

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
Management, Leadership and Learning

REPORT

Ainm na scoile / School name	St. Mary's National School
Seoladh na scoile / School address	Partry Claremorris County Mayo
Uimhir rolla / Roll number	20499D

Date of inspection: 21-11-2019



An Roinn Oideachais
agus Scileanna
Department of
Education and Skills

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 inspector 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 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.
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, Wellbeing).
8. Child protection records are maintained in a secure location.

The school met the requirements in relation to each of the checks above.

Whole-School Evaluation – Management, Leadership and Learning

Dates of inspection	19-11-2019 to 21-11-2019
Inspection activities undertaken	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meetings with principal and in-school leadership team • Meeting with representatives 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 and pupil questionnaires • Observation of teaching and learning • Examination of pupils’ work • Interaction with pupils • Feedback to principal, teachers and to board of management representatives

SCHOOL CONTEXT

St. Mary’s National School is a co-educational primary school in Partry, County Mayo. It was established as an amalgamation of Partry National School and Scoil Náisiúnta Coill an tSidheáin in 2017 under the patronage of the Catholic Archbishop of Tuam. There are three mainstream teachers, one of whom is the principal. There is one special education teacher (SET) based in the school who also works in another school nearby. At the time of the evaluation, there were forty-three pupils enrolled and overall attendance was excellent.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

FINDINGS

- Pupils’ learning is good overall, with scope to improve the quality of presentation, including handwriting, in their written work.
- The overall quality of teaching is good; effective teaching methods were not evident in all of the lessons observed, however.
- Support for pupils’ well-being is commendable, with an inclusive and welcoming atmosphere evident throughout the school.
- *Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework* is not implemented currently.
- The overall quality of school leadership and management is satisfactory.
- School self-evaluation (SSE) is good.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- A whole-school approach to the presentation of pupils’ written work should be implemented to ensure greater consistency in presentation and penmanship at each class level.
- More effective teaching methods, including active learning and pupil collaboration, should be used in all classes.
- *Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework* should be implemented.
- Procedures for the constitution of a new board of management are underway and the new board should be constituted in compliance with the *Governance Manual for Primary Schools 2019-2023*.

DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. THE QUALITY OF PUPILS' LEARNING

- The quality of pupils' learning is good overall. Most pupils demonstrated good knowledge of the work covered across a range of curricular areas. Pupils were engaged actively in their learning during the activities in the majority of lessons observed.
- In the lessons observed, the quality of pupils' learning experiences ranged from fair to very good. Pupils' learning experiences were most effective when the pupils were active in their learning and engaged collaboratively in meaningful, purposeful activities, appropriate to their level of ability. In a minority of lessons, learning activities were overly dependent on textbooks and did not develop pupils' knowledge and skills to a sufficient degree.
- Learning environments in the school are print-rich and successfully support pupils in their learning. Useful classroom displays demonstrate the breadth and quality of pupils' work across various curricular areas.
- Pupils' literacy skills are of a high quality. Early literacy skills, including phonemic awareness, word attack and fluency skills are very well developed in the infant and junior classrooms. Pupils in all classes read with confidence and appropriate expression in English. Most pupils' oral language skills in English are good and they are articulate in describing their learning. Poetry recitation in both languages is of a good standard.
- Tá caighdeán maith Gaeilge ó bhéal tríd an scoil, go háirithe sna hardranganna. Léann an chuid is mó de na daltaí le brí agus tuiscint chuí. *There is a good standard of oral Irish throughout the school, particularly in the senior classes. Most pupils read with appropriate meaning and understanding.* The use of graded readers supports the development of pupils' reading skills successfully in both Irish and English.
- Whole-school approaches to writing enable pupils in all classes to write effectively in a range of genres. There is variation in the quality of presentation in pupils' written work. A whole-school approach to the presentation of written work should be implemented to ensure greater consistency in presentation and penmanship at each class level.
- Learning in Mathematics is very good overall. Most pupils are able to discuss concepts articulately using appropriate mathematical language. They are also enabled to connect their learning with other subjects, for example, Social, Environmental and Scientific Education (SESE).
- The majority of pupils have regular opportunities to be physically active. There is a commendable range of equipment available at breaktimes for a variety of exercises and games. In parent questionnaires, a significant minority of parents were unsure or disagreed that their child had a physical education (PE) lesson each week. The school should ensure that the appropriate time allocation is given to PE at each class level and that parents are aware of this.

