An Roinn Oideachais
Department of Education

Curriculum Evaluation: English

Report

REPORT

Ainm na scoile/School name	S N Mhuire
Seoladh na scoile/School address	Cloondara Co. Longford
Uimhir rolla/Roll number	18733T
Dáta na cigireachta/ Date of evaluation	18/01/2024
Dáta eisiúna na tuairisce/Date of issue of report	15/05/2024

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 through learning experiences and teachers' practice
3. The effectiveness of school planning, including SSE, in progressing pupils' learning

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.

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.

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) or Bí Cineálta (2024) and this policy is reviewed annually.
2. The school's current 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	17/01/2024 -18/01/2024
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

Scoil Mhuire National School is a rural, co-educational primary school which is located in the village of Cloondara, Co. Longford. The school operates under the patronage of the Catholic Bishop of Ardagh and Clonmacnoise. The teaching staff consists of four mainstream class teachers and two special education teachers (SETs), one of whom is shared with a local school. An extra teacher serves the school on a one-day-per-week basis to provide cover for principal release days. At the time of the evaluation, there were ninety-two pupils enrolled in the school.

Summary of main findings and recommendations:

Findings

- The quality of pupils' learning in English was very good.
- Pupils were provided with very good learner experiences and their responses and efforts were valued and affirmed.
- The overall quality of teaching was highly commendable and teachers demonstrated high quality preparation for lessons with very effective use of resources to stimulate pupil response and engagement.
- The quality of school planning and of school self-evaluation (SSE) was very good.

Recommendations

- To further support pupils' learning experiences and their digital literacy skills in English, teachers should agree a whole-school approach to the use of information and communication technology (ICT) across the school.
- School leadership should review the current provision for pupils with special education needs to ensure a better balance between withdrawal approaches and small group in-class support.

Detailed findings and recommendations

1. The quality of pupils' learning outcomes

The quality of pupils' learning in English was very good. Pupils enjoyed their learning and were motivated to learn. Appropriate attention was given by teachers to developing pupils' oral language skills. The quality of learner outcomes across the elements of communicating and understanding was highly commendable. Pupils were articulate, confident speakers and teachers supported them in developing a wide vocabulary. Teachers' use of *Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework* effectively supported the development of pupils' early language skills in the infant classes. In all classes, rhyme and poetry enhanced the development of oral language skills and pupils were enabled to recite, explore and analyse a wide range of poetry. They were knowledgeable about the features and types of poetry and recitation was promoted in all classes.

Pupils listened to, read and responded meaningfully to a variety of texts. They had access to a range of printed materials, including graded readers, novels and library books. Most pupils read with fluency and appropriate expression across all class settings. While novels were used in senior classes, the whole-school plan should outline a more systematic approach to their use. Pupils in all classes were encouraged to read independently for pleasure.

Teachers had developed a whole-school two-year plan to teach the writing genres and the majority of pupils could discuss the characteristics and functions of the different genres. There was considerable variance in the quality of pupils' presentation of written work and penmanship, as pupils progressed through the school. To improve this, teachers should systematically develop a consistent approach to the development of handwriting skills so that pupils have a clear understanding of how to improve their penmanship and presentation of written work.

During the focus group discussion, all pupils agreed that English was interesting and fun. They said that they enjoyed learning English when working collaboratively with others especially when participating in walking debates and drama. Pupils said they would like further opportunities to use digital technologies to publish their written works in English.

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

The quality of pupils' learning experiences was very good. Classroom environments were supportive of pupils' learning with word walls and language-rich displays throughout the school. During almost all lessons observed there was a good balance between teacher-led input and collaborative learning experiences. Pupils' engaged in meaningful talk and discussion and, in most classes, pupils had opportunities to engage in playful learning experiences. Classroom libraries were very well organised and stocked with a wide range of books. Local experts had visited the school and had provided curriculum-enriching experiences in storytelling and oral reports. To further enhance the pupils' learning experiences, technology should be used as a tool for literacy development. As digital literacy and responsibility are important aspects of learning, it is advised that the school include digital literacy opportunities in their planned learning activities for English to further benefit pupils' learning.

The quality of teaching was very good. Teachers were good communicators and promoted an appreciation of literacy. They demonstrated very effective classroom management skills and good levels of preparation. Teachers shared learning intentions and success criteria with pupils and communicated new learning concepts clearly. Where practice was most effective, teachers skilfully used questioning to scaffold high-quality discussion with pupils. All teachers should structure lessons to further develop pupils' critical thinking skills including the justification and explanation of their ideas.

