

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Curriculum Evaluation
Science

REPORT

Ainm na scoile / School name	Scoil Náisiúnta An Teaghlaigh
Seoladh na scoile / School address	An Phairc Turloch Caislean An Bharraigh Contae Mhaigh Eo
Uimhir rolla / Roll number	18562S

Date of inspection: 21-11-2019



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 inspector(s) 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	21-11-2019
Inspection activities undertaken <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Discussion with principal and teachers• Review of relevant documents• Pupil focus-group interview	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Observation of teaching and learning• Examination of pupils' work• Interaction with pupils• Feedback to principal and teachers

SCHOOL CONTEXT

Scoil Náisiúnta an Teaghlaigh, also known as Parke National School, is situated near the village of Turlough, Castlebar, County Mayo. Under the patronage of the Catholic Archbishop of Tuam, it is a rural, co-educational school catering for pupils from junior infants to sixth class. There are currently three classroom teachers, one full-time special education teacher (SET) and one shared SET on the staff. At the time of the evaluation, there were sixty-six pupils enrolled.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

FINDINGS

- The overall quality of learning is good; the pupils displayed very good knowledge of the content covered in Science to date this year, but there is scope to develop their skills of working as a scientist.
- The overall quality of learner experiences is good, and the use of the school garden to promote learning is highly commendable.
- The overall quality of teachers' practice is good; while very good elements of practice were observed during the evaluation, there is a need to provide more pupil-led opportunities to learn.
- Assessment is good, with effective assessment strategies in place in each setting.
- School planning in Science is good.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Teachers should ensure that the skills of working as a scientist, as outlined in the curriculum for Science, are taught in a structured manner across the school, in particular the skills of investigating and experimenting.
- The teaching staff should plan for and implement a broader range of pupil-led learning opportunities that enable the pupils to discover and explore scientific concepts in line with their own questions and observations.

DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. THE QUALITY OF PUPILS' LEARNING

The overall quality of learning in Science is good. Across the school, the pupils displayed high interest levels and in discussions with them, as part of the evaluation, it was clear that they enjoyed their learning in Science. The majority of pupils achieved the learning objectives as planned in the lessons observed. The pupils' ability to recall content from previous lessons is very good, and, overall, they have developed very good knowledge of the science curriculum.

Overall, the pupils were enabled to use high-quality scientific terminology when describing their learning. There was evidence of good progression in learning from class to class, although opportunities for the pupils to design and make in Science are limited throughout the school. Furthermore, the development of pupils' skills of working as a scientist needs improvement. While the pupils' observational skills have been well developed, they have not received sufficient opportunities to develop the full range of skills required by the curriculum, in particular the skills of investigating and experimenting. Going forward, pupils should be provided with frequent opportunities to pose scientific questions, analyse information, and design and carry out investigations and experiments in order to improve these skills. These skills should form an integral part of learning in all topics in Science.

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

The overall quality of the learner experiences in Science is good. The pupils are motivated to learn and were very well engaged in learning in the lessons observed. They were very respectful in their interactions with each other during the evaluation.

The pupils receive meaningful opportunities to develop their learning in the *Living things* strand of the curriculum in the school garden and in the locality, and through their engagement with the Green Schools programme. The use of external expertise to further enhance the learning experience is commendable. While some pupils were appropriately challenged by the learning in the lessons observed, teachers are advised to provide learning experiences that more appropriately enable all pupils to learn in line with their abilities, interests and needs.

The overall quality of teaching is good, with elements of very good practice observed throughout the school. The development of vocabulary in each setting was highly commendable. All lessons were very well resourced and there was evidence of very good integration of learning across other curricular areas, in particular in literacy. Classroom management was very good in each setting. The use of discussion to elicit prior knowledge is commendable. At times, there was an over-reliance on teacher-led instruction, which limited the amount of investigative learning opportunities for the pupils. The teaching of science lessons should be adjusted across the school to reduce the amount of teacher-led instruction and increase the amount of pupil-led discovery learning in order to further develop the pupils' scientific understanding in line with their own questions and observations.

The overall quality of assessment is good. The teachers demonstrated good-quality questioning techniques and their observations enabled them to adjust the lesson in line with identified needs. Records of learning produced by some pupils were good, although in some cases these records need to be less generic and used more as a tool for assessing individual pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding of the concept being learned. Overall, it is advised that the assessment of Science be reviewed so that a more structured approach to evaluating pupil progress in line with the objectives of the curriculum would be agreed by all teachers and implemented consistently across the school.

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

The overall quality of school planning, including school self-evaluation (SSE), is good. The whole-school plan for Science has been reviewed recently and provides a good overview of the strands and strand units to be taught each year of a two-year cycle. The plan also gives some good

instructional guidance to teachers. Individual teachers' short-term plans are detailed and outline clearly the content to be covered from one fortnight to the next. Currently, there is an over-reliance on generic long-term plans which do not support the preparation of learning opportunities in line with the context of the school or the interests of the pupils. It is recommended that this practice be reviewed to enable teachers to align their own planning with the school plan and the curriculum, in order to provide learning opportunities that promote more pupil-led, enquiry-based learning in Science.

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 Parke N.S welcomes the Inspectorate's curriculum evaluation of Science at Parke National School. We appreciate the acknowledgement that the overall quality of pupils' learning in Science is good and the recognition of a positive attitude towards Science among pupils.

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

All teachers will be working on developing the skills of investigation and experimentation across class levels.

Through the skills of working as a scientist, the teachers will provide pupil-led learning experiences.

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.

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