An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Curriculum Evaluation
Science

REPORT

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<tr>
<th>Ainm na scoile / School name</th>
<th>Scoil Naomh Colmcille</th>
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<tr>
<td>Seoladh na scoile / School address</td>
<td>Massreagh</td>
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<td>Kilmacrennan</td>
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<td>Uimhir rolla / Roll number</td>
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Date of inspection: 12-02-2019
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 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

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| Inspection activities undertaken | • Observation of teaching and learning  
• Examination of pupils’ work  
• Interaction with pupils  
• Feedback to principal and teachers |

Inspection activities undertaken
- Discussion with principal and teachers
- Review of relevant documents
- Pupil focus-group interview
- Observation of teaching and learning
- Examination of pupils’ work
- Interaction with pupils
- Feedback to principal and teachers

CONTEXT
Scoil Naomh Colmcille is a co-educational primary school under the patronage of the Roman Catholic Bishop of Raphoe. The staff comprises an administrative principal teacher, eight mainstream class teachers and four special education teachers, one of whom is shared with another school. There are 204 pupils currently enrolled in the school.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

FINDINGS
- The quality of learning in Science is very good; pupils are highly motivated and interested in their learning.
- Support for pupils’ learning is very good; pupils are provided with regular opportunities to participate in worthwhile learning opportunities.
- The quality of teaching is very good overall; teachers provide consistent collaborative learning opportunities and facilitate purposeful pupil discussion during teaching.
- The quality of assessment is good; however, current assessment procedures do not support the monitoring of pupil progress from class to class.
- School planning for Science is good overall although appropriate guidance for individual teachers’ short-term planning approaches is insufficiently clear in the whole-school plan.

RECOMMENDATIONS
- Assessment practices should be developed to facilitate the systematic evaluation of pupils’ achievement and progress in scientific content and skills from class to class.
- The whole-school plan for Science should detail the cyclical two-year programme to be taught and provide clearer guidance for classroom teachers in relation to development of appropriate short-term planning.

DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. THE QUALITY OF PUPILS’ LEARNING
The quality of learning in Science is very good. Pupils are highly motivated and interested in their learning. Pupils’ scientific knowledge is well developed throughout the school and they are competent in the skills of predicting, observing, experimenting, recording and communicating. Further attention to the progressive development of pupils’ scientific skills would enhance their learning. During the evaluation pupils demonstrated successful learning in the strands Living Things,
Materials and, Energy and Forces. Most pupils were able to recall details of previous learning and to use subject-specific language.

Pupils in the middle and senior classes are familiar with the concept of a fair test. They can also explain the application of Science in familiar contexts and can identify how it contributes to society. Engagement in co-curricular initiatives such as the Green Schools Programme supports pupils’ environmental awareness and facilitates them in making meaningful connections with life-long learning. Pupils also have the opportunity to engage in the Discover Primary Science Programme. The internal and external school environment promotes the appreciation of and engagement in Science.

In the focus-group discussion, all pupils agreed that they enjoy conducting experiments and that they have a preference for activity-based learning. They spoke enthusiastically about the breadth and balance of learning activities and experiences provided for them. Pupils also agreed that they enjoyed and benefitted from opportunities to present their learning using digital learning technologies (DLT) to more junior pupils during Science week.

2. SUPPORTING PUPILS’ LEARNING: LEARNER EXPERIENCES AND TEACHERS’ PRACTICE
Overall, support for pupils’ learning experiences is very good. Pupils have good access to a range of scientific materials for experimental work in the strand units of Magnetism and electricity, Forces, Materials and change, Light, Plant and animal Life, and Human life. An integrated and thematic approach allows for aspects of Science to be taught in other curricular areas including a strong emphasis on the use of incidental Irish during lessons. Pupils are provided with regular opportunities to participate in worthwhile opportunities, and learning is further enriched through their engagement with visiting Science experts.

The quality of teaching is very good overall. Teachers prepare learning environments that promote an appreciation of Science which is evident in the very good quality displays and projects which have been completed to a very high standard. Overall, teachers prepare purposeful and challenging learning activities for each strand of the curriculum. Teachers provide consistent collaborative learning opportunities and facilitate purposeful pupil discussion during teaching. Current group-work approaches could be further refined by assigning specific roles and responsibilities for pupils based on the topics taught.

In a minority of lessons, exemplary practice was observed where teachers facilitated open-ended investigations which took due regard of pupils’ prior knowledge, own observations and capacity for inventiveness and creativity. This very good practice should be extended to all classes to provide more regular opportunities to engage with open-ended investigations during teaching. Lesson structure built very effectively on pupils’ prior knowledge and clear connections were made with previous learning activities. Learning intentions were effectively communicated during some lessons. There is scope to develop self-monitoring of progress for all pupils through providing explicit learning intentions and success criteria during teaching on a more consistent basis.

The quality of assessment is good. Teachers use a variety of assessment for learning and assessment of learning strategies to assess pupils’ work including the use of learning logs, DLT, pupil reflections and the maintenance of valuable samples of pupils’ work. Exemplary practice was observed in one classroom where content objectives were explicitly linked to the monitoring of pupil progress. This
very good approach should be extended to all classrooms including a more balanced approach to the assessment of the content taught and skills developed from class to class.

3. THE EFFECTIVENESS OF PLANNING, INCLUDING SSE, IN PROGRESSING PUPILS’ LEARNING
The quality of whole-school planning for Science including school self-evaluation is good. The school plan outlines the key vocabulary and terminology to be taught at each class level. While the overall development of pupils’ oral language skills is targeted during teaching as part of the SSE process, clearer guidance regarding agreed whole-school approaches in the teaching of subject-specific vocabulary in Science should be provided.

The quality of individual teachers’ planning is good overall. At present there is considerable variance in the quality of individual teacher’s short-term planning. In reviewing the whole-school plan for Science there is need to detail the cyclical two-year programme to be taught as well as the provision of clear guidance for classroom teachers in relation to the development of appropriate short-term planning.
Appendix

TO THE REPORT

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

The board of management welcomes the findings and is most pleased that the quality of learning, the support for pupils’ learning and the quality of teaching are all rated as very good. It too welcomes the many positive affirmations regarding pupils’ competency, motivation and interests as well as the breadth and balance of learning activities and experiences provided for them.

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

A copy of the cyclical two-year programme has been appended to the Science plan and we will further develop the assessment practices in line with the recommendations.
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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<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Example of descriptive terms</th>
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<td><strong>Very Good</strong></td>
<td>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 <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>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 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><strong>Satisfactory</strong></td>
<td>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.</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>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.</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>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.</td>
<td>Weak; unsatisfactory; insufficient; ineffective; poor; requiring significant change, development or improvement; experiencing significant difficulties;</td>
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