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>
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<td>Seoladh na scoile / School address</td>
<td>Kentstown</td>
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<td>Navan</td>
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<td>Co. Meath</td>
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<td>Uimhir rolla / Roll number</td>
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Date of inspection: 05-06-2019
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

Date of inspection: 05-06-2019

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
- Post-inspection feedback meeting with the principal and deputy principal who is also the post-holder for Science

SCHOOL CONTEXT
Kentstown National School is co-educational school located near Navan in Co. Meath. It operates under the patronage of the Catholic Bishop of Meath. It currently has 258 pupils who are distributed across ten mainstream classes ranging from junior infants to sixth. The teaching staff consists of an administrative principal, ten mainstream teachers, two full-time special education support teachers and one part-time special education teacher who is based in a neighbouring school.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

FINDINGS
- The overall quality of learning in Science is very good; pupils have regular opportunities, individually and collaboratively, to work scientifically through their engagement with a wide range of enriching investigations along with Make and Design activities.
- Pupils demonstrate very positive learning dispositions towards Science, a keen understanding of key curricular concepts, and an appreciation of local habitats.
- The teaching of Science is of a very good standard overall: the promotion of subject-specific language is not consistently promoted in all classes.
- Overall, assessment practices are very good; the monitoring of pupils’ incremental skill development has yet to be established on a whole-school basis.
- Very good curricular leadership, staff collaboration and engagement in continuing professional development (CPD) underpin the very high quality of planning, teaching and ongoing school self-evaluation.

RECOMMENDATIONS
- A whole-school emphasis on the promotion of subject-specific language in Science and ongoing monitoring of pupils’ use of this language would further augment the very good practices in this school.
- Teachers are advised to monitor pupils’ incremental skill development in Science on a whole-school basis to further enhance teaching and learning.
DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. THE QUALITY OF PUPILS’ LEARNING
The overall quality of pupils’ learning is very good. Pupils demonstrate enjoyment in their learning and their engagement in learning activities is rooted in a positive spirit of enquiry. They have a keen knowledge and understanding of a wide range of scientific concepts including fair testing. Pupils recall with enthusiasm visits to areas within their local community, such as Balrath Woods and Dalgan Park, and how these have contributed to their learning in Science. Pupils’ scientific skills have been developed to a very high level in most instances. They demonstrate confidence and competency in applying their skills to a range of open-ended activities including numerous Make and Design tasks. During the evaluation, pupils in all classes could provide ample examples of investigations in which they had actively engaged and many of them could transfer this learning to other contexts.

During the focus-group discussion conducted as part of the evaluation, pupils confirmed that they avail of regular opportunities to explore and investigate in Science. They reported that they enjoy working in groups, and particularly enjoy, ‘making breakthroughs’, ‘getting to try new things’, and ‘discovering the answers’. Pupils in various classes discussed their experiences of their award-winning school garden and the importance of the school’s wild garden to ensure sustainable habitats for insects.

2. SUPPORTING PUPILS’ LEARNING: LEARNER EXPERIENCES AND TEACHERS’ PRACTICE
The quality of pupils’ learning experiences is very good. Pupils enjoy frequent opportunities to be active in their learning and to work collaboratively with other pupils; their productive participation in collaborative scientific enquiry is a noteworthy feature of their learning. Pupils are enabled to make relevant connections in their learning across the strands of the Science curriculum and also with other curricular areas, such as Mathematics and Geography. Teachers provide pupils with differentiated and constructive feedback to ensure that learning is suitably challenging for pupils of varying abilities and interests. Pupils benefit from a suitable range of opportunities to participate in a judicious selection of programmes that provide valuable opportunities for them to deepen their understanding of scientific phenomena in practical and meaningful contexts. These include the Young Entrepreneur, Discover Primary Science and the Green Schools Environmental programmes.

The quality of teaching is very good overall with exemplary practice noted in a few instances. Teachers’ short and long-term planning is informed by a comprehensive whole-school plan and these are used purposefully to provide pupils with a balanced programme of learning in Science. Teachers use a suitable blend of methodologies that facilitate pupils to be active in their learning as individuals and as members of small and whole-class grouping. The effective use of playful pedagogies in infant classes is particularly praiseworthy. Where best practice was noted, teachers modelled subject-specific language and enabled pupils to use this language to describe and reflect on their learning. A whole-school emphasis on the promotion of subject-specific language in Science and ongoing monitoring of pupils’ use of this language would further augment the very good practices in this school. In a number of instances, teachers used digital resources, such as concept cartoons and appropriate audio-visual materials to stimulate pupils’ interest and scaffold their learning about particular scientific phenomena. The adaption of the classroom environment to allow pupils to consolidate and extend their learning through their interactions with play materials and books aligned to the themes and concepts being explored in Science is highly commended. Teachers are resourceful in their use of the local habitats and involvement of members of the community to facilitate exploration of environmental and engineering concepts. Textbooks are used judiciously by teachers and pupils are
supported to record their learning using a variety of media including narrative, photographic and statistical media.

The overall quality of assessment is very good. Teachers provide pupils with opportunities to reflect on their learning and to engage in peer and self-assessment in relation to their learning in Science. Teachers monitor pupils’ learning in Science within their classroom using a range of strategies including conferencing, check-lists, and teacher-designed tasks. The monitoring of pupils’ incremental skill development from class-to-class has not yet been established. Adopting a whole-school approach to monitoring pupils’ incremental skill development and their proficiency in using subject-specific language would further enhance the quality of teaching and learning.

3. THE EFFECTIVENESS OF SCHOOL PLANNING, INCLUDING SSE, IN PROGRESSING PUPILS’ LEARNING
The effectiveness of school planning, including SSE is very good. Very good curricular leadership and a whole-school culture of collaboration underpins the very high quality of planning, teaching and learning in Science in this school. The whole-school plan clearly delineates the content for each class using a two-year cycle and this is used purposefully by teachers to inform their practice with due regard for the multi-grade classrooms and the need to implement a curriculum which is spiral in nature and balanced across the four strands. School self-evaluation and improvement initiatives in literacy and numeracy have also contributed to the ongoing development of provision for Science and its purposeful integration with other curricular areas. Self-review and commitment to ongoing improvement in the quality of provision for Science are well-established practices among the staff and the school has a long tradition of participating in programmes and competitions that promote Science and scientific learning. The leadership team has organised CPD for staff to support the ongoing development of their professional knowledge and skills in relation to Science, and in particular to the use of the Digital Learning Framework in this regard. The leadership team and the staff also demonstrate a keen awareness of the importance of Science, Technology and Engineering and Mathematics as a national priority and are proactive in exploring how they support ongoing improvements and innovations in teaching and learning.
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 Kentstown National School is delighted with the Inspectors’ report and is greatly encouraged by its very positive findings. It affirms that the teaching and learning in our school is of a high quality. We are delighted that the inspection records our pupils enjoy their active learning which is rooted in a positive spirit of enquiry and that the pupils are confident and competent in applying their highly developed scientific skills.

We are very pleased that this report acknowledges the hard work and dedication of our staff and the strong culture of professional collaboration that exists between our teachers.

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

We accept the recommendations of the report and appreciate the guidance. Work has already begun on the promotion of subject-specific language and also on the pupils’ incremental skills development.

These steps will build on our very good practices further enhancing teaching and learning in our school.
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>
<th>Example of descriptive terms</th>
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<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 outstanding 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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