

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Curriculum Evaluation

English

REPORT

School name	Slieveardagh N S
School address	Kyleballygalvan The Commons Thurles Co. Tipperary
Roll number	11470B

Date of inspection: 17-06-2019



**An Roinn Oideachais
agus Scileanna**
Department of
Education and Skills

WHAT IS A CURRICULUM EVALUATION?

Curriculum Evaluations report on the quality of teaching and learning in specific subjects of the *Primary School Curriculum* (1999). They affirm good practice and make recommendations, where appropriate, to aid the further development of the subject in the school.

HOW TO READ THIS REPORT

During this inspection, the inspector evaluated learning and teaching in English under the following headings:

1. Quality of pupils' learning
2. Supporting pupils' learning through learner experiences and teachers' practice
3. The effectiveness of school planning, including SSE, in progressing pupils' learning

Inspectors describe the quality of each of these areas using the Inspectorate's quality continuum which is shown on the final page of this report. The quality continuum provides examples of the language used by inspectors when evaluating and describing the quality of the school's provision in each area.

The board of management of the school was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the report, and the response of the board will be found in the appendix of this report.

CHILD PROTECTION

During the inspection visit, the following checks in relation to the school's child protection procedures were conducted:

1. The name of the DLP and the Child Safeguarding Statement are prominently displayed near the main entrance to the school.
2. The Child Safeguarding Statement has been ratified by the board and includes an annual review and a risk assessment.
3. All teachers visited reported that they have read the Child Safeguarding Statement and that they are aware of their responsibilities as mandated persons.

The school met the requirements in relation to each of the checks above.

Curriculum Evaluation

Date of inspection	17-06-2019
Inspection activities undertaken <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Discussion with principal and teachers• Review of relevant documents• Pupil focus-group interview	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Observation of teaching and learning• Examination of pupils' work• Interaction with pupils• Feedback to principal and teachers

SCHOOL CONTEXT

Slieveardagh National School is a co-educational primary school under the patronage of the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Cashel and Emly. It is located in a rural area in Co. Tipperary. There are two mainstream class teachers, and one special education teacher (SET) who is based in this school and shared with another school. There are thirty-six pupils enrolled across two classroom settings; in the junior room, there are pupils from junior infants to second class, and in the senior room, there are pupils from third to sixth class. In recent years, there has been a steady decline in school enrolment. The school participates in Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS), the action plan of the Department of Education and Skills for educational inclusion.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

FINDINGS

- The overall quality of pupil learning outcomes in English is satisfactory. In oral language, pupil outcomes range from weak to good, in reading, pupil outcomes are good, and in writing, pupil outcomes range from fair to good.
- The quality of teaching in English is good overall. While reading is well taught and aspects of the teaching of writing are very good at some class levels, aspects of the teaching of writing and oral language require improvement at other class levels.
- The overall quality of support provided in English for pupils with additional needs is good.
- The quality of assessment is satisfactory. While assessment data are used well to inform the selection of differentiated reading materials and some teaching approaches, the assessment of writing and oral language is an area for development.
- The quality of planning for English is fair overall with the quality of individual teacher's planning ranging from fair to very good and the quality of school planning for English judged to be poor.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- In the junior room, pupils' outcomes in oral language should be significantly improved, through the provision of appropriately challenging content and learning experiences, and through play-based approaches.
- Additional emphasis should be placed on early handwriting skills, there should be explicit teaching in a range of writing genres, and the variety in pupils' writing tasks should be expanded.
- The school should take the necessary steps to improve assessment practices. To raise standards in oral language, assessment data should be generated and utilised, and an agreed approach to assessing pupils' writing should be implemented across the school.

- At some class levels, the short-term planning process should be improved substantially and the DEIS and school self-evaluation (SSE) planning processes should be used annually to promote improvements in literacy at whole-school and classroom levels.

DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. THE QUALITY OF PUPILS' LEARNING

The overall quality of pupils' learning in English is satisfactory. The pupils are eager to engage in lessons, and in the focussed pupil interview, they indicated that they enjoy their learning in English.

