An Roinn Oideachais
Department of Education

# Curriculum Evaluation: SPHE
# Report

**REPORT**

| | |
|---|---|
| Ainm na scoile/School name | Scoil Mhuire National School |
| Seoladh na scoile/School address | Moylagh<br>Oldcastle<br>County Meath |
| Uimhir rolla/Roll number | 11978O |
| Dáta na cigireachta/<br>Date of evaluation | 23-05-2023 |
| Dáta eisiúna na tuairisce/Date of issue of report | 09/10/2023 |

# 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 Social, Personal and Health Education 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; a response was not received from the board.

# 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>The name of the DLP and the Child Safeguarding Statement were prominently displayed near the main entrance to the school.<br>The Child Safeguarding Statement had been ratified by the board and included an annual review and a risk assessment.<br>All teachers visited reported that they had read the Child Safeguarding Statement and that they were aware of their responsibilities as mandated persons.</td><td>The school had developed an anti-bullying policy that met the requirements of the Anti-Bullying Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools (2013) and this policy was reviewed annually.<br>The board of management minutes record that the principal provided 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.<br>The school's anti-bullying policy was published on its website and was readily accessible to board of management members, teachers, parents and pupils.</td></tr>
</table>

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

# Curriculum evaluation

| | |
|---|---|
| **Date of inspection** | 23-05-2023 |
| **Inspection activities undertaken**<br><br>Discussion with principal and teachers<br>Review of relevant documents<br>Pupil focus-group interview | Observation of teaching and learning<br>Examination of pupils' work<br>Interaction with pupils<br>Feedback to principal and teachers |

## School context

Scoil Mhuire is a rural, co-educational national school under the patronage of the Roman Catholic Bishop of Meath. At the time of the evaluation there were ninety-five pupils enrolled from junior infants to sixth class. Staffing comprised four mainstream teachers and two special education teachers, one of whom was shared with another local school.

## Summary of main findings and recommendations:

### Findings

- The overall quality of learning in Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) was good with pupils ably articulating their thoughts and opinions on various strands of the SPHE curriculum.
- A positive, supportive atmosphere permeated the school, focused on pupil wellbeing and respectful engagement.
- Learner experiences were of a good quality in which pupils had opportunities to collaborate with their peers.
- The overall quality of teaching was good with teachers adopting an integrated approach to teaching SPHE; effectively connecting pupils' learning across the curriculum.
- School planning, including school self-evaluation (SSE) was of a very good quality; the process of gathering information from parents, pupils and staff to inform improvement targets relating to wellbeing was underway.

### Recommendations

- Teachers should enable pupils to further extend and justify their thinking through the effective use of higher-order questioning and the provision of more sufficiently challenging tasks and activities.
- Teachers should enable pupils to maintain a record of their learning to facilitate pupils' reflection and further support their self-assessment of the knowledge and skills acquired during SPHE lessons.

# Detailed findings and recommendations

## 1.The quality of pupils' learning

The overall quality of learning in SPHE was good. Pupils generally demonstrated good levels of engagement during lessons. Most pupils contributed confidently to class discussions and listened respectfully to the contributions of their peers. Overall, pupils displayed a strong sense of belonging to the school community.

Pupils' learning was evident in their responses to topics from across the various strands of the SPHE curriculum. Learners capably recalled the key messages of the Stay Safe programme. They ably identified situations in which personal safety was threatened and described appropriate strategies for addressing such situations. Pupils demonstrated good knowledge in relation to identifying and appropriately expressing a broad range of emotions. They discussed qualities associated with friendships and described potential solutions to addressing conflict within their relationships, which was further supported through the implementation of restorative practices. Pupils demonstrated good awareness in terms of recognising and effectively addressing bullying behaviour. They clearly articulated their sense of individual and collective responsibility for caring for the environment and were very appreciative of the learning opportunities afforded by the environs of the school.

Pupils were involved in a broad range of activities to promote a positive school environment and develop their sense of wellbeing. Such activities included the development of a school garden, healthy eating initiatives, Grandparents' Day, participation in the local Pride of Place, regular assemblies during which pupils had opportunities to present their learning and various celebratory weeks focused on wellbeing. The school reported that it had developed good relations with the surrounding post-primary schools and the pre-school, facilitating pupils' attendance at open days to support transitions as they progressed in their education.

During the focus-group meeting, pupils reported that they enjoyed aspects of their learning in SPHE, in particular opportunities to be active in their learning. They noted the effectiveness of exploring various scenarios, through both discussion and role-play, enabling them to implement the skills acquired in their learning and expressed a desire for more such learning experiences, focused on challenging and extending their thinking. They specifically noted the learning gleaned from engagement with guest speakers and the various field trips they had experienced. They spoke positively of the opportunities for pupil leadership in the school through the assignment of various roles and their involvement in the Green Schools Programme. They noted the benefits of having a pupil council and expressed an interest in re-establishing the council.

## 2. Supporting pupils' learning: Learner experiences and teachers' practice

Learning experiences were of a good quality. Teachers provided calm and inspiring classroom environments, conducive to learning. Attractive displays of pupils' learning and material promoting and celebrating wellbeing were evident throughout the school.
Pupils had opportunities to engage in whole-class discussions and work both independently and collaboratively on assigned tasks. Where practice was very good, teachers provided pupils with opportunities to reflect on their thinking as they engaged in appropriately challenging learning experiences. However, this practice was not a feature of most lessons

observed. Teachers should enable pupils to further extend and justify their thinking through the effective use of higher-order questioning and the provision of sufficiently challenging tasks. Such provision would further optimise pupils' engagement and enable them to progress in their learning at a level commensurate with their abilities.

Overall, the quality of teaching observed was good. Teachers were affirming of pupils' contributions. Lessons were well structured and teachers assessed pupils' prior knowledge before sharing the intended learning outcomes with the pupils. They adopted an integrated approach to teaching SPHE; effectively connecting pupils' learning across the curriculum and beyond to the everyday context of the pupils. Teachers modelled good use of subject-specific language during lessons and used a wide range of methodologies including story, circle time, debate and collaborative learning tasks to enhance pupils' learning experiences. Teachers made good use of their observations and assigned tasks and activities to monitor and assess pupils' learning in SPHE. Teachers should further extend these assessment strategies to include pupils' self-assessment practices by enabling pupils to maintain a record of their learning in SPHE. Such a record could serve to consolidate pupils' knowledge and skills and enable them to constructively reflect on their progress over time.

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

The quality of planning, including SSE, was very good. The SPHE and relationships and sexuality education policies provided details to effectively guide teaching and learning at a whole-school level and ensured the provision of a broad and balanced programme of learning. A critical incident policy had been devised by the staff and the board of management.

The topic of wellbeing provided a focus for the current SSE cycle. Informed by the statements of effective practice from the Wellbeing Framework, the principal and teachers had reflected on practice across a number of key areas. They had already sought the opinions of pupils and were in the process of gathering the perspectives of parents and teachers to inform the identification of targets and associated actions relevant to promoting pupils' wellbeing. Commendably, the principal and teachers had adopted a collaborative and reflective approach to school improvement and demonstrated a commitment to continued engagement with targeted professional learning to improve practice and enhance provision for all pupils.

**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; |