably more information relating to the profile of all schools, including DEIS primary schools. The sample size in this evaluation comprised approximately a quarter of all DEIS primary schools that participate in the Support Teacher Project. In that regard, the Department should ensure that the schools which benefit from this resource are those that continue to serve the most disadvantaged communities.

It is critically important that, where schools have the benefit of this valuable additional resource, it is used for the purposes for which it was intended. In most cases, observed practice suggested that schools used the resource purposefully and beneficially to attend to the needs of the pupils with the most significant behaviour-related issues. Schools have very broad discretion in deploying the resource and, in that regard, it is important that the structures in the school support effective decision-making, target-setting and monitoring processes. The evidence suggests that most schools fare well in that regard. Where schools take the decision to deploy the resource inappropriately, for example, as a means of lowering the pupil-teacher ratio, the Department should reserve the right to withdraw the resource.

9. Summary of main findings

- Overall, support teachers were effective in enhancing the educational opportunities of the target group, and also in enhancing the educational opportunities of all pupils in the school.

- In almost all cases, there was a general awareness among mainstream teachers of the specific role and responsibilities of the support teacher in the school. Most schools had a plan in place regarding the deployment of the support teacher.

- Most, but not all, schools had a clear rationale for the inclusion of pupils in the target group of the support teacher.

- Support teachers worked in collaboration with the SEN and care teams in the school and with class teachers, parents and external agencies where appropriate.

- Support teachers engaged in professional development and worked on prevention as well as on intervention projects and programmes, both with individual pupils, small groups, classes and with the whole school.

- Most support teachers used the *Continuum of Support* to set out a plan for pupils. In some schools the targets were very general in nature and the learning outcomes of pupils in the target group were clearly tracked in only half of the schools.

- There is potential to enhance the role of the support teacher through the provision of a systematic programme of CPD and by using the resource to provide integrated support within the special education framework and promote positive behaviour management and wellbeing for all pupils.

- In one school, the support teacher was used as an additional mainstream class teacher and it was recommended that this be changed as soon as possible.

10. Recommendations

- Based on an analysis of observed practice, the Inspectorate recommends the retention of the Support Teacher Project as a discrete resource in schools serving areas of acute disadvantage, and it recommends that the resource should be used to provide integrated support within the special education framework.

- School management should ensure that the organisation of support teacher provision is clarified in the school plan in order to fully realise the potential of the resource in the school.

- In all cases, support teachers should involve themselves in regularly updating the school's code of behaviour.

- All schools which avail of the Support Teacher Project should ensure that they devise and review regularly a succinct plan to guide the operation of support teacher provision.

- School management should ensure that the role and responsibilities of the support teacher are aligned with the job specification for the role in order to have the maximum positive impact on the behaviour of individual pupils and on behaviour across the school.

- Schools should include a clear rationale and procedures for the selection of pupils for additional interventions from the support teacher.

- Support teachers' plans should include targets which are stated in specific, measurable and attainable terms in order to guide their work and to support the tracking of pupils' learning progress. .

- The Department should arrange for newly-appointed support teachers to avail of an induction programme aimed at detailing best practice regarding planning, teaching and tracking of pupils' learning targets.

- The Department should arrange for continuous professional development

opportunities for current support teachers. Clear guidelines should be put in place by schools to support collaboration between the support teacher and the other resources in the school. Formalising the post as an integrated support within the special education needs framework would help to further develop the role of the support teacher.

- Support teachers are a limited resource which should be targeted at the schools serving the most disadvantaged communities. The Department should use the information in its possession relating to the profile of all schools, including DEIS primary schools, to ensure that the schools which benefit from this resource are those that continue to serve the most disadvantaged communities.

- Schools should continue to have a very broad discretion in deploying the support teacher resource and hence, it is important that the structures in the school support effective decision-making, target-setting and monitoring processes to ensure that this resource is used purposefully and beneficially. This will enable the school to ensure that it attends to the needs of the pupils with the most significant behaviour-related issues. In the small number of instances where schools take a decision to deploy the resource inappropriately, for example, as a means of lowering the pupil-teacher ratio, the Department should reserve the right to withdraw the resource.