2. THE QUALITY OF TEACHING

- The quality of teaching is good overall. The practice observed ranged from fair to very good. The very good lessons were characterised by careful teacher preparation and very effective lesson structure. In such lessons, the learning intention was clear, the appropriate vocabulary was taught explicitly and there was a good balance between individual and collaborative activities. These effective strategies should be extended to all lessons.
- Team teaching has been developed successfully in the infant and junior classrooms. This good practice should be extended to all class levels.

- All teachers provided planning documentation, the quality of which ranged from very good to fair. Preparation for teaching in accordance with the *Primary Language Curriculum* (PLC) has begun. It is recommended that specific learning outcomes and key vocabulary to be taught be identified by all teachers in preparation for future lessons.
- The National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) *Continuum of Support* is implemented in the school. Very good quality support plans are provided for each pupil receiving extra support. The learning targets in the support plans are clear. Diagnostic tests identify pupils' individual learning needs to ensure supplementary support is focused on the areas of learning of greatest priority.
- Commendable work has been done on maintaining assessment files for each pupil in the school. There is variation in the quality of assessment practices at class level. Whole-school approaches to assessment across the curriculum, including assessment for learning (AfL), should be agreed and implemented. While pupils' work in copybooks is corrected in all classes, there is a need to provide regular written feedback for pupils, to enhance the learning process.
- While *Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework* was introduced for a period in the recent past, it is not being implemented currently. It is recommended that *Aistear* be reintroduced to enhance the learning process in the junior classes.

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

- Support for pupils' well-being is good. There is an inclusive and welcoming atmosphere throughout the school. The parents' nominees on the board of management spoke positively about the clear behaviour rules in the school and how a buddy system was in place to welcome new junior infants each year.
- In their questionnaire responses, most pupils indicated that they enjoy their lessons and learning.

4. THE QUALITY OF LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

- The overall quality of leadership and management is satisfactory.
- The work of the board of management is good. The board has overseen the maintenance of the school building and grounds to a high standard. The school is very well equipped with teaching resources and Digital Learning Technologies (DLT). The board meets regularly, as required, and demonstrates good commitment to improving the quality of education provided. School accounts are certified annually.
- It was noted during the evaluation that two members of the board of management were closely related to each other. The *Governance Manual for Primary Schools 2015-2019* states that, where practicable, parent nominees should bear no relationship to any other member of the board or staff member. The board of management was of the view that this was unavoidable as, at the election meeting, only one father was willing to be nominated to the board. The school must ensure that such a situation will not be repeated going forward. Procedures for the constitution of a new board of management are underway. The new board should be constituted in compliance with the *Governance Manual for Primary Schools 2019-2023*.
- The principal demonstrates good commitment to the continuing improvement and development of the school. She oversees the effective administration and management of the school and has led the implementation of valuable whole-school approaches in teaching and learning.

- The role of the deputy principal is not clearly defined and does not have an identified set of duties. It is recommended that duties be identified and assigned in accordance with Circular 70/2018 *Leadership and Management in Primary Schools*. It is also recommended that the deputy principal submit an annual report on this work to the board of management.
- In the parents' questionnaires, all parents indicated that there is a good atmosphere in the school and that they feel welcome in the school. A significant minority of parents, however, indicated that they were unsure whether, or disagreed that, the school sought their views regularly on school matters. While the school uses texts, emails and newsletters to communicate with parents and an annual report on the work of the board of management is provided, it is recommended that parental involvement in school policy development be increased. As there is no parents' association currently, it is recommended that a parents' association be established as a further means of enhancing the parents' role in school matters.
- The school reported that it provides placements for student teachers. Such engagement in initial teacher education programmes is welcome and is included among the Teaching Council's Code of Professional Conduct for Teachers, as it can provide valuable benefits for teachers, pupils and the teacher education institute.

5. THE QUALITY OF SCHOOL SELF-EVALUATION (SSE)

- The quality of SSE is good. The school has engaged positively with the process and an SSE report and school improvement plan (SIP) has been formulated. There is evidence that the focus placed on writing genres in English has been effective in improving pupils' outcomes in this area.
- The school has identified reading fluency as its next area of focus. Good work has begun in planning for teaching approaches and setting targets for improvement in this area.

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 St. Mary's NS accepts the content of the WSE report, its findings and recommendations.

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

- A new handwriting and presentation policy has been drafted and is already being implemented.
- Aistear: We have engaged with other primary schools to assist with our planning for the implementation of Aistear in September 2020.
- The current Board of Management (2019 -2023) has been constituted in full compliance with the Governance Manual for Primary Schools (2019 -2023)
- The role and responsibilities of the Deputy Principal have been assigned and ratified by the Board of Management and an annual report will be submitted.
- A Parents' Information Evening has been organised with the National Parents Council for February 11th 2020.

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;