The pupils in both classrooms demonstrate good listening skills. However, their outcomes in oral language vary significantly ranging from weak to good. In the senior room, the pupils use topic-specific terminology and they recite poetry. Using digital technologies, they research topics and they engage in debates and make oral presentations. On the day of the inspection, the pupils in the junior room provided brief answers to lower-order questions posed by the teacher. It was evident in the case of a number of pupils, that their vocabulary is limited and that they experience difficulties with pronunciation. They did not have sufficient opportunities to elaborate on their answers, to hypothesise or to work collaboratively. The pupils in first and second class were unable to recite any poetry other than basic, short nursery rhymes which are not sufficiently challenging or stimulating. As a priority in the junior room, pupils' outcomes in oral language need to be improved, through appropriately challenging content and learning experiences, and through play-based approaches.

Pupil outcomes in reading are good overall. In the junior room, the pupils have appropriate sight vocabulary and they are reasonably confident in identifying rhyming words. When questioned by the teacher, they identify the parts of speech. During the inspection, in each setting, many of the pupils read with appropriate fluency and some read expressively. They speak positively about reading in school and as a pastime.

Pupil outcomes in writing range from fair to good. In the senior room, the pupils' originality and independence are promoted through writing and good outcomes are noted. Many of the pupils present their work neatly, they spell accurately, they use appropriate punctuation and they delineate paragraphs clearly. The pupils in the junior room diligently complete tasks which are predominantly work-book based. They engage in some independent work. The quality of this work is fair and many pupils are capable of exceeding their current standards.

The quality of the outcomes achieved by pupils who receive additional support in English is good and these pupils are making appropriate progress.

2. SUPPORTING PUPILS' LEARNING: LEARNER EXPERIENCES AND TEACHERS' PRACTICE

The overall quality of teaching in English is good.

The environments feature pupils' written work and visual aids which support learning in English and literacy across the curriculum. Digital technologies are used but the pupils express an interest in using digital technologies more frequently.

In the senior room, the teacher reads expressively and uses rich vocabulary. Class discussions are skilfully facilitated, enabling the pupils to converse for sustained periods. In the junior room,

approaches to the teaching of oral language need to be improved, and targeted interventions supported by the special education teacher are required. Time-bound planning for oral language needs to include the specific themes, vocabulary, phrases, rhymes and poetry which will be taught, as well stories and audio visual materials which will enrich pupils' oral language. Pupils require explicit instruction in significantly more content through additionally challenging and engaging learning experiences. Through play, hands-on and practical tasks, they need to be exposed to and encouraged to use a broader vocabulary.

Reading is well taught. Commendably, over a number of years, pupils' outcomes in reading have improved at a steady rate. The school hosts an annual book fair and a good range of books, including graded readers is available. The three teachers collaboratively implement various literacy initiatives. Comprehension strategies are taught in the senior room, and in the junior room, these have been recently introduced. In the senior room, writing genres are taught thoroughly, project work is undertaken and the pupils have contributed written articles to the school year book. In both rooms, writing conventions and spelling are emphasised. In the junior room, additional emphasis should be placed on early handwriting skills, further explicit teaching in a range of writing genres is required, and the variety in pupils' writing tasks needs to be expanded. In place of repetitive workbook activities, the writing genres and free writing need to be focused on to a greater extent. To boost pupils' confidence and interest in writing, they could engage in informal writing, using a broad range of mark-making materials during their play scenarios.

The special education teacher (SET) works effectively to support pupils who require additional support in English. Good-quality individual support, group support and in-class support are provided.

The overall quality of assessment is satisfactory. Aspects of English are assessed using early literacy tests, standardised and diagnostic tests, and regular class tests. The data are used appropriately to inform differentiated teaching in reading. Data relating to oral language need to be generated and used to ensure that oral language lessons are tailored to pupils' needs. While pupils receive feedback on their written work, some of the feedback is too vague to promote improvement. An agreed approach to assessing pupils' writing needs to be implemented across the school. Teachers are encouraged to set out benchmarks regarding learning outcomes in writing at each class level. This will help to guide assessment of writing.

3. THE EFFECTIVENESS OF SCHOOL PLANNING, INCLUDING SSE, IN PROGRESSING PUPILS' LEARNING

The overall quality of planning for English is fair overall.