Appendix 1 – List of Schools participating in the Support Teacher Programme

Schools in the Support Teacher Pilot Project

Roll No.	School
05940D	Scoil Ursula, *Blackrock,* Cork
14000C	Scoil Naomh Mhuire an Oileáin, Sharman Crawford St, Cork
20497W	Scoil Mhuire agus Eoin, *Mayfield,* Cork. (2 posts)
17024I	Scoil na Croise Naofa*, Mahon,* Cork
20389T	Scoil Maria Assumpta, *Ballyphehane,* Cork
20038N	Scoil Aiséirí Chríost, *Farranree,* Cork
19714U	Muire na Chnoc Haoine, Knocknaheeny, Cork
00752A	Central Snr. Mxd. NS., Marlborough St., Dublin 1
01795A	Central Model Inf. Sch., Marlborough St., Dublin 1
15816I	St. Vincent IBNS, Nth. William St., Dublin 1
15056L	SN San Vinseann Cailíní, Nth. William St., Dublin 1
17110B	Naomh Lorcan O'Tuathail, Seville Place, Dublin 1
11776C	St. Laurence O'Toole JBNS., Seville Place, Dublin 1
20228S	St. Laurence O'Toole GNS., Seville Place, Dublin 1
20429F	St James's PS, Basin Lane, James' Street, Dublin 8
18386B	Marist NS., Clogher Road, *Crumlin,* Dublin 12
17603B	Scoil Íosagáin, Aughavannagh Road, *Crumlin*, Dublin 12
11578V	City Quay BNS, City Quay, Dublin 2
17881G	Scoil Uí Chonaill, North Richmond St., Dublin 1
19208F	Holy Spirit B.N.S., Silloge Road, *Ballymun,* Dublin 11

19502F	Scoil Aenghusa JNS. Balrothery, *Tallaght,* Dublin 24
19510E	Talbot Senior NS, Bawnogue, *Clondalkin,* Dublin 22
19543T	SN An Croí Ró Naofa, Killinarden, *Tallaght,* Dublin 24
19575J	St. Mary's JNS., Rowlagh, *Clondalkin*, Dublin 22
19576L	SN Aenghusa Sin, Balrothery, *Tallaght,* Dublin 24.
19577N	Scoil Íosa, Tymon North, *Tallaght,* Dublin 24
19613O	Scoil Cnoc Mhuire, Knockmore Ave, Killinarden, *Tallaght,* Dublin 24
19647I	St. Mary's SNS., Rowlagh, *Clondalkin,* Dublin 22
19652B	SN An Croí Ró Naofa Sois. Killinarden, *Tallaght,* Dublin 24
19702N	St. Thomas' JNS., Jobstown, *Tallaght,* Dublin 24
19743E	St. Bernadette's JNS., Quarryvale, *Clondalkin,* Dublin 22
19765O	St. Thomas' SNS., Jobstown, *Tallaght,* Dublin 24
19775R	Scoil Cnoc Mhuire Knockmore Ave Killinarden, *Tallaght,* Dublin 24
19782O	St. Brigid's NS., Brookfield, *Tallaght,* Dublin 24
19785U	St. Bernadette's SNS., Quarryvale, *Clondalkin,* Dublin 22
19834H	Brookfield 2 NS., Brookfield, *Tallaght,* Dublin 24
19872P	Scoil Caitlin Maude, Brookfield, *Tallaght,* Dublin 24
19878E	Holy Rosary PS. Old Court Avenue, *Tallaght,* Dublin 24
20436C	St Mary's PS, Dorset Street, Dublin 7
19946S	Rutland St. N.S., Rutland St, Dublin 1
20468P	St. Dominic's NS., *Tallaght,* Dublin 24
20173T	St. Anne's SNS., Fettercairn, *Tallaght,* Dublin *24*
18288B	Scoil Mhichíl Naofa, Athy, Co. Kildare

Appendix 2 – Job Specification: Support Teachers

The thrust of the work of the support teacher will be preventative and supportive and will be concerned with:

a) Advising on and participating in a whole school strategy on devising, identifying, implementing and reviewing (i) Good practice in behavioural management and (ii) strategies that will help to prevent the occurrence of disruptive behaviour as well as supporting relevant personnel where disruption incidents occur.

b) Teaching and supporting small groups and individual pupils who exhibit persistent behaviour difficulties in the classroom

c) Developing an appropriately adapted curriculum to give pupils experience of success in core curricular areas and to develop behavioural management skills in pupils through that work and through therapeutic activities in the more aesthetic and creative aspects of the primary school curriculum.

d) Co-operating with classroom teachers in the delivery of appropriately adapted programmes and approaches.

