An Roinn Oideachais
Department of Education

Curriculum Evaluation: English

Final Report

Ainm na scoile/School name	Gortjordan National School
Seoladh na scoile/School address	Kilmaine Claremorris County Mayo
Uimhir rolla/Roll number	14534Q
Dáta na cigireachta/ Date of evaluation	05-12-2023
Dáta eisiúna na tuairisce/Date of issue of report	30/01/2024

What is a curriculum evaluation?

Curriculum evaluations report on the quality of teaching and learning in specific subjects of the *Primary School Curriculum (1999)* and the *Primary Language Curriculum (2019).* 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 English under the following headings:

1. Quality of pupils' learning outcomes
2. Supporting pupils' learning outcomes 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.

Actions of the school to safeguard children and prevent and tackle bullying

<table>
<tr><td colspan="2">During the inspection visit, the following checks in relation to the school's child protection and anti-bullying procedures were conducted:</td></tr>
<tr><td>Child Protection</td><td>Anti-bullying</td></tr>
<tr><td>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.</td><td>1. The school has developed an anti-bullying policy that meets the requirements of the Anti-Bullying Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools (2013) and this policy is reviewed annually.
2. The board of management minutes record that the principal provides a report to the board at least once a term on the overall number of bullying cases reported (by means of the bullying recording template provided in the Procedures) since the previous report to the board.
3. The school's anti-bullying policy is published on its website and/or is readily accessible to board of management members, teachers, parents and pupils.</td></tr>
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The school met the requirements in relation to each of the checks above.

Curriculum evaluation

Date of inspection	05-12-2023
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

Gortjordan National School is a rural co-educational primary school located approximately five kilometres from Kilmaine, County Mayo. This school operates under the patronage of the Catholic Archbishop of Tuam. At the time of the evaluation, the school had two mainstream teachers and a special education teacher and there were twelve pupils enrolled from junior infants to sixth class.

Summary of main findings and recommendations:

Findings

- The overall quality of pupils' learning in English was very good.
- High quality learner experiences were provided in the lessons observed and pupils were motivated and engaged positively in their learning activities.
- The overall quality of teaching in English was very good.
- School assessment practices were very effective and pupils' learning in English was tracked and supported as they progressed through the school.
- The overall effectiveness of school planning, including school self-evaluation (SSE), in progressing pupils' learning in English was very good.

Recommendations

- A whole school approach to the incremental development of pupils' comprehension skills should be implemented.

Detailed findings and recommendations

1. The quality of pupils' learning outcomes

The overall quality of pupils' learning in English was very good. Pupils in all classes were motivated to learn, listened attentively and engaged positively in their learning activities.

Most pupils were very articulate in their responses in class and group discussions. It was evident that their skills in the learning outcome of *Engagement, listening and attention* were being developed very effectively. At all class levels, pupils had regular opportunities to participate in oral language activities, such as pair and group work, and oral language games which helped to develop their critical thinking skills. Pupils at all class levels experienced a range of poetry and rhymes.

Throughout the school, pupils demonstrated very good familiarity with the writing genres. High quality samples of pupils' written work were displayed in classrooms, presented in the pupils' copybooks and printed using the school's digital devices. The pupils' functional writing skills, including their understanding of *conventions of print and sentence structure*, were well developed at all class levels. The presentation of pupils' work in their copybooks was of a good standard and it was evident that there were clear expectations of organisation and neatness. A

whole-school approach to the independent use of cursive handwriting would further enhance this.

Pupils' early literacy skills, including pre-writing skills, phonological and phonemic awareness were developed very effectively in the junior classroom. These skills were developed systematically through the school and it was evident that all pupils were making progress in their reading, with most achieving very good outcomes. While pupils could identify and apply certain reading comprehension strategies, it is recommended that a whole school approach to the incremental development of pupils' comprehension skills be implemented.

2. Supporting pupils' learning outcomes through learner experiences and teachers' practice

Pupils' learning experiences in English were very good overall. All pupils experienced pair or small group activities and opportunities for peer collaboration. Pupils experienced print-rich learning environments with word wall displays and topic specific vocabulary available for reference. Classroom displays were supportive of pupils' current learning in English. Classroom libraries were well-stocked and attractively presented to promote independent reading opportunities for the pupils. In all classes there was a commendable emphasis on the use of appropriate key vocabulary for the theme being taught. Word analysis was a notable feature of daily classroom practice. Levelled reading books were used to support differentiated reading abilities in the infant and junior classes. All pupils had opportunities to make oral presentations to their peers. These opportunities should be extended to involve inter-classroom presentations to further develop pupils' presentation skills.

All pupils experienced respectful interactions and a range of meaningful learning activities. Pupils in the focus-group meeting reported that they benefitted from a variety of learning experiences in English. They described the benefits of their literacy games, walking debates, opportunities to use digital technologies for research and project work, and the transfer of their learning in English to other subjects. They reported enjoying opportunities to record their learning using outdoor spaces, view live theatre performances and engage with visiting authors.

The quality of teaching was very good, with elements of practice ranging from good to very good. Teachers were well prepared and had a clear focus for learning in their lessons, based on the learning outcomes of the *Primary Language Curriculum*. In the junior classroom *Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework* was implemented and in all classes pupils had opportunities to engage in playful learning experiences.

Commendable support for pupils with special education needs was provided through an appropriate balance of in-class support and withdrawal approaches. The Department's *Continuum of Support* was implemented successfully. A range of diagnostic assessments was used to support teacher preparation and the development of specific and measurable targets in Student Support Plans. There was a clear practice of recording pupils' progress towards the achievement of these targets and the targets were used as the basis for weekly recorded preparation.

School assessment practices were very effective and pupils' learning in English was tracked and supported as they progressed through the school. Teachers used a range of assessment of learning strategies and recorded pupils' progress using checklists, tasks and tests. High quality teacher questioning was used to assess achievement of the learning outcomes in the lessons observed. Pupils' written work was monitored effectively and there were some examples of formative feedback given by teachers to guide pupils work. This practice should be extended in all classes. The school should also further develop opportunities for pupils to reflect on their own learning through a variety of peer and self-assessment approaches.

3. The effectiveness of school planning, including SSE, in progressing pupils' learning

The overall effectiveness of school planning, including school self-evaluation, in progressing pupils' learning was very good. A comprehensive school plan was in place for English. It outlined the strands, elements and learning outcomes of the *Primary Language Curriculum*. It set out the school's approach to the teaching of writing incorporating a two-year plan for the teaching of the writing genres. The school should further develop the section on comprehension strategies to give teachers clearer guidance on the methodologies and approaches to be used in developing pupils' comprehension skills.

The school had used the SSE process successfully to further develop pupils' learning in English. Through this process leadership had identified specific areas for improvement. It was evident that the school improvement plan had a positive impact on teaching, learning and assessment in English. There was scope to involve parents more meaningfully in the SSE process.

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 Gortjordan National School welcomes this report and its 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

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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;