

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Curriculum Evaluation
Science

REPORT

Ainm na scoile / School name	Scoil Ursula
Seoladh na scoile / School address	Strandhill Road Sligo County Sligo
Uimhir rolla / Roll number	18979F

Date of inspection: 20-11-2019



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 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	20-11-2019
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 Ursula is an urban, co-educational primary school under the patronage of the Catholic Bishop of Elphin. The school has an administrative principal, seventeen mainstream class teachers, five special education teachers and one based elsewhere. Currently there are 440 pupils enrolled in the school.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

FINDINGS

- The overall quality of pupils' learning in Science is very good; pupils are motivated to learn and they actively engage in purposeful and collaborative learning activities.
- The quality of the learner experiences provided to pupils is very good; pupils have opportunities to work as scientists and engage in online research and experiments and to apply their learning to 'design and make' tasks in the subject.
- The overall quality of teaching in Science is very effective; teachers employ a variety of purposeful teaching approaches.
- Whole-school planning and assessment are good overall; there is scope to develop whole-school planning and teachers' recording of pupil progress in Science in a consistent manner.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- The whole-school plan for Science should be reviewed to support a developmental approach in terms of content and assessment strategies to better guide teacher planning and implementation in the classroom in a consistent manner.

DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. THE QUALITY OF PUPILS' LEARNING

The overall quality of pupils' learning in Science is very good. Pupils are motivated to learn and they actively engage in purposeful, active and collaborative learning activities. Most pupils were able to recall details of previous lessons in the subject and use appropriate subject specific language. Pupils in the middle and senior classes are familiar with the concept of the fair test in scientific experiments and can explain the application of Science in familiar contexts and identify how it contributes to society. Their scientific skills are being developed consistently and they are able to work scientifically and apply their learning to 'design and make' tasks.

During the evaluation, pupils demonstrated very successful learning across a broad range of curricular strands. They achieved the intended learning outcomes of the lessons observed. Pupils demonstrated very confident use of digital learning technologies (DLT) to further their learning, for the completion of projects and to record achievements in their learning in Science. Photographs and videos are used extensively to document and reflect on learning activities. In discussion, pupils reported that lessons are fun and that they enjoy engaging in experiments. They also identified how they liked to be given opportunities to do research on assigned topics in advance of the lesson being taught in school.

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

The overall quality of the learner experiences provided to support pupils' learning is very good. The enjoyment of Science is promoted and pupils are motivated to learn through the engagement in interesting, differentiated activities. Online blogs are used to capture and share the pupils' learning experiences with the school community. A varied programme is provided through a series of guest speakers; involvement with local second and third level institutions; science fairs; climate action week; science week and other learning experiences outside the classroom. Pupils were exposed to a variety of purposeful and challenging learning activities for the strands of the curriculum observed. They have opportunities to work as scientists and engage in practical activities such as online research and experiments in a safe manner. All pupils are enabled to actively participate in lessons and experience inclusivity within the classroom. Engagement in co-curricular initiatives, such as the Green Schools Programme, the school garden and polytunnel, supports pupils' environmental awareness and facilitates them in making meaningful connections with life-long learning.

The quality of teaching in Science is very good. Teachers prepared thoroughly and diligently for the lessons observed. They demonstrated very good subject knowledge, pedagogical knowledge and classroom management skills. They were very good at teaching subject specific vocabulary and some teachers identified in their planning the key language needing to be taught; this very good practice should be extended to all classes. Teachers create attractive classroom and school environments which promote an appreciation of Science as was evident from displays and projects. They also employ a variety of purposeful teaching approaches. They work together to agree appropriate learning activities for pupils in all classes and they share their expertise in the subject with other teachers appropriately. They foster a commitment to inclusion, equality of opportunity and the holistic development of each pupil.

The overall quality of assessment is good. Teachers use observation, purposeful questioning, teacher-designed tasks, project samples and a variety of assessment for learning strategies to assess pupils' knowledge and understanding of the subject. Where very good practice was observed in assessing and recording pupil progress, records of pupils' progress were clear, useful and easy to interpret. This very good practice should be extended to all classes to support progression in the recording of achievement in terms of content and skills.

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

The quality of school planning, including school self-evaluation (SSE), in progressing pupils' learning is good. The principal and those leading the subject area actively promote a culture of improvement, collaboration and creativity in teaching and learning. The SSE plan effectively supports progression in

digital learning and encompasses learning in Science through the development and promotion of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) related initiatives. The whole-school plan for Science outlines the strands and strand units for all class groups. The school plan should be reviewed to support a developmental whole-school approach to teaching Science to include a local environmental audit and the identification of areas for pupils to explore and investigate. The school plan should also include systematic approaches to assessment for learning (AfL) in Science to better guide teacher short-term planning and implementation in the classroom in a consistent manner.

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 Scoil Ursula welcomes the very positive Curriculum Evaluation in Science conducted recently in the school by DES Inspectors and accepts the contents and findings of the report. The key findings are very affirming and encouraging. Of particular note are the commendations in relation to the quality of pupils' learning, the quality of learner experiences and the overall quality of the teaching of Science in the school. The Board will endeavour to ensure these high standards are maintained and that the inspectors' recommendation with regard to our Whole School Science Plan is implemented in full (see below).

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 Board acknowledges and values the independent, expert contribution of the evaluation and desires to implement suggestions and guidance aimed at further improving the teaching and learning of Science in the school as set out in the recommendations of the report. To this end, the following steps will be taken:

- A review of the Whole School Plan for Science will be undertaken by the staff under the leadership of the curricular head of SESE and the Principal to be complete before Mid-Term Break.
- The Science Plan will be revised to include a developmental approach to content where a graduated progression is evident from class to class up through the school. The revised plan will be drafted between Mid-Term Break and Easter.
 - The assessment element of the plan will be amended to include systematic approaches to formative assessment which will guide teachers towards consistency in their short-term planning and implementation. The very good practice, which was observed in assessing and recording pupil progress, will be included in the plan and to support progression in the recording of achievement in terms of content and skills.
 - An Environmental Audit will be undertaken to identify areas in the school grounds and locality which are suitable for pupils to scientifically explore and investigate.
- When the revised plan has been finalised, it will be disseminated to all teachers during the final term for implementation from the beginning of the next school year.
- The above steps will be incorporated into Scoil Ursula's PIEW Strategic Planning Framework and the Revised Science Plan will be published on the school website.

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;