Curriculum Evaluation

Science

REPORT

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<th>Ainm na scoile / School name</th>
<th>Our Lady’s National School</th>
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<td>Seoladh na scoile / School address</td>
<td>Ballingarry, Thurles</td>
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<td>Co Tipperary</td>
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<td>Uimhir rolla / Roll number</td>
<td>20475M</td>
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Date of inspection: 06-06-2019
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 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  06-06-2019

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
Our Lady’s NS Ballingarry is a co-educational primary school operating under the patronage of the Catholic Archbishop of Cashel and Emly. The school has four mainstream class teachers, one full-time and one part-time special education teacher (SET). The school participates in Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS), an action plan of the Department of Education and Skills for educational inclusion. Currently, there are 101 pupils enrolled in the school.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

FINDINGS
- The quality of pupils’ learning is very good and they demonstrate a well-developed capacity to link learning across the strands of the Science curriculum; there is scope to direct further attention to the skills associated with the Designing and making strand.
- Good quality learning experiences are provided for the pupils; the recent development of an outdoor classroom will further enhance their learning experiences.
- The quality of teaching is very good; lessons observed were highly structured and appropriately challenging.
- The quality of assessment in Science is satisfactory; current practice is primarily confined to teacher observation and the retention of work samples and worksheets.
- The overall quality of planning, including school self-evaluation (SSE) is good; more explicit direction is required in the whole-school plan for Science on the use of both summative and formative assessment.

RECOMMENDATIONS
- As part of whole-school planning, the school should develop and implement agreed systems, including the use of summative and formative assessment, to monitor the incremental development of pupils’ conceptual understanding and skills in Science.
- There should be increased emphasis on the Designing and making strand of the curriculum.
DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. THE QUALITY OF PUPILS’ LEARNING
The overall quality of pupils’ learning is very good. They demonstrate high levels of engagement and participation in lessons. Pupils’ scientific knowledge is well developed and scientific skills of questioning, investigating and experimenting are progressed incrementally as pupils move through the school. They benefit from participation in the Green Schools Programme and can discuss strategies for improving and caring for the environment. The strands of Energy and forces and Materials are particularly well addressed in most classes. Pupils ably describe heat transfer using appropriate terminology of insulation and conduction. They demonstrate very good ability to link learning across the strands of the curriculum and successfully describe the properties of materials in relation to sound, heat and light. They investigate simple circuits and capably identify the positive societal contributions of science and technology. It is commendable that the work of female scientists is afforded due attention. Pupils demonstrate good capability in the use of scientific terminology in classroom-based discussions. To further support the pupils’ learning, the school should consider, as part of the school planning and SSE process, how to further develop the pupils’ acquisition of the language of Science.

There is scope to direct greater attention to the strand of Designing and making. Specific emphasis should be placed on planning investigations, making objects to apply knowledge and solve problems, and in particular, towards evaluating results against initial plans and intentions. More regular opportunities for pupils to develop these skills will further nurture their inventive and creative capacities.

During the focus group discussion, the pupils expressed a preference for activity-based learning and described the ways in which they learn best, which include demonstration, trial and error and figuring out problems.

2. SUPPORTING PUPILS’ LEARNING: LEARNER EXPERIENCES AND TEACHERS’ PRACTICE
Good quality learning experiences are provided for the pupils. In all classes, pupils have opportunities to work as scientists and to engage in practical activities. An integrated and thematic approach allows for aspects of Science to be taught in other subjects, in particular in the junior classes. Talk and discussion feature strongly in lessons and the pupils are enabled and encouraged to share their ideas and to discuss their work. In some instances, the pupils are prompted to look at the work of others in the classroom and to evaluate their own engineering endeavours. Learner experiences are further enhanced through work in the school garden where seasonal vegetables are sown and managed by the pupils. The school exploits the immediate environment and pupils have frequent opportunities to feed birds, observe changes in trees and investigate insects. The recent development of an outdoor classroom, where pupils have assisted in its design through planting flowers and painting wooden wildlife creatures, will further enhance the learning experience for pupils.

The quality of teaching is very good. Teachers provide supportive learning environments that promote an appreciation of Science. They successfully use a range of curriculum appropriate approaches including investigations, experimentation and use of the local environment. Long term plans for Science are drawn from the whole-school plan and in most instances, short-term planning ensures that pupils experience a breath and balance of curriculum strands. Lessons observed were
characterised by highly structured formats and the presentation of challenging tasks. Where lessons were most successful, pupils’ existing ideas and previous knowledge were used as a starting point and pupils were enabled to consolidate or to question existing ideas as appropriate.

The quality of assessment in Science is satisfactory. Teachers use some strategies to assess pupils’ knowledge, including, questioning, observing and maintaining samples of worksheets. In order to better support continuity and progression in learning and to further enhance the quality of learning outcomes, the school should develop and implement agreed systems to monitor the incremental development of pupils’ conceptual understanding and scientific skills. Pupils should be enabled to reflect constructively on their own learning.

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

The overall quality of planning, including SSE is good. The whole-school plan for Science provides useful guidance for teachers in relation to both developing scientific content and teaching approaches. More explicit direction is required on the use of both summative and formative assessment.

School leaders promote a culture of improvement in teaching and learning. As part of the SSE process, the school plan for Science should be reviewed to provide greater guidance for teachers on the use of assessment to further progress the high standards of attainment. The school has prepared a well-considered improvement plan focussing on the enhancement and assessment of oral language skills, to be introduced in September 2019. There is potential to include the development and assessment of pupils’ scientific vocabulary as a component of this school plan.
**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><strong>Very Good</strong></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><strong>Good</strong></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><strong>Satisfactory</strong></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><strong>Fair</strong></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><strong>Weak</strong></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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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 Our Lady’s N.S. is very pleased that the report affirms the very good quality of the pupil’s learning.

We welcome the recognition that the recent development of an outdoor classroom will further enhance their learning experiences.

We are particularly pleased that the report acknowledges that the lessons observed were highly structured and appropriately challenging for the students.

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 of Management accepts the findings of the report. All recommendations will be implemented in the new school year 2019/2020