

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Curriculum Evaluation
Science

REPORT

Ainm na scoile / School name	Rearcross National School
Seoladh na scoile / School address	Rearcross Newport County Tipperary
Uimhir rolla / Roll number	12124K

Date of inspection: 12-11-2019



**An Roinn Oideachais
agus Scileanna**
Department of
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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(s) evaluated learning and teaching in Science 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	12-11-2019
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

Rearcross National School, situated near Newport in County Tipperary, is a co-educational primary school catering for pupils from junior infants to sixth class. It is under the patronage of the Catholic Archbishop of Cashel and Emlly. There are three mainstream classroom teachers, one full-time special education teacher (SET) and one shared SET. The teaching principal was appointed in an acting capacity in 2018.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

FINDINGS

- The overall quality of learning in Science is good, with high levels of motivation evident; further development of investigating and experimenting skills is needed.
- Good-quality learner experiences are provided, although, in some instances, further challenge for pupils would be beneficial.
- The overall quality of teaching is good, with scope to improve some elements of practice.
- Very good use is made of the range of resources available to support teaching and learning.
- Good-quality assessment practices are in place to monitor pupils' progress.
- Whole-school planning is very good, and the whole-school plan provides very comprehensive guidance to support continuity and progression in Science.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Teachers should provide more frequent opportunities for pupils to investigate and develop experiments in order to improve pupils' skills of working as a scientist.
- Teachers should ensure that they provide learner experiences that suitably challenge pupils across the range of classes in each setting.
- Teachers should ensure that all learning activities in the subject provide opportunities for pupils to extend their core scientific understanding and knowledge.

DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. THE QUALITY OF PUPILS' LEARNING

The overall quality of learning is good. The pupils were highly motivated to learn in each lesson observed, and it was clear from discussions with them that they enjoy their lessons in Science. Their knowledge of previously learned content was highly commendable. The development of pupils' communication skills is very good and, in each lesson observed, there was a clear emphasis on relevant scientific vocabulary. The opportunities provided to pupils to present their independent learning during Science week each year is highly commendable.

The pupils receive opportunities to design and make, although a more child-led approach would be beneficial in some cases. Their use of observation and prediction skills was good. There is scope to further develop pupils' investigating and experimenting skills. To this end, pupils should receive more frequent opportunities to pose scientific questions and to develop and carry out investigations.

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

The overall quality of learner experiences is good. In most settings, the learning environment was very good, with interesting and appropriate visual supports for learning on display. The use of the locality and local expertise to support learning is highly commendable.

Very good emphasis is placed on the *Living things* strand of the curriculum, which is supported by the work in the school garden. Pupils' learning in Science has been enhanced with good-quality cross-curricular and extra-curricular links, in particular in literacy, Visual Arts and through participation in the Green Schools programme. In all lessons observed, the pupils were engaged in their work, although the extent to which this engagement supported scientific learning was varied. A notable characteristic of learning across the school was the high-quality interactions between pupils during the lessons observed. In most cases, there was a need to more closely align learning with the needs of the range of class levels in each setting, in order to provide more appropriate challenge and support for all pupils.

The overall quality of teaching is good in Science, with scope to improve some elements of practice. All teachers prepare long-term and short-term plans, which generally provide very good guidance for teaching and learning. The preparation of resources for the lessons observed was of a very high standard.

Across the school, the lessons observed were well structured and pupils were provided with opportunities to be active in their learning. In most lessons, opportunities for collaborative learning were provided and structured in a way that could support the development of scientific learning. For a small number of pupils, there were not enough opportunities for the development of core scientific learning. Therefore, it is recommended that all lessons be prepared carefully in line with the objectives of the science curriculum to ensure that the activities undertaken by pupils contribute to their knowledge, skills and understanding in the subject.

Assessment is good. All teachers make very good use of observation and questioning to monitor pupil progress during lessons. It is commendable that there is an emphasis across the school on developing self-assessment strategies in Science, and there was evidence of good use of these strategies in some of the lessons observed. In each class, pupils compile portfolios of their work in Science. However, the extent to which these samples of work are usefully assessed is varied. Evidence was provided that guidelines for producing good-quality work are discussed with pupils on occasion. Overall, however, a more structured approach to providing feedback in line with agreed success criteria would be beneficial to pupils' learning outcomes.

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

The overall quality of school planning in progressing pupils' learning, including work in school self-evaluation (SSE), is very good. The whole-school plan was reviewed collaboratively by the teaching staff during the last school year, and a very clear two-year plan has been devised for

teaching and learning in Science. This plan gives very good guidance to teachers to support continuity and progression for pupils. Teachers are committed to continuing professional development in Science.

During the evaluation, it was clear that some of the actions agreed as part of the schools' improvement plan for literacy are having a very positive impact on pupils' learning outcomes across the curriculum, including in Science. In this regard, the whole-school approach to developing communication skills is being implemented very effectively.

Appendix

SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

Submitted by the Board of Management

Part A Observations on the content of the inspection report

The Board of Management of Rearcross N.S. welcomes the inspection report and wishes to acknowledge the positive findings of this report and the recommendations within. The Board is very pleased that the report affirms the very good quality of whole-school planning which provides very comprehensive guidance to support continuity and progression in Science, the very good use made of the range of resources available to support teaching and learning and the commitment of our teachers to continuing professional development (CPD). We are pleased that all lessons observed were well structured and pupils were provided with opportunities to be active in their learning. We are delighted that the Inspectorate recognised that the work undertaken as part of school self-evaluation (SSE) is of a very high standard and is having a very positive impact on the development of pupils' communication skills and on pupils' learning outcomes across the curriculum.

The Board is particularly pleased that pupils' levels of motivation and enjoyment, the interactions between pupils, pupils' knowledge of previously learned content, the clear emphasis on relevant scientific vocabulary and the opportunities provided for pupils to present their independent learning during Science Week were highly commendable. We are delighted that the emphasis across the school on assessment, in particular on developing self-assessment, was commended and that the very good use of observation and questioning was recognised. Finally, we welcome the recognition of the school's highly commendable use of the locality and the good quality cross curricular and extra-curricular links made.

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

The Board acknowledges the inspector's recommendations to further enhance the teaching and learning of Science in our school. Work on the recommendations made by the Inspectorate has already begun at a whole-school level. This includes:

1. Building upon the current resource files available, including exemplars from the Primary Curriculum Teacher Guidelines for Science, the staff has begun to collaboratively compile a resource pack for each classroom which includes a range of experiments and open investigations across the curriculum. These packs will further support classroom teachers in providing pupils with more frequent opportunities to investigate and develop experiments to enhance their skills of working as a scientist. Our commitment to continuing professional development (CPD) in science will also continue to support teachers.
2. Teachers are also ensuring that all science lessons include learner experiences that suitably challenge pupils across the range of classes and provide opportunities for pupils to extend their core scientific understanding and knowledge. Strategies such as tiered assignments, KUDos and Bloom's Taxonomy will be utilised when planning lessons to identify learning experiences that support and challenge all pupils.

The school also intends to utilise the recommendations in the report to guide future school self-evaluation (SSE) in the school.

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;