Curriculum Evaluation
Science

REPORT

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<tr>
<th>Ainm na scoile / School name</th>
<th>Scoil Náisiúnta Gort Sceiche</th>
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| Seoladh na scoile / School address | Annefield  
Hollymount  
County Mayo |
| Uimhir rolla / Roll number | 18880J |

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.

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.

HOW TO READ THIS REPORT

During this inspection, the inspector 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.

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.
Date of inspection 12-02-2019

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
- Feedback to principal and teachers

CONTEXT
Scoil Náisiúnta Gort Sceiche (Gortskehy National School) is a rural, co-educational primary school situated in the parish of Hollymount, County Mayo. The school operates under the patronage of the Catholic Archbishop of Tuam. There are three mainstream teachers and an acting principal, who is the special education teacher (SET). At the time of the evaluation, there were seventy pupils enrolled.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

FINDINGS
- The overall quality of pupils’ learning in Science is good.
- A highly commendable range of learning experiences is provided for pupils, including participation in co-curricular initiatives and projects.
- The overall quality of teaching in Science is good.
- Pupils demonstrate commendable ability to discuss their learning in Science.
- There is appropriate provision for assessment in Science, although some possibilities for improvement exist.
- School planning for Science is effective overall in progressing pupils’ learning; there are opportunities to improve whole-school planning for the teaching of key scientific vocabulary.

RECOMMENDATIONS
- A whole-school approach to the assessment and recording of pupils’ progress in Science should be implemented.
- School planning should include the key scientific vocabulary to be taught for each strand of the science curriculum at each class level.

DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. THE QUALITY OF PUPILS’ LEARNING
The overall quality of pupils’ learning in Science is good. Most of the pupils can discuss their learning competently and confidently. They demonstrate good knowledge across a range of strands and strand units, including Materials, Energy and Forces, Living Things, and Environmental Awareness and Care. In the lessons observed, the pupils were well motivated to learn and engaged appropriately in the learning activities.

Skills development receives due attention at each class level. Pupils have opportunities in all classes to work scientifically and to record their results. Questioning, predicting, sorting and investigating are central to the experiments conducted by the pupils. In some classrooms, the
pupils could discuss famous inventors and scientists. They also demonstrated a good understanding of the application of what they had learned in Science to modern living.

Pupils’ learning is enriched through a highly commendable range of experiences, including participation in worthwhile co-curricular initiatives and projects such as the Erasmus+ Space Project, the Young Scientist Exhibition, the School Excellence Fund, Creative Schools, and the Green Schools Programme. The recording and celebration of this learning are enhanced through the use of digital technology. There are good-quality displays on classroom and corridor noticeboards and on the school website. The school has achieved the Digital Schools of Distinction Award.

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

The pupils’ learner experiences are good overall, with some very good learner experiences also observed during the evaluation. Pupils engage in collaborative learning activities and have opportunities to work and record scientifically. All classrooms have displays of the recent work undertaken in Science. In the focus-group discussion, pupils reported that they like Science and that they find it interesting and enjoyable, and particularly enjoy undertaking projects and experiments, and producing digital presentations of their work. They reported that they present their work to other pupils and that they leave the school to learn about Science on nature walks, as well as part of the Erasmus+ Space project.

The overall quality of teaching in the subject is good. Some aspects of the teaching observed was very good. In all of the classrooms visited, the learning outcome was shared clearly with the pupils at the start of the lesson. Teachers demonstrated good questioning and explaining skills and used effective active learning methods in their lessons. Where highly effective practice was evident, tasks were differentiated to provide an appropriate challenge for pupils of various abilities. Pair and group work were also used effectively in these lessons.

Effective classroom management skills were observed, including highly respectful interactions between pupils and teachers, as well as between pupils in their groups. The pupils were very well behaved and co-operative.

There is appropriate provision for assessment in the subject, although some possibilities for improvement exist. While pupils’ written work in Science is monitored and corrected, there is scope to develop the quality of written feedback provided to encourage pupils to improve their work. The Thumbs up! Thumbs Down! strategy was observed to be working well. It is recommended, however, that a whole-school approach to the assessment and recording of pupils’ progress in Science be implemented.

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

The quality of school planning is good. A culture of reflection and improvement in teaching and learning is evident. The whole-school plan for Science was reviewed recently using the principles of school self-evaluation (SSE). It provides valuable guidance to teachers on the strands of the curriculum to be covered on a cyclical basis. To enhance the quality of learning at each class level, it is recommended that school planning include the key scientific vocabulary to be taught for each strand.
The management of resources is very good. The pupils make very good use of these resources when conducting experiments and discovery tasks. Digital technologies were used very effectively to present lessons and to record participation in co-curricular initiatives and projects. The pupils are actively involved in the planning and development of a sensory garden. This should serve to complement teaching and learning in Science, especially in the strands Living Things and Environmental Awareness and Care.
Appendix

TO THE REPORT

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

The Board of Management of S.N. Gort Sceiche wishes to acknowledge the positive findings of this report and the recommendations within.

In particular, the Board of Management is pleased that the overall quality of teaching in Science is good. The Board welcomes the recognition of the school’s emphasis on co-curricular initiatives and projects that enrich the pupils’ learning experiences in Science.

The Board of Management will work with the staff of the school in implementing the recommendations outlined in this report.

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

The school will implement the recommendations of the report with the support of the Board of Management and the following actions will be taken:

The teaching staff will review assessment practices with the aim of developing and implementing a consistent whole-school approach to recording pupils’ progress in Science.

The teaching staff will review the Science school plan and include the key specific vocabulary to be taught for each strand of the Science curriculum at each class level.
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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<th>Level</th>
<th>Description</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 <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>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 <strong>very good</strong> 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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