The quality of individual teacher's planning varies significantly. Some plans are of a very good quality. However, some plans cite minimal content to be addressed, and are inadequate in providing for continuity and progression in all aspects of the pupils' learning in oral language, reading and writing.

In recent years, the teachers have collaborated well to support improvements in English. It is evident that they agree on areas which need to be improved. Nonetheless, at the time of this inspection, the required DEIS plan for the current academic year, with focused targets and actions for literacy and other themes was not in place. This is poor practice. Urgent action is required to ensure that the DEIS and school self-evaluation (SSE) planning processes are used annually to promote improvements in literacy. Through these processes, the principal needs to proactively lead the

development of annual targets and actions in a range of themes, including literacy. These targets and actions need to be implemented, monitored and evaluated systematically.

THE INSPECTORATE'S QUALITY CONTINUUM

Inspectors describe the quality of provision in the school using the Inspectorate's quality continuum which is shown below. The quality continuum provides examples of the language used by inspectors when evaluating and describing the quality of the school's provision of each area.

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 <i>very good</i> 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;

Appendix

SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

Submitted by the Board of Management

Part A Observations on the content of the inspection report

We thank the inspectorate for this report and for the contents within. We wish to formally respond to this report. Ordinarily the children in the junior classroom would be asked many and varied higher order questions and would answer them appropriately. This would be done while reading during literacy lift off time and during oral language discussions. Poetry was also taught but discussed in terms of topic, theme feelings etc. rather than learned off in the junior room. We did acknowledge even prior to the inspection that oral language and writing were areas which needed further attention and had begun to work on those for example writing genres, comprehension strategies.

However, this inspection has given us very specific guidance as to how to improve the learning outcomes in oral language and writing. These were areas that can now be worked on as the outcomes for children in reading and spelling have improved quite significantly over the past few years. These had come up from quite a low base to being almost at the national average for reading and well above the national average for spelling. We are endeavoring to improve children's handwriting and have introduced cursive handwriting from junior infants since September 2019.

While do use textbooks for this current academic year 2019/2020, we will be phasing out textbooks to only those that may be absolutely necessary over the coming years. Parents will be informed of this at an upcoming meeting- we have looked critically at our teaching as a staff and feel that it will be easier for us to teach and for the children to achieve the desired learning outcomes without textbooks.

We have looked critically at our DEIS plan. We have reviewed the plan and have set targets which were specifically highlighted in this report e.g. oral language, and writing targets as well as targets for assessment. This informs our whole-school planning, particularly in the areas of literacy and numeracy. We very much have English literacy to the forefront of the school self-evaluation process.

Part B Follow-up actions planned or undertaken since the completion of the inspection activity to implement the findings and recommendations of the inspection.

1. We are completing two six-week blocks of *Aistear* in the junior room from September to Halloween and again in May/ June for this academic year- we will then review and see if this could be done for a longer duration the following year.
2. We will administer the British Picture Vocabulary Scale test to each child to see where their oral language ability lies September/October 2019 and will retest again at the beginning of the next academic year to see if progress has been made.
3. We are using the up-to-date planning templates for the new language curriculum at all class levels.
4. Teachers have collaboratively looked at assessment of writing and now we use a standard marking system for writing, giving specific feedback to pupils based on the writing genre being covered and specifically based on the learning outcome.
5. Each child has a writing genre copy and writing genres are taught using a tiered scaffolded approach from junior infants up.
6. Cursive writing has been introduced from junior infants up as per policy ratified by BOM during the 18/19 academic year.
7. The pupils in the junior room now have a specific poetry and vocabulary copy so parents can also practice the necessary vocabulary at home too.
8. Books will be used in the main for homework, thus freeing up that time in class to focus on comprehension strategies and writing genres.

9. We will review again our language curriculum policy to ensure that teachers' long-term plans for English and short-term planning for English are in line with our language curriculum policy
10. Big books and oral language posters will be used as starting points for discussion topics and oral language lessons in the junior room.
11. We have updated our DEIS plan to reflect the changes being implemented and ensure continued progression for the children in literacy, oral, reading and writing.
12. Big writing is being introduced from junior infants to 6th class in this academic year.
13. We also teach specific sentence types from junior infants to sixth class.