Ainm na scoile / School name: Holywell Educate Together National School

Seoladh na scoile / School address:
- Holywell Road
- Nevinstown
- Swords
- K67 AP99

Uimhir rolla / Roll number: 20348F

Date of inspection: 08-03-2019
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.

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  08-03-2019

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

SCHOOL CONTEXT

Holywell Educate Together National School is an urban, co-educational primary school under the patronage of Educate Together. The school enrols pupils from junior infants to sixth class and includes three special classes for pupils with autistic spectrum disorders. At the time of the evaluation, there were 654 pupils enrolled. The school staffing includes an administrative principal, an administrative deputy principal, twenty-five mainstream teachers and sixteen special education teachers.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

FINDINGS

- Pupils’ learning in Science is good; pupils are interested in their learning and positively disposed to Science.
- Pupils display good knowledge and understanding of their learning in the strands of living things and environmental awareness and can use and apply their scientific skills to design and make activities; they were less confident in understanding the concept of fair testing, discussing their previous learning in certain other strands of the Science Curriculum such as materials and energy and forces and in identifying the every-day applications of their scientific investigations.
- The quality of pupils’ learning experiences is very good; pupils are afforded opportunities to engage in a broad range of science activities.
- The overall quality of teaching is good and all lessons observed during the evaluation had clear learning objectives, were appropriately resourced, very well-structured and very-well paced.
- Assessment in Science is satisfactory; while all teachers assess pupils’ learning in Science, there is some variation throughout the school in how records of pupils’ attainment in Science are maintained which detracts from the potential of assessment to contribute to progression and continuity in pupils’ learning.
- Whole-school planning in Science is good; the whole-school plan supports the implementation of a broad and balanced programme in Science.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- To optimise learning, teachers should place a greater emphasis on fair testing, connecting pupils’ learning with previous learning and on providing pupils with opportunities to see how their scientific learning connects to real life.
- Pupils’ records of work should be developed as ongoing learning logs to support continuity and progression in their learning.
DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. THE QUALITY OF PUPILS’ LEARNING
Overall, the quality of pupils’ learning in Science is good. Pupils are interested in their learning, motivated to learn and positively disposed to Science. During observed lessons and in group discussions, pupils used topic-specific vocabulary confidently to describe their learning. Pupils’ engagement in learning was generally very good in the lessons observed and they demonstrated a very good ability to work effectively in groups. Pupils displayed good knowledge and understanding of their learning in the strands of living things and environmental awareness and are enabled to use and apply their scientific skills to design and make activities. However, they were less confident in discussing their learning in certain other strands of the science curriculum such as energy and forces and materials. Their understanding of variables and the concept of a fair test requires further development and in general, pupils would benefit from more regular and more systematic revision of scientific knowledge and concepts. Pupils enjoy regular opportunities to work as scientists through their engagement in practical investigations and experiments and demonstrate a good ability to communicate, discuss and present results from this work; a more consistent emphasis should be placed on encouraging pupils to draw conclusions from their experiments and to explore the practical applications of their findings. In the focus-group interview, pupils demonstrated a very high level of enthusiasm for Science and spoke very positively of their experience of Science in the school.

2. SUPPORTING PUPILS’ LEARNING: LEARNER EXPERIENCES AND TEACHERS’ PRACTICE
The quality of pupils’ learning experiences is very good. Pupils are afforded opportunities to engage in a broad range of science activities and to participate actively in experiences such as field trips. Very good emphasis is placed on the environmental awareness and care strand and this is reflected in the school’s successful involvement in the Green Schools programme. The school encourages parental involvement in the Science Curriculum in a variety of ways, including their work in the school garden. In all observed settings, pupils had opportunities to purposefully discuss, share and compare their learning in collaborative settings. Well-resourced classroom environments offer valuable supports for learning and digital technologies are used effectively to stimulate pupils’ learning and engagement. Pupils’ work in Science is displayed attractively throughout the school. Pupils have opportunities to develop and utilise the school garden and poly-tunnel. The management of resources for learning in Science is very good and these materials and equipment support pupils’ understanding of concepts. Pupils’ learning experiences in Science are enhanced through their participation in an annual science fair.

The overall quality of teaching is good. Teachers displayed very good teaching skills during the evaluation. All lessons were based on clear learning outcomes, lessons were very well-structured and well-paced, there was a clear focus on language development and a broad range of teaching methodologies was used very effectively. All lessons observed were very well-prepared and appropriately resourced. In a few instances, features of particularly effective practice included challenging lesson objectives which were clearly linked to pupils’ prior knowledge and very focused teacher questioning which stimulated extended pupil discussion. To optimise the impact of the effective teaching and very good quality learning experiences in evidence in the school, pupils would benefit from further opportunities to consolidate and revise previously-learned skills and concepts in Science more regularly.
The overall quality of assessment in Science is satisfactory. Generally, teachers assess pupils’ learning through teacher observation, teacher questioning and teacher-designed tasks. While some use is made of checklists to monitor pupils’ learning, greater consideration should be given to outlining a whole-school approach to how these checklists will be used to monitor pupils’ attainment of learning objectives at specific stages in their progression through school. All teachers maintain some samples of pupils’ work in a variety of strands although there is some variation in how these records are maintained. A consistent approach to the recording of pupils’ work in Science through the use of learning logs will support the systematic recording of pupil attainment and progress in Science.

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

Whole-school planning in Science is good. The whole-school plan supports the implementation of a broad and balanced programme in Science and includes a useful environmental audit, identifying areas for pupils to explore and investigate. Further attention to how pupils’ scientific knowledge and specific scientific skills are developed through the school would enhance pupils’ learning in Science; there is potential to extend the monitoring of teachers’ monthly progress reports to ensure that pupils’ knowledge and understanding of the topics from the curriculum for each class is being developed in a progressive and developmental way. Although all teachers prepare short-term plans to guide their teaching across the curriculum generally, in a few instances these plans were not sufficiently contextualised to meet the needs of learners in their individual classes. Greater specificity in this regard will enhance pupils’ learning.
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.

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