An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Curriculum Evaluation
Social, Personal and Health Education

REPORT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ainm na scoile / School name</th>
<th>Naomh Tomas N S</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Seoladh na scoile / School address</td>
<td>Rathowen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Co Westmeath</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uimhir rolla / Roll number</td>
<td>18591C</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Date of inspection: 22-11-2017
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 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 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.
Curriculum Evaluation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date of inspection</th>
<th>22-11-2017</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Inspection activities undertaken | • Observation of teaching and learning  
• Examination of pupils’ work  
• Interaction with pupils  
• Feedback to principal and teachers |

• Discussion with principal  
• Review of relevant documents  
• Pupil focus-group interview

SCHOOL CONTEXT
Naomh Tomas NS is a Church of Ireland, rural, co-educational school in Rathowen, Co. Westmeath. The school is under the patronage of the Bishop of Kilmore, Elphin and Ardfagh. There were twenty-five pupils enrolled at the time of the evaluation. The school receives additional Departmental grants and supports through its participation in DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools), the action plan of the Department of Education and Skills for educational inclusion.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

FINDINGS
• The school fosters an inclusive atmosphere and respectful relations, and the wellbeing of pupils is central to its work.
• Teachers provide a balanced and broad SPHE programme through the delivery of discrete lessons and meaningful integration across other curricular areas.
• The pupils are provided with a variety of good learning experiences, with a particular emphasis on pupils’ participation in relevant national initiatives and school-based events.
• The pupils are well behaved and attentive during lessons; however, they are not confident in talking about their learning.
• There is scope for teachers to develop their assessment practices.

RECOMMENDATIONS
• The teachers should extend the range of methodologies they use in order to promote the pupils’ confidence in communicating and their ability to reflect on their learning.
• Teachers should agree and implement whole-school approaches to assessing and recording the pupils’ learning.
DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. THE QUALITY OF PUPILS' LEARNING

The quality of pupils’ learning is good. They demonstrate a good understanding of healthy living and participate in school-based activities which focus on promoting their health and wellbeing. The pupils demonstrate care for the environment and a respect for diversity. They are motivated to learn. They apply themselves well to their learning tasks and, for the most part, can work well both individually and cooperatively. Nevertheless, many pupils, particularly in the third to sixth classes, did not display self-confidence in communicating their learning. They found it difficult to reflect on and discuss their learning. The teachers should extend the methodologies they use in order to promote the pupils’ confidence in communicating and their ability to reflect on their learning.

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

The quality of support for the pupils’ learning is good. A positive, inclusive school atmosphere is fostered. All staff members promote the wellbeing of pupils, and nurture caring and respectful relations. The agreement of class rules and responsibilities are a positive feature of practice: such undertakings could be extended further to include activities which will promote the pupils’ voice and develop their appreciation of democratic processes.

The classrooms and the school environment are attractive and celebrate the pupils’ learning and achievements. Nevertheless, it was evident during the evaluation that the use of old-style school desks in the two small classrooms significantly impeded the teachers’ freedom to use active-learning methodologies and to promote effective collaborative group work among the pupils.

The pupils in the focus group discussed the range of initiatives in which they are involved. These address diverse global and national issues relating to science learning, sustainability, citizenship and also Green School actions. The pupils described many learning activities as fun, including making and playing games, preparing presentations and projects, and composing songs. They responded very positively to the introduction of debating in recent times in the senior classes.

Overall, the teaching of SPHE is good. Teachers employ methodologies which are focused on active learning. Surveys, projects, booklets and posters of the pupils’ work were exhibited with pride. The junior pupils were enabled to use stimulating resources which enhanced their learning experiences. Lesson content was relevant and appropriate to the pupils’ stages of development. During the lessons observed, the learning objectives were implied, rather than explicit. Teachers should systematically share the learning objectives of lessons and explain the purpose of the learning tasks. This will greatly assist in supporting the pupils’ learning and their ability to reflect on their learning.

The teachers use a narrow range of assessment approaches. It is recommended that teachers agree and implement a whole-school approach to assessing the pupils’ learning in order to ensure that there is progression up through the school.
3. THE EFFECTIVENESS OF SCHOOL PLANNING, INCLUDING SSE, IN PROGRESSING PUPILS’ LEARNING

The school plan for SPHE gives good direction to teachers on many aspects of practice, including the content to be covered within two-year cycles. With the recent appointment of a new mainstream teacher, it is timely to review this plan to ensure it sets out the full range of SPHE-related learning currently underway and supports high-quality collaborative practice in teaching, learning and assessment. Consideration should be given to describing the active-learning methodologies and experiences that the teachers will use to enhance the pupils’ reflection and communication skills, and to agreeing how these skills will be assessed. The school’s DEIS plan, which is due for review, incorporates many actions which are supportive of the pupils’ learning in SPHE.

CHILD PROTECTION
The following aspects of the Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post Primary Schools were checked during the evaluation:

1. Teachers’ access to a copy of the school’s Child Protection policy
2. The prominent display of the name of Designated Liaison Person near the main entrance

The school was fully compliant with both aspects.
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 in each area.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Example of descriptive terms</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very Good</td>
<td><em>Very good</em> 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 <em>outstanding</em> 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>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good</td>
<td><em>Good</em> 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 <em>very good</em> standard.</td>
<td>Good; good quality; valuable; effective practice; competent; useful; commendable; good standard; some areas for improvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfactory</td>
<td><em>Satisfactory</em> 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>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fair</td>
<td><em>Fair</em> 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>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weak</td>
<td><em>Weak</em> 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>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix

SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

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

The board of management of St. Thomas’ National School welcomes the positive Curriculum Evaluation of Social, Personal and Health Education.

The board welcomes the findings of the report with regard to the inclusive atmosphere, respectful relations and the wellbeing of the pupils being central to the school’s work.

The board is pleased that teachers provide a balanced and broad SPHE programme and a variety of good learning experiences.

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

The board acknowledges and accepts the findings and recommendations of the report.

The development of pupils’ confidence is being addressed by continuing the debating programme in 3rd-6th and age appropriate oral language activities in the infants and 1st and 2nd class.

A Students Council is being set up to promote the pupils’ voice.

The area of assessment in SPHE is being addressed.

The board is reviewing the use of the old style desks.