

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
Management, Leadership and Learning

REPORT

Ainm na scoile / School name	Rathcormack National School
Seoladh na scoile / School address	Rathcormack Drumcliff County Sligo
Uimhir rolla / Roll number	19408N

Date of inspection: 28-01-2019



WHAT IS WHOLE-SCHOOL EVALUATION – MANAGEMENT, LEADERSHIP AND LEARNING?

Whole-School Evaluation – Management, Leadership and Learning reports on the quality of teaching and learning and on the quality of management and leadership in a school. It affirms good practice and makes recommendations, where appropriate, to aid the further development of educational provision in the school.

HOW TO READ THIS REPORT

During this inspection, the inspectors evaluated and reported under the following headings or areas of enquiry:

1. The quality of pupils' learning
2. The quality of teaching
3. The quality of support for pupils' well-being
4. The quality of leadership and management
5. The quality of school self-evaluation

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.
4. The Child Safeguarding Statement meets the requirements of the Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools 2017.
5. The records of the last three board of management meetings record a child protection oversight report that meet the requirements of the Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary schools 2017.
6. The board of management has ensured that arrangements are in place to provide information to all school personnel on the Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools, 2017
7. School planning documentation indicates that the school is making full provision for the relevant aspects of the curriculum (SPHE, Stay Safe, RSE, Well-being).
8. Child protection records are maintained in a secure location.

The school did not meet the requirements in relation to 2 above and therefore was not fully compliant with the checks undertaken. However, the school has subsequently furnished evidence of compliance with these requirement.

Whole-School Evaluation – Management, Leadership and Learning

Dates of inspection	28-01-2019
Inspection activities undertaken	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meetings with principal and in-school leadership team • Meeting with chairperson of the board of management • Meeting with parent representatives • Meeting with teachers • Review of relevant documents 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analysis of parent, pupil and teacher questionnaires • Observation of teaching and learning • Examination of pupils' work • Interaction with pupils • Feedback to principal, deputy principal and teachers, and to parent and board of management representatives

SCHOOL CONTEXT

Rathcormack National School is a co-educational primary school under the patronage of the Roman Catholic Bishop of Elphin. The staff includes an administrative principal, nine mainstream class teachers and three special education teachers. There are 243 pupils enrolled and their attendance levels are very good overall.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

FINDINGS

- The overall learning achievements of the pupils, including pupils with special educational needs (SEN), are very good and they can apply their knowledge and skills very well in areas across the curriculum.
- The quality of teaching is highly effective; currently, in teachers' individual short-term planning, there is scope to make greater use of assessment data to inform target setting for differentiated team-teaching approaches and in classroom *Continuum of Support* planning.
- The quality of assessment is good in the main; assessment for learning (AfL) is not implemented consistently throughout the school.
- Support for pupils' well-being is of an exceptionally high standard and a warm, welcoming, inclusive atmosphere permeates the school.
- Leadership and management are effective overall; in-school leadership does not prioritise whole-school curriculum planning in a systematic manner to guide whole-school and individual teacher curriculum planning, implementation, monitoring and review.
- The quality of school self-evaluation (SSE) is very good; improvement plans in numeracy and Physical Education (PE) are impacting positively on teaching and learning on a whole-school basis.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Teachers should use assessment data more effectively to inform differentiated individual teacher planning, team-teaching approaches and classroom support planning, so as to ensure that all pupils are appropriately challenged and supported in their learning.
- A whole-school approach to AfL including pupil, peer and self-assessment is recommended to strengthen current practice.
- The in-school leadership team should prioritise curricular leadership with specific delineation of responsibilities to support curriculum implementation, monitoring and review.

DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. THE QUALITY OF PUPILS' LEARNING

- The learning achievements of pupils including pupils with SEN are very high. Pupils enjoy their learning and are motivated to learn. They displayed very high levels of ability to recall and discuss previous learning experiences and to make connections in their learning across various subjects. They demonstrated the knowledge, skills and understanding required by the primary curriculum at each class level.
- Learning outcomes in literacy and numeracy are very good. Pupils could articulate their learning very well in Social Environmental and Scientific Education (SESE) subjects and in various projects completed across the curriculum. Pupils displayed very good skill development in Music, Visual Arts and SESE in particular. In literacy, they demonstrated very good oral, reading and writing skills. While pupils reading standards are very good overall in both English and Irish; the use of extended reading materials in Irish would enhance current provision in this area. Pupils have a very good understanding of concepts in Mathematics. The pupils prepare and present powerpoint presentations very effectively at class and at whole-school level on projects that they have completed on various topics of interest to them. Their performance levels in numeracy and literacy as evidenced from the outcomes in standardised tests are consistently high.
- During the inspection, pupils demonstrated very good knowledge in graphical and investigative skills. Their awareness of line, colour, tone and texture in the examples on display in the *Fabric and fibre; Print and drawing* in Visual Arts demonstrate a very high level of creative imagination and skill.
- Performance in Music is a regular feature of classroom and school life and pupils are provided with opportunities to celebrate their individual talents as part of the Music Generation Programme. Pupils can discuss elements of percussion and musical instruments with confidence and their understanding of the concepts of *pulse* and *tempo* in Music is exemplary.
- In the infant classes, pupils have access to playful learning experiences as part of *Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework* and very good emphasis is placed on using a thematic approach to support pupils' learning. Pupils engage very well in organised learning tasks in all classrooms. However, a significant minority of pupils' responses in questionnaires indicated that they do not work in groups most days. While purposeful group activities are organised for some lessons, this good practice should be extended to all curricular areas.

