An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Curriculum Evaluation
Science

REPORT

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<th>Ainm na scoile / School name</th>
<th>Scoil Neassain</th>
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<tr>
<td>Seoladh na scoile / School address</td>
<td>Mungret</td>
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<td>Limerick</td>
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<td>County Limerick</td>
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Date of inspection: 06-02-2019
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 inspectors 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  06-02-2019

Inspection activities undertaken

- Discussion with principal and science co-ordinator
- Review of relevant documents
- Pupil focus-group interview

- Observation of teaching and learning
- Examination of pupils’ work
- Interaction with pupils
- Feedback to principal and science co-ordinator

SCHOOL CONTEXT
Scoil Neassa is a co-educational primary school located in Limerick city. The school operates under the patronage of the Catholic Bishop of Limerick. Currently, there is an administrative acting principal, an administrative acting deputy principal, twenty-five mainstream class teachers and eighteen special education teachers (SETs), one of whom is shared with another school. At the time of the evaluation, 704 pupils were enrolled.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

FINDINGS
- The overall quality of pupils’ learning in Science is good; pupils’ ability to discuss their learning in the strand of Energy and forces during the evaluation was limited.
- Overall, pupils are provided with valuable learner experiences.
- The overall quality of the teaching observed in Science was commendable.
- The quality of assessment in the subject is satisfactory.
- School planning, including school self-evaluation (SSE), is of a good standard; guidance to teachers in relation to some aspects of the subject is limited.

RECOMMENDATIONS
- Pupils’ learning in the strand of Energy and forces should be improved.
- Agreed whole-school approaches to the assessment of Science should be implemented systematically.
- The school plan for Science should outline the investigations, field trips, and activities in Designing and making to be conducted at each class level; teachers should use the school plan to inform fortnightly planning.

DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. THE QUALITY OF PUPILS’ LEARNING
The overall quality of pupils’ learning in Science is good. In almost all of the lessons observed, pupils demonstrated very positive attitudes and were highly motivated to learn. During the focus-group meeting, the pupils reported that they enjoy conducting experiments and working as part of a group.

The pupils’ engagement during most lessons was of a very high quality and the learner outcomes from these lessons were of a very good standard, overall. The majority of pupils demonstrated a competent understanding of scientific concepts across most strands of the Science curriculum. The pupils’ competence and confidence, however, to discuss their learning in the strand of Energy and forces was limited. Pupils’ learning in this strand needs improvement.
In almost all of the lessons observed, there was evidence of a range of pupils’ scientific skills being developed at a commendable level. Pupils in the middle and senior classes demonstrated a very good understanding of the concept of the fair test. In some classes, the pupils displayed a very good knowledge of the process of Designing and making. This scientific skill needs to be further developed, however, at whole-school level. While there was evidence of displays of pupils’ learning in Science in most classrooms, the wider school environment should be used more effectively to support and celebrate pupils’ learning in the subject.

2. SUPPORTING PUPILS’ LEARNING: LEARNER EXPERIENCES AND TEACHERS’ PRACTICE
Overall, the quality of the pupils’ learner experiences in Science is good. In almost all of the lessons observed, pupils engaged in meaningful and appropriately challenging learning activities. Classroom interactions were very respectful. Pupils’ collaboration and discussion were an integral feature of almost all lessons.

Pupils engage in a valuable range of co-curricular learner experiences in Science. They have opportunities to work with community experts and to engage in some field trips. The school garden supports pupils’ learning in the strand Environmental awareness and care. To build on this good practice, additional opportunities should be provided by class teachers for pupils to explore their local environment.

Overall, the quality of teachers’ practice was good; during lesson observations, the quality of this practice ranged from exemplary to fair. Teachers’ preparation for lessons was highly commendable, overall. In a few of the lessons observed, however, there was an over-reliance on teacher direction and on the pupils’ textbooks. Where practice was highly effective, teachers facilitated pupils in designing and evaluating open-ended investigations. They modelled very high-quality scientific vocabulary for pupils and used higher-order questioning to extend pupils’ scientific knowledge. This exemplary practice should be shared with all teachers.

It is commendable that teachers have adopted collaborative planning practices to support pupils’ learning. Teachers’ progress records, however, indicate a lack of breadth and balance in the delivery of the Science curriculum. Whole-school approaches to teachers’ fortnightly planning should be agreed and implemented; these should identify clear learner outcomes for lessons, specific learning activities and scientific vocabulary. A more judicious approach to the use of textbooks should be adopted in the teaching of the subject in some settings.

Overall, the quality of assessment is satisfactory. A range of assessment strategies, including copybooks, teacher-designed tasks and learning logs, is used in the school to assess pupils’ progress and to support pupils in reflecting on their learning in the subject. Practice in relation to these strategies is varied across the school. The whole-school assessment strategies identified in the school plan should be refined to support the systematic implementation of assessment strategies at each class level.

3. THE EFFECTIVENESS OF SCHOOL PLANNING, INCLUDING SSE, IN PROGRESSING PUPILS’ LEARNING
The overall quality of school planning, including SSE, is good. The whole-school plan for Science was reviewed recently at school-level. It provides appropriate guidance to teachers in relation to developing content and teaching approaches.
The acting principal and the science co-ordinator demonstrate very high levels of commitment to the improvement of teaching and learning in Science. The school has also engaged in SSE in the subject. It is commendable that pupils, parents and staff were involved collaboratively in this process. Areas for improvement have been identified by the school itself: the acquisition of high-quality scientific resources, assessment practices and the development of the investigative process have been identified correctly as key priorities. As part of the SSE process, the school plan should be amended to provide more specific guidance to teachers in relation to the progressive development of strand units, scientific investigations, scientific vocabulary, field trips and activities in Designing and making at each class level.
Appendix

SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

Submitted by the Board of Management
Part A Observations on the content of the inspection report

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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 school has requested guidance and support from the PDST in relation to improving the pupils’ learning in the area of *Energy and Forces* and in the implementation of agreed whole-school approaches to the assessment of Science. An initial meeting with a PDST facilitator has taken place and a follow-up meeting will take place in June 2019.
- The school plan will be adjusted to include more specific guidance in relation to the development of strand units, scientific investigations, scientific vocabulary, field trips and activities in *Designing and Making* at each class level.
**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.

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<th>Level</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<td><strong>Very Good</strong></td>
<td><strong>Very good</strong> 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 <strong>outstanding</strong> and provides an example for other schools of exceptionally high standards of provision.</td>
<td>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</td>
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<td><strong>Good</strong></td>
<td><strong>Good</strong> 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 <strong>very good</strong> standard.</td>
<td>Good; good quality; valuable; effective practice; competent; useful; commendable; good standard; some areas for improvement</td>
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<td><strong>Satisfactory</strong></td>
<td><strong>Satisfactory</strong> 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.</td>
<td>Satisfactory; adequate; appropriate provision although some possibilities for improvement exist; acceptable level of quality; improvement needed in some areas</td>
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<td><strong>Fair</strong></td>
<td><strong>Fair</strong> 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.</td>
<td>Fair; evident weaknesses that are impacting on pupils’ learning; less than satisfactory; experiencing difficulty; must improve in specified areas; action required to improve</td>
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<td><strong>Weak</strong></td>
<td><strong>Weak</strong> 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.</td>
<td>Weak; unsatisfactory; insufficient; ineffective; poor; requiring significant change, development or improvement; experiencing significant difficulties;</td>
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