The following is a list of activities in which the support teacher should engage.

The Support Teacher will:

- Observe particular pupils who are disruptive! disturbed within their mainstream classes, record precisely what the disruptive behaviours are and their antecedents, and consequences of those behaviours; advise class teachers on what is happening in the classroom and on how disruptive behaviour can be prevented, ameliorated and managed

- Provide behaviour checklists for class teachers to use in observing individual pupils who are disruptive or withdrawn to enable them to record the inappropriate behaviours and their frequency; advise on appropriate intervention strategies and provide suitable progress charts; support class teachers within the mainstream classroom by assisting them in managing and teaching pupils who are generally disruptive or withdrawn

- Identify small groups and individual pupils who are disruptive/withdrawn, teach them suitably adapted core areas of the curriculum in a way that is appropriate to their level of need and attentive capacities for short periods; use creative activities - art, craft, drama, play, etc, and develop the pupils' personal and social skills. (The School Psychological Service, where available, should assist in this area.) The focus of this approach is to afford pupils experience of success, to raise their self-esteem and to model and teach adaptive personal and social

skills;

- Participate in the efforts of the staff under the principal's leadership in devising and implementing a whole-school policy on the management of behaviour and discipline in the school
- Liaise and collaborate with parents and other non-school agencies that are involved in addressing the pupils' specific needs in school, at home and in the community
- Keep careful records to include the following:
    - Identification data on pupils who are disruptive/withdrawn
    - The forms of disruptive behaviour and their frequency
    - The steps being taken to prevent and/ or manage disruptive behaviour
    - Psychological, psychiatric, social reports
    - Programmes designed to meet the education, behavioural, personal and social needs of small groups and individual pupils.

Appendix 3 – The Inspectorate's Quality Continuum

Level	Description	Example of descriptive terms
Very Good	**Very good** applies where the quality of the areas evaluated is of a very high standard. The very few areas for improvement that exist do not significantly impact on the overall quality of provision. For some schools in this category the quality of what is evaluated is **outstanding** and provides an example for other schools of exceptionally high standards of provision.	**Very good;** of a very high quality; very effective practice; highly commendable; very successful; few areas for improvement; notable; of a very high standard. Excellent; outstanding**:** exceptionally high standard, with very significant strengths; exemplary
Good	**Good** applies where the strengths in the areas evaluated clearly outweigh the areas in need of improvement. The areas requiring improvement impact on the quality of pupils' learning. The school needs to build on its strengths and take action to address the areas identified as requiring improvement in order to achieve a *very good* standard.	**Good;** good quality; valuable; effective practice; competent; useful; commendable; good standard; some areas for improvement
Satisfactory	**Satisfactory** applies where the quality of provision is adequate. The strengths in what is being evaluated just outweigh the shortcomings. While the shortcomings do not have a significant negative impact they constrain the quality of the learning experiences and should be addressed in order to achieve a better standard.	**Satisfactory;** adequate; appropriate provision although some possibilities for improvement exist; acceptable level of quality; improvement needed in some areas
Fair	**Fair** applies where, although there are some strengths in the areas evaluated, deficiencies or shortcomings that outweigh those strengths also exist. The school will have to address certain deficiencies without delay in order to ensure that provision is satisfactory or better.	**Fair,** evident weaknesses that are impacting on pupils' learning; less than satisfactory; experiencing difficulty; must improve in specified areas; action required to improve
Weak	**Weak** applies where there are serious deficiencies in the areas evaluated. Immediate and coordinated whole-school action is required to address the areas of concern. In some cases, the intervention of other agencies may be required to support improvements.	**Weak;** unsatisfactory; insufficient; ineffective; poor; requiring significant change, development or improvement; experiencing significant difficulties;