An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Curriculum Evaluation
Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE)

REPORT

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<tr>
<th>Ainm na scoile / School name</th>
<th>Saint Mary's National School</th>
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<tr>
<td>Seoladh na scoile / School address</td>
<td>Castlefinn</td>
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<td>Lifford</td>
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<td>County Donegal</td>
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<td>Uimhir rolla / Roll number</td>
<td>14910S</td>
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Date of inspection: 15-01-2018
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 Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) 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 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.
**Curriculum Evaluation**

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<th>Date of inspection</th>
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| **Inspection activities undertaken** | **Observation of teaching and learning**  
 | • Discussion with principal and teachers  
 | • Review of relevant documents  
 | • Pupil focus-group interview  
 | • Examination of pupils’ work  
 | • Interaction with pupils  
 | • Feedback to principal and teachers |

**SCHOOL CONTEXT**

Saint Mary’s National School is a co-educational school under the patronage of the Catholic Bishop of Derry. The school caters for 127 pupils from junior infants to sixth class. The staff includes five mainstream class teachers and two special education teachers. The school participates in Delivering Equality of Opportunity in School (DEIS), the action plan of the Department of Education and Skills for educational inclusion and in the School Completion Programme.

**SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:**

**FINDINGS**

- Pupils’ learning in SPHE is good overall, with some very good learning also demonstrated through pupils’ active listening and full participation during lessons.
- There is a positive school climate promoted which fosters respectful and caring relationships throughout the school.
- Overall, the quality of teaching in SPHE is good with some very good teaching also observed; some pupils have opportunity to engage very well in collaborative activities.
- The quality of assessment is satisfactory; current assessment approaches do not support teachers sufficiently in the monitoring of continuity and progression in pupils’ work in all strands of the SPHE curriculum.
- Whole-school planning, including Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE), must improve in specified areas.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Collaborative learning opportunities for pupils should be incorporated more consistently from class to class during SPHE lessons.
- A whole-school approach to assessment should be agreed by teachers, in order to inform short-term planning and maximise pupils’ learning potential.
- The whole-school plan for SPHE, including RSE, should be reviewed; the specific aspects of RSE to be taught at each class level should be outlined clearly in the plan and developed in line with curriculum objectives.

**DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

**1. THE QUALITY OF PUPILS’ LEARNING**

The quality of pupils’ learning in SPHE is good overall, with some very good learning also noted. Pupils engaged very well in their learning during the evaluation and presented as confident and highly articulate learners. They demonstrated active listening and ready co-operation. In group discussion, pupils reported that they enjoy their lessons and learning. While they are developing the
social skills of communication, co-operation and conflict resolution through their learning, further collaborative learning opportunities during lessons would be beneficial. Pupils have a very good understanding of self-identity, healthy living, personal safety, and growing and changing. They display very good participation in activities that promote and sustain health. They are developing their understanding of cultural diversity through purposeful engagement in school activities and developing links through projects with neighbouring schools. Pupils are supported in creating and maintaining supportive relationships through targeted school-yard initiatives and provision of a wide choice of games and equipment. While the majority of pupils discuss aspects of safety and protection, making decisions, taking care of my body and self-identity with confidence, there is scope to further enhance pupils’ use of specific language in a more consistent manner relevant to these topics. Pupils are enabled to share their experiences and problems through discussion and other in-school creative initiatives. They reported that they have learned about bullying, health and other useful information, and appreciate the provision of opportunities to share opinions during lessons. They were pleased with the promotion of pupil voice through the recent establishment of a pupil council.

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

The overall quality of the learner experiences is very good. There is a positive school climate and the principal and staff promote and nurture a strong sense of community. Pupils experience a sense of belonging through purposeful promotion of safety and security in classrooms and the school environment. Pupils with special educational needs are enabled and supported to participate fully in SPHE lessons. All pupils are provided with many opportunities in other curricular areas to support their learning in SPHE. The lessons observed were integrated very effectively with literacy and numeracy for example.

Overall, the teaching approaches observed in SPHE were good, with some very good practice noted. A number of beneficial programmes are implemented to very good effect to support pupils’ relationships and emotional development. During the evaluation, it was found that teachers had prepared purposefully for their lessons and provided appropriate resources to support lesson delivery such as concrete materials, pictures and digital presentation material. They employed a variety of teaching strategies including whole-class teaching and, in some classrooms, collaborative work. Going forward, there is need to provide more consistent facilitation of pupil collaboration to support the key principles of the SPHE curriculum from class to class.

The overall quality of assessment is satisfactory. In some classrooms, teachers use checklists, teacher observation and very effective questioning techniques. There is scope to develop a common whole-school approach to assessment that is clear, useful and easy to interpret and share so as to inform short-term planning and maximise learning potential. All teachers engage regularly in continuous professional development, supported by school leadership and management. A culture of teamwork and staff collaboration is well established and the principal takes a leading role in ensuring the smooth running of this culture of collaboration and improvement.

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

The quality of whole-school planning in SPHE is satisfactory overall, with certain aspects that require improvement. The school plan outlines strands and strand units for SPHE in a two-year programme and provides some guidance for teachers in the integrated delivery of RSE, Stay Safe programmes,
anti-bullying and substance abuse programmes. However, the current planning format does not provide sufficient guidance for individual teachers in planning a balanced and developmental programme of learning across all the strand units of the SPHE curriculum. Building on existing good practice in the senior class, further use of curriculum objectives as a focus for planning should be incorporated into teachers’ short-term planning to ensure optimum progression and continuity for all pupils in SPHE.

The SPHE policy has been prioritised for review in 2018 as part of the school self-evaluation process. This will be a worthwhile action as there is need to outline clearly the specific aspects of RSE to be taught from junior infants to sixth class; the programme should be based on curriculum objectives and developmental from class to class. A system to monitor the implementation of RSE should also be agreed at whole-school level. The approaches to assessment of pupils’ learning in SPHE should also be detailed. School management and staff have reviewed a number of policies recently. As a next step, they should ensure that a critical incident plan and team are in place.

4. CHILD PROTECTION

During the evaluation, the following checks in relation to the school’s child protection procedures were conducted:

1. The school principal is aware that revised child protection procedures for primary and post-primary schools came into effect on 11 December 2017 and arrangements are in place to begin the process of implementing these procedures.
2. The name of the designated liaison person for child protection matters was prominently displayed near the main door of the school.
3. The school has a child protection policy in place.
4. All teachers are aware that they are mandated persons and of their responsibilities in that regard.

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

School response to the report

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

We would like to acknowledge receipt of the inspection report for St. Mary’s National School, Castlefin. In consultation with the principal and staff, the Board of Management accepts the findings of the report and the Inspectorate recommendations. St Mary’s National School has seen many changes in personnel and leadership in recent times. Despite this, we are happy to note that a high standard of teaching has been maintained and that the children came across as happy at school.

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 of Management will ensure:

- All teachers will incorporate active learning and collaborative practice in their teaching of SPHE
- While SPHE, RSE and critical incident policies were to be addressed in the 2018-2019 academic year as part of our three-year school improvement plan, SPHE will be prioritised for the remainder of this school year.
- Using Croke Park hours, the staff will work collaboratively to improve and develop assessment methods and tools across all class levels to ensure a more uniform approach to assessment.
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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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Example of descriptive terms</th>
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<tr>
<td>Very Good</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>Good</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 very good standard.</td>
<td>Good; good quality; valuable; effective practice; competent; useful; commendable; good standard; some areas for improvement</td>
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<td>Satisfactory</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>Fair</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>Weak</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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