Curriculum Evaluation

REPORT

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<tr>
<th>Ainm na scoile / School name</th>
<th>St. Mary's Primary School</th>
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<td>Seoladh na scoile / School address</td>
<td>Enfield Co Meath</td>
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<tr>
<td>Uimhir rolla / Roll number</td>
<td>17821L</td>
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Date of inspection: 14-03-2019
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

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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

SCHOOL CONTEXT
St Mary’s Primary School is a vertical co-educational school in the town of Enfield, County Meath. The school is under the patronage of the Catholic Bishop of Meath and has an administrative principal, twenty-two mainstream teachers and eight special education teachers. At the time of the evaluation there were 594 pupils enrolled. Inspectors observed teaching and learning in Science in a sample of twelve mainstream classes.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

FINDINGS

- The overall quality of pupils’ learning in Science is very good.
- The quality of learner experiences in Science is very good.
- The quality of the teaching of Science is very good overall.
- The quality of school planning for Science is very good.
- The potential of the local environment is not sufficiently exploited.
- A more consistent approach is needed across the classes to the development of the pupils’ scientific skills.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- The school should select a range of habitats in the local environment that the pupils will study in detail as they progress from infants to sixth class.
- The concept of fair testing needs to be consistently taught, and further consideration needs to be given to developing the skills of exploring, planning, making and evaluating in the design and make process.

DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. THE QUALITY OF PUPILS’ LEARNING

The overall quality of pupils’ learning in Science is very good. They demonstrate good knowledge of the concepts of the strands and strand units of the curriculum at each class level. Their knowledge of the Energy and Forces and Materials strands are particularly strong. They demonstrate an awareness of their environment and of environmental issues. They have a good knowledge of many of the areas of the Living Things strand. However, they are not as familiar as they should be with the plants and animals of their locality, and the school does not sufficiently exploit the potential of the local environment in teaching Science. It is recommended that the
school should select a range of habitats in the local environment that the pupils will study in detail as they progress from infants to sixth class so that they will be able to compare and contrast the flora and fauna of these habitats and to carry out investigations and longitudinal studies.

Some good examples of developing the practical skills of investigation and of designing and making were observed. Nonetheless, a more consistent approach is needed across the classes to the development of the pupils’ skills. In particular, the concept of fair testing needs to be clearly taught and understood, and further consideration needs to be given to developing the skills of exploring, planning, making and evaluating in the design and make process.

Pupils are enthusiastic and excited about their learning in Science. During the focus-group interview, pupils reported that they enjoy Science. They described their Science lessons as fun and as hands-on. They attributed their enjoyment of the lessons to the pupil-centred approach adopted by their teachers.

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

The quality of learner experiences in Science is very good. Pupils demonstrate very high levels of interest and participation in their learning. They are able to work both independently and collaboratively in a very purposeful and productive manner. They understand and can explain the purpose of the learning tasks.

The quality of the teaching of Science is very good overall. Classroom planning is of a very high standard and is informed by the science curriculum. Many of the teachers, particularly in the junior classes, adopt a thematic approach to planning and teaching Science. Lessons are well structured and well delivered. The teachers use a variety of teaching methodologies and demonstrate very good classroom management skills. Pair and group work is used very effectively. Science lessons focus correctly on eliciting and discussing pupils’ ideas and on helping them to modify those ideas and to develop more scientific understandings through the teachers’ judicious use of questioning. Scientific language is explicitly taught and teachers and pupils make good use of scientific language throughout the lessons. The school is very well resourced to support the teaching of Science and these resources are used effectively in the classrooms. Digital technology is used well to teach and to record results of investigation. While the school has a new outdoor garden, more widespread practice of growing bulbs and seeds in classrooms would provide opportunities for pupils to observe and record growth and change on a regular basis.

The quality of assessment is good. Teachers have begun to evaluate pupil progress in Science, and records demonstrate pupil engagement with particular learning outcomes of the curriculum. Pupils in fourth class maintain learning logs, and the fourth class pupils in the focus group reported that they enjoy recording their Science learning on a weekly basis in this manner. This is very good practice and the school might explore how it could expand the learning logs across the senior classes. A limited variety of recording strategies is used by pupils to record their own work in Science. The school is now well placed to further develop this aspect of assessment and to explore strategies which enable the pupils to record independently and to develop their own
initiative and creativity when it comes to recording the findings of their scientific investigations and experiments.

The school has participated in a wide variety of co-curricular and extra-curricular activities which have enhanced the pupils’ experience of Science. It has achieved awards in the Discovery Primary Science and Mathematics, Intel Mini-Scientist and Meath Pride of Place School Gardens competitions. While the school is not currently involved in the Green Schools Programme, it is about to re-engage in the programme.

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

The quality of school planning for Science is very good. The whole-school plan is clearly linked to classroom planning. When it is next reviewed, it is recommended that those areas of repetition, particularly in the Living Things strand, be addressed. The school is also advised to include an environmental audit that identifies areas of the locality for pupils to explore and investigate on an incremental basis, to identify further opportunities to engage in designing and making, and to compile a list of famous scientists, including female scientists, to be studied at each class level.

The school is to be commended for appointing a post-holder to co-ordinate provision for Social, Environmental and Scientific Education (SESE).
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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<tr>
<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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Appendix

SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

Submitted by the Board of Management
Area 1 Observations on the content of the inspection report

The school community is satisfied that the report is positive and that the three areas, pupils’ learning, support for pupils through teaching and the effectiveness of planning all received the highest grade of very good.

In relation to scientific skills, good examples of the practical skills of investigation and designing and making were observed in the school.

The high standard of teaching and the opportunities for the children to engage in positive learner experiences are recognised.

The teaching staff work together collaboratively as a team and this has led to the development of a useful whole school plan for science. The effort of teachers to co-ordinate this work is recognised.

The science plan is very valuable in guiding the work of individual teachers at the level of classroom planning.

Area 2 Follow-up actions planned or undertaken since the completion of the inspection activity to implement the findings and recommendations of the inspection.

While the pupils demonstrated a good knowledge of the strands and strand units of the curriculum at every level the school recognises that there are areas where improvements can still be made. The school will work to make progress in these areas.

Enfield is a small town situated in close proximity to a rural area and this will give the pupils in the school the opportunity to become familiar with the plants and animals that are found in the local environment. The school will select a range of habitats so that the children will be able to learn about the growth and development of the flora and fauna over time.

It is recognised that the concept of fair testing in relation to the children working scientifically needs to be taught explicitly to the children. A good understanding of this concept will allow them to create more accurate results in their work.

The school will seek to further develop an understanding of the children’s progress through assessing and recording the work completed.

There is now a recognised need for everyone to take care of our planet. This desire is particularly strong among young people. In order to support the children, the school has decided to re-engage with the Green Schools Programme.

There is a close link between the whole-school plan and the classroom planning. The school believes that this is a welcome opportunity to review the whole school plan for science. The plan will be developed in line with the curriculum documents issued to schools. New ideas and approaches will be incorporated into the plan to guide teachers in their work.

The plan supports teachers to build on the learning completed previously. The plan will refer to an environmental audit that will be completed where suitable habitats will be identified for future study. It will outline a spiral approach to the design and make process so that pupils will be provided with suitable challenging learning opportunities as they progress through the school. The plan will contain a list of famous scientists, including female scientists to be studied which will guide teachers in their work.

This work will be carried out under the direction of the principal. It will involve a senior post holder leading a core group who will consult with other members of the school community and be brought to the Board of Management for approval.