

Supporting special education needs at school level

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Problem and the context

Killorglin Community College in County Kerry, Ireland, is a post-primary school that has adopted a fully inclusive policy. Around 60% of its 294 students have some form of learning difficulty, far exceeding national averages. With increasing diagnoses of autism, ADHD, anxiety and dyslexia, the school faces the dual challenge of meeting complex learning needs while maintaining academic standards in a mixed-ability classroom environment.

This learning story centres on Marieke, a special education needs coordinator and teacher, who leads efforts to organise and use data to plan targeted interventions, facilitate cross-staff collaboration and adapt instruction across subjects. The school's experience illustrates how systematic data collection, inclusive teaching strategies and coordinated support systems can help all students thrive.

Centralised SEN data management

Marieke created a tracker file, where each student has a separate profile include all data needed to understand how teachers can provide them support:

- standardised test scores (cognitive and literacy);
- primary school background and external agency input;
- records of interventions, support meetings and parent communication;
- goals and progress in learning and behaviour.

The tracker file enables all teachers to understand each student's learning profile and receive practical teaching tips based on diagnosis (e.g., for dyslexia, ASD, ADHD).

Differentiated instruction and assessment

- Students receive individual or group withdrawal support based on learning profiles.
- SEN students may be exempt from Irish and Spanish; they receive dedicated learning support instead.
- Lessons are adapted using universal design for learning (UDL) principles—varying content delivery and response formats.
- Homework and in-class tasks are differentiated (e.g., lighter workload, choice of verbal or written outputs).
- Teachers integrate assistive technology (e.g., Microsoft Immersive Reader, Office Lens, digital note-taking) and allow the use of smartphones for educational purposes.

Specialised support for autism

- Two dedicated autism support classes were created.
- Wellbeing initiatives and off-timetable activities are provided to reduce anxiety and enhance emotional regulation.
- The school adjusted its uniform policy (e.g., removing ties) to accommodate students with sensory sensitivities.

Assessment and feedback loops

- Initial assessments include UK-standard cognitive tests and Irish-standard reading tests.
- Progress is monitored using repeated standardised tests and classroom data.
- Teachers revise student profiles in a tracker sheet when improvements or regressions occur, which informs the level of support provided.
- Provision mapping surveys gather feedback from students, parents and teachers before any new initiative is implemented.

Lessons learned

- A shared, regularly updated student profile system helped teachers deliver personalised support efficiently and consistently. New teachers can also easily get up-to-speed thanks to this practice.
- Grouping students by ability in certain subjects and differentiating assignments enabled inclusivity, helping them to catch up with the curriculum.
- Addressing anxiety and sensory needs improved engagement, particularly for autistic students.
- The SEN team and broader teaching staff worked together in real-time via MS Teams, sharing strategies, factsheets and advice.
- Maintaining the SEN tracker demands significant time, echoing wider research about the hidden workload of educational data practices ([Selwyn, 2020](#)).

Killorglin Community College demonstrates how a collaborative, data-informed SEN strategy can empower teachers and support inclusive education at scale. By centralising data, tailoring instruction, and involving stakeholders at every level, the school aims to support all students. This story is a positive example of using school-wide data for improving support for students. It sets a contrast to schools that are under pressure for accountability and school ranking practices, which lead to triage and other non-inclusive practices ([Booher-Jennings, 2005](#)).

This case exemplifies how schools can use SEN data not just for compliance or diagnosis, but for dynamic instructional adaptation and long-term educational planning. Future directions include exploring aggregated data insights to inform school-wide policy and resource allocation, ensuring sustained and equitable support for all learners.



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