An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Curriculum Evaluation

History

REPORT

Ainm na scoile / School name	Balscadden National School
Seoladh na scoile / School address	Balscadden Ring Commons Co Dublin K32 VK33
Uimhir rolla / Roll number	09492W

Date of inspection: 08-02-2019

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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 History 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	08-02-2019
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

Balscadden National School, under the patronage of the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Dublin, is a co-educational primary school catering for 219 pupils from junior infants to sixth class. School staffing includes eight mainstream class teachers, four full-time special education teachers, and an additional support position which is shared with another school in the locality.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

FINDINGS

- The quality of pupils' learning in History is very good; pupils have a very good knowledge of local history.
- Pupils' learning experiences in History are very good; pupils are enabled to work as historians in a very purposeful and productive manner.
- The overall quality of teachers' practice is very good; all teachers demonstrated a very good ability to respond to individual learning needs and to differentiate teaching and learning activities as required.
- While whole-school assessment practices are good with effective procedures in place to enable pupils to activate and build on their prior knowledge, possibilities for improvement exist in the systematic monitoring of pupils' skill development in History.
- Learning experiences provided for pupils are of a very high quality and a very good emphasis is placed on the inclusion of stimulating displays which support an appreciation of History; a small number of settings feature history-rich exploratory areas with potential to extend this worthwhile practice across the school.
- School planning in History is very good; the whole-school plan clarifies the content and skills to be addressed at each class level using an appropriately spiral and developmental approach.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- A more consistent emphasis should be placed on the assessment of pupils' incremental skill development as they progress through the school.
- The use of stimulating, history-rich investigation tables in each classroom should be promoted as a whole-school practice.

DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. THE QUALITY OF PUPILS' LEARNING

The overall quality of pupils' learning in History is very good. In general, pupils were very enthusiastic about their learning in History and enjoyed the lessons observed during the evaluation. The engaging and relevant learning activities provided stimulate pupils' interest in and motivation to learn History. Pupils have a very good knowledge of the work completed to date. They can recall facts and discuss topics competently. The skills of working as a historian are well developed. Pupils are enabled to identify change and continuity between eras in history and a strong sense of empathy is developed. An understanding of time and chronology is promoted through a whole-school emphasis on the display and use of timelines. Where these timelines were most effective as a learning aid, teachers highlighted them and encouraged pupils to refer to them during lessons. In a few instances, additional timelines covering shorter time periods should be used to facilitate pupils' understanding of the sequence of individual events within the discrete topics studied. Pupils demonstrate a very good ability to use and interpret evidence, to select and organise historical information, and to record their findings using a variety of techniques and media. A very good knowledge of and understanding of local history is developed through the exploration of local sites of historical significance and through pupils' engagement in a wide range of project work on local and national historical topics.

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

Pupils' learning experiences in History are very good. During the lessons observed, pupils demonstrated, in their engagement with their teachers and the inspector, an ability to synopsise, present, and articulate their learning in History. Pupils are enabled to work independently and collaboratively as historians in a very purposeful and productive manner. A formal plenary period should be included following activity-based learning to ensure that pupils have an opportunity to reflect constructively on their own learning and to communicate the key facts and skills acquired to their peers. It is notable that project-based learning is central to the programme for pupils and it is evident that pupils take great pride in this work. Pupils have opportunities to engage in productive local studies as part of their History programme and they undertake a range of field trips as they progress through the school. The school provides frequent opportunities for pupils to incorporate digital technologies into their learning of History, enabling them to use these technologies to find, record, synthesise and communicate relevant information on historical topics.

The overall quality of teachers' practice is very good. All lessons observed were well-structured and appropriately resourced, ensuring high levels of pupils' sustained engagement. In a very small number of observed instances, certain aspects of lessons were overly teacher-oriented; earlier use of active learning methodologies would be of benefit in such instances. All teachers demonstrate a very good knowledge of the content and skills of the curriculum. Teachers use curriculum-appropriate approaches including story, evidence, pictures and photographs. Drama methodologies and techniques from the Visual Arts are particularly effective in enabling pupils to explore, interpret and express their understanding of historical themes.

Teachers responded very well to individual learning needs, differentiating teaching and learning activities as required. Teachers' planning and preparation facilitates effective practice in History

teaching and learning; a range of assessment methods is in place including teacher observation, teacher-designed tasks and tests, portfolios and projects. Effective use is made of formative assessment strategies to enable pupils to activate and build on prior learning in History. A structured whole-school approach to the assessment of pupils' skills is not evident in all settings; a more consistent emphasis should be placed on the assessment of pupils' incremental skill development to plan for pupils' future learning.

A whole-school emphasis on promoting pupils' literacy skills through History is evident. Pupils demonstrate a very good ability to use comprehension strategies when working with evidence. While all teachers carefully identify and teach the key vocabulary for each topic in History, greater support should be provided to pupils in ensuring that they can learn and use this vocabulary on an ongoing basis. Where practice was particularly effective, teachers enriched the oral language context of history lessons by carefully scaffolding small-group discussions and encouraging pupils to articulate their learning using rich topic-specific vocabulary and extended sentences.

Pupils in the focus-group discussion talked very positively about their thought-provoking learning experiences and the engaging methodologies used by teachers during their History lessons. They cited active learning, project work, the use of carefully-selected novels, digital technologies and the projects and trips they engaged in as valuable. The pupils also praised the engaging nature of classroom History displays and noted how they referred to these regularly in support of their own learning. Given pupils' expressed interest in visual displays, a whole-school approach to the use of stimulating History-rich investigation tables in each classroom would be worthwhile.

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

The quality of school planning in History is very good. Teachers have collaboratively developed, and recently reviewed the whole-school plan for History. It clarifies the content to be addressed at each class level and clearly documents a spiral and developmental approach to the teaching of local History. The whole-school plan effectively informs and guides teachers' individual planning and classroom practice. The plan includes a specific, incremental outline of how the skills of a historian are to be developed; as part of the school's ongoing self-evaluation process, the agreed procedures to monitor progression in pupils' skill attainment should be reviewed to ensure that they are implemented consistently throughout the school.

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 Balscadden NS acknowledges this very positive evaluation of the teaching and learning of History in the school. Local History is very important to our local community and we note that that is this reflected in the pupils' knowledge. We note with interest that the hard work and commitment of our staff and pupils has been duly recognised in an official report. We note that the work undertaken by the school community to develop and implement a whole school approach to the teaching of history has been a success. We wish our pupils, teachers, parents and all those to form part of our school community, continued success and curricular excellence.

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

Our staff will work to ensure a more consistent emphasis on the assessment of pupils' incremental skill development. Our staff are currently setting up 'Centres of Investigation' in their classrooms on a school-wide basis.

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 *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;

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