2. THE QUALITY OF TEACHING

- The overall quality of teaching is very good. Learning environments were stimulating with purposeful displays of projects in literacy, SESE and Visual Arts.
- Teachers use a purposeful range of questioning techniques and the whole school emphasis on language development and mental Mathematics is very successful. A praiseworthy feature of teachers' collective practice is the significant commitment to continuing professional development (CPD) and the sharing of expertise and knowledge gained through these courses. Almost all teachers agreed in teachers' questionnaires completed as part of the evaluation that they collaborate and share good practice with each other. In questionnaire responses, almost all parents agreed that teaching is good in the school.
- The quality of whole-school and individual teacher curriculum planning has scope for improvement. While whole-school and curricular planning is available for all subject areas, the quality of teachers' planning was inconsistent in the majority of classrooms. At whole-

school and individual teacher planning level, the curricular content, objectives and skills are not sufficiently outlined in a developmental and progressive manner. There is scope for improvement in the quality of individual teachers' curricular planning in terms of differentiation and assessment practices in particular. There is a need to clarify the content objectives and skills for the varying abilities of pupils at each class level in order to ensure appropriate continuity, progression and development in pupils' learning.

- Teachers use digital technologies very effectively to support pupils' learning. Almost all pupils agreed in questionnaires that they use computers during some lessons. Integration of curricular areas is a feature of effective teaching throughout the school. Literacy and numeracy approaches are well developed; however the progressive development of the writing genres in both languages should be reviewed at whole-school level.
- Overall, the quality of teaching provided for pupils with SEN is of a very high standard. Early intervention strategies are implemented very effectively in the junior classes to support early reading and phonological skills. SEN teachers have very effective pupil-support plans in place for pupils with identified needs. Teachers use a variety of very effective teaching approaches to progress pupils' learning across the curriculum. However there is scope for a whole-school approach to team and station teaching to cater more effectively for differentiated needs of all pupils. All classroom teachers should implement the *Continuum of Support* in a more consistent manner to cater for the varying needs of pupils' more effectively.
- While the quality of assessment overall is good; there is scope for a more cohesive approach in this area. Assessment data should be used more effectively to inform differentiated team teaching approaches and individual classroom support plans to cater for pupils of all abilities. In pupils' questionnaires, the majority of pupils agreed that they know that they are doing well at reading. However, a significant minority indicated that they don't know how well they are doing in Mathematics. It is recommended that all teachers promote pupils' self-assessment and peer-assessment incrementally across the school.

3. THE QUALITY OF SUPPORT FOR PUPILS' WELL-BEING

- The overall quality of support for pupils' well-being is exceptionally high. A warm welcoming, inclusive atmosphere permeates the school. The principal and staff foster a genuine commitment to the holistic development of each pupil. Respectful interactions between teachers and pupils and pupils and their peers were evident.
- At whole-school level, many aspects of provision make an important contribution to the well-being of pupils. These include links with external agencies and participation in the Friends for Life programme.
- In Inspectorate questionnaires, almost all parents agreed that there is a good atmosphere in the school and that their child is safe and well looked after therein. Almost all pupils agreed that their teacher listens to them and pays attention to what they say and that there are clear rules against hurting others.
- There is a good emphasis on physical fitness through a variety of sporting activities including co-curricular and extra-curricular initiatives. The school promotes respectful interactions in all aspects of school life. Senior classes are involved in supporting junior classes in games and many cross-curricular activities. The school participates in a number of community and school based initiatives and it has received many sporting awards, Green Flags and are currently focussing on achieving the Active Flag.

- Teachers develop and maintain strong links with external agencies to support pupils' social and emotional needs. There are commendable initiatives in place to support pupils in making transitions to post-primary schools and support for pre-school children in advance of starting school.