Assessment practices were of a very high quality. Teachers maintained assessment information of pupils, which included detailed anecdotal notes, standardised test results, class checklists and pupils' work samples. The meaningful use of pupil self-assessment in promoting pupil reflection and development of responsibility in learning was at an early stage of development and should now be explored by teachers. Teachers' monitoring of pupils' copybook work varied in quality as did their provision of constructive feedback to support pupils in improving their writing skills. All teachers should provide developmental feedback so that pupils have a clear understanding of how to improve their work to attain the next level in their learning.

The quality of support for pupils with special educational needs (SEN) was very good. Assessment data from a range of standardised and diagnostic testing informed the development of school support plans. In most support plans, targets were specific and measurable to support recording of pupil achievement. School leadership should review the current provision for pupils with special educational needs to ensure a better balance between withdrawal approaches and small group in-class support.

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

The quality of school planning, including school self-evaluation (SSE), was very good. Leaders and teachers had recently reviewed and developed the whole-school plan for English. The English policy provided useful guidance for teachers on aspects of the English curriculum. There was scope for the policy to guide teachers more effectively in further areas of the Primary Language Curriculum (PLC) such as critical literacy and digital literacy.

Teachers had identified wellbeing as the next area of focus for development through the SSE process. This process had recently included the voice of parents and pupils, which demonstrated a highly commendable partnership approach. School leaders and teachers had successfully fostered a culture in which collaboration, learning and creativity flourished.

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	Examples of descriptive terms
Excellent	**Provision that is excellent** is exemplary in meeting the needs of learners. This provision provides an example for other schools and settings of exceptionally high standards of provision.	Excellent; exemplary; outstanding; exceptionally high standard; with very significant strengths
Very good	**Provision that is very good** is very effective in meeting the needs of learners and is of a very high standard. There is potential to build on existing strengths to achieve an excellent standard.	Very good; of a very high quality; very effective practice; highly commendable; very successful
Good	**Provision that is good** is effective in meeting the needs of learners. There is need to build on existing strengths in order to address the aspects to be developed and achieve a very good standard.	Good; of good quality; effective practice; competent; useful; commendable; good standard; strengths outweigh the shortcomings; appropriate provision although some possibilities for improvement exist
Requires improvement to achieve a good standard	**Provision that requires improvement to achieve a good standard** is not sufficiently effective in meeting the needs of learners. There is need to address certain deficiencies without delay in order to ensure that provision is good or better.	Fair; less than effective; less than sufficient; evident weaknesses that are impacting on learning; experiencing difficulty; shortcomings outweigh strengths; must improve in specified areas; action required to improve
Requires significant improvement to achieve a good standard	**Provision that requires significant improvement to achieve a good standard** is not meeting the needs of learners. There is immediate need for significant action to address the areas of concern.	Weak; poor; ineffective; insufficient; unacceptable; experiencing significant difficulties; serious deficiencies in the areas evaluated; requiring significant change, development and improvement to be effective

Appendix

SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

Submitted by the Board of Management

Area 1 Observations on the content of the inspection report

The Board of Management of Scoil Mhuire, Clondra National School welcomes the findings of the recent curriculum evaluation of English. Our staff endeavour to provide positive and engaging learning environments and we are happy this was reflected in this evaluation. We are delighted that the overall quality of teaching was highly commendable and that it was noted that resources were used effectively to stimulate pupil response and engagement. An acknowledgment of the good balance between teacher-led input and collaborative learning experiences is appreciated. We are proud to be an inclusive school, supporting all pupils to achieve their full potential. Therefore, we are pleased that the report acknowledges the support for pupils with special educational needs was very good. The Board of management welcomes the affirmation of the many strengths of Scoil Mhuire Clondra.

Area 2 Follow-up actions planned or undertaken since the completion of the inspection activity to implement the findings and recommendations of the inspection.

- In line with the Digital Strategy Framework the school will identify specific learning targets in digital literacy. This will allow us to devise a whole school strategy to develop and improve the pupils' learning experiences using information and communications technology (ICT) across the school. We have purchased Chrome books and a charging trolley since the evaluation to facilitate this.
- Teachers will explore how provision of in-class support can be accommodated on a whole school basis to progress teaching and learning in literacy. This will further enhance the existing good practices which are already in place
- To improve the variance in the quality of pupils' presentation of written work and penmanship as they progress through the school, the teachers will systematically develop a consistent approach to the development of handwriting skills. This will be outlined in our English school plan with very clear expectations of how work should be presented.
- We will ensure that in all support plan targets are specific and measurable to support recording of pupil achievement. We have already started the process of reviewing all plans and amending targets.