4. THE QUALITY OF LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

- The overall quality of leadership and management is effective. The principal demonstrates significant strengths in many aspects of his work. He fosters and models a strong culture of trust, respect and a positive school climate at all levels, including communication with teachers, the board of management, pupils, parents and the wider community. He has high expectations for pupils and supports staff in continuous improvement. He is successful in creating an inclusive and supportive pupil-centred learning environment. Collaboration and teamwork structures are well established between the mainstream class teachers and SEN teachers.
- The work of the in-school leadership team is of a high standard overall. All members of the team are deeply committed and undertake a wide range of duties diligently. Current assigned curricular development roles are efficiently managed. In the development of in-school leadership roles, the assigned responsibilities should be reviewed so as to accord more appropriately with the school's current identified priorities. In-school leadership should lead this whole school curriculum planning process by promoting teachers' reflective practice in respect of the further development of curricular planning, implementation, monitoring and review. Their assigned roles need to be ratified at board level.
- The board of management manages the smooth day-to-day running of the school effectively. Accounts are certified and an annual report is provided to the school community. The physical resources are highly organised and are used very effectively to enhance pupils' learning experiences both in classrooms and in the outside learning environment.
- The school regularly provides placements for student teachers. Such engagement in initial teacher education programmes is welcome and is included among the standards in the Teaching Council's *Code of Professional Conduct for Teachers* as it can provide valuable professional benefits for teachers, student teachers, pupils and the teacher education institution.
- The management of communications and relations with the school community is a significant strength of the school. The parents' association provides very good support. Parent questionnaires indicated that almost all parents agreed that there is a good atmosphere and that they feel welcome in the school. Almost all parents agreed that they have been informed of the code of behaviour and the anti-bullying policy. However, a significant minority indicated that they have not been informed of the Relationships and Sexuality (RSE) policy of the school. While the school shares the policies with parents as they are reviewed, parental involvement should be further promoted in policy development and procedure.
- The management of pupils is very good in the school. Teachers create a positive and inclusive pupil-centred learning environment. School assemblies are organised regularly to celebrate pupils' achievements and talents. In questionnaire responses, more than half of the pupils agreed that they have a say in how things are done in the school. They should be afforded further opportunities through the establishment of a student council to engage in relevant decision-making processes.

5. THE QUALITY OF SCHOOL SELF-EVALUATION

- The overall quality of SSE is very good. As part of the SSE process, the school places suitable emphasis on the development of oral skills and mental Mathematics. School improvement plans have been developed for literacy and numeracy. The agreed initiatives have resulted in improvements in pupils' learning experiences and in teachers' individual practice. The progress and outcomes of the SSE process is communicated to the school community annually. As a next step, the SSE process should be used to manage change in differentiated planning and team-teaching approaches in mainstream classes.

Appendix

School response to the report

Submitted by the Board of Management

Part A: Observations on the content of the inspection report

- The Board is happy that the school had met all Child Protection procedures during the inspection.
- The Inspectorate affirmed the Board's view that the quality of all children's learning and their ability to apply this knowledge across all subjects is very good. It is pleased that the high results in standardised tests was acknowledged, and that the inspectors noted the emphasis on Visual Arts, S.E.S.E. Music and P.E.
- It is also favourably received by the Board that the quality of teaching in Rathcormack NS is highly effective, and that the provision for pupils with SEN is also of a very high standard.
- The Board is particularly pleased that the support for pupils' well-being is exceptionally high. There is a genuine commitment from all staff to the holistic development of each pupil, there is a warm, respectful, welcoming atmosphere, and this was affirmed by parents and pupils alike. The Board welcomes the comments that the management of communication and relations within the school community is a significant strength, and the Board would like to acknowledge the support of the Parents' Association in this regard.
- The Board acknowledges that management and leadership is effective, that the principal fosters and models a strong culture of trust, respect and a positive school climate. It is also noted that the work of the I.S.M.T. is of a high standard, and that there are well established structures of communication and collaboration between all teachers. It welcomes the affirmation that the Board manages the day-to-day running of the school effectively.

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 Inspectorate has acknowledged that learning outcomes in literacy and numeracy are very good, and that in Literacy the pupils demonstrated very good oral, reading and writing skills. In line with the recommendations, and in the context of the Primary Language Curriculum, the school is to carry out an extensive audit on reading resources in both languages and invest in extra reading materials in Gaeilge.
- The Inspectorate has noted that the quality of assessment is good in the school. To further improve this and in keeping with the recommendations the school will develop a more cohesive approach to AFL and will promote pupils' self-assessment and peer assessment across all classes. The school will also introduce the Drumcondra Spelling Test, as well as extending the Drumcondra Maths and English Tests to include infants.
- The Inspectorate has commented on the highly effective teaching and the very good learning achievements of the pupils. However, to develop further, the school will formalise current practice under the *Continuum of Support*. A number of teachers have undertaken to attend Team-Teaching training and will use this training for differentiated team-teaching in the classroom, as recommended.
- The work of the In-School Management Team has been acknowledged by the Inspectorate. The individual roles and responsibilities of Post-Holders are under review and will be ratified by the Board of Management at the May meeting in accordance with the recommendations. The I.S.M.T. will continue to function effectively, but on a more formalised level leading policy review and school procedure.

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 of quality 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 very good 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;