An Roinn Oideachais
Department of Education

Curriculum Evaluation: Language and Communication Report

REPORT

Ainm na scoile/School name	St Anthonys Special School
Seoladh na scoile/School address	Humbert Way Castlebar Co. Mayo
Uimhir rolla/Roll number	19248R
Dáta na cigireachta/ Date of evaluation	24-05-2023
Dáta eisiúna na tuairisce/Date of issue of report	18/09/2023

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 inspectors evaluated learning and teaching in Language and Communication 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 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	24-05-2023
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

St. Anthony's is a co-educational Special School located in Castlebar, County Mayo. The school operates under the patronage of Western Care Association. St. Anthony's provides education for pupils, aged four to eighteen years, with a mild general learning disability. Pupils may have additional needs such as physical disabilities or sensory impairments. At the time of the evaluation, the school had an administrative principal, nine class teachers and four part-time specialist teachers, with fifty-nine pupils enrolled.

Summary of main findings and recommendations:

Findings

- Overall, the quality of pupils' learning was very good; pupils very good knowledge of rhymes, poetry and songs in both English and Irish was notable.
- The overall quality of learner experiences was of a very high standard; pupils have been provided with very valuable opportunities to participate in a wide range of co-curricular activities.
- Teaching was of a very high standard; teachers communicated very high expectations of pupils' learning.
- Teachers used a very good range of assessment tools to monitor pupil progress on an ongoing basis.
- The quality of school planning, including school-self evaluation (SSE) was highly effective.
- School management created an inclusive and very supportive learning environment.

Recommendations

- Teachers should review and stream-line the current support plans for individualised pupils, to ensure that records of pupils' learning and progress are clear, useful, and easy to interpret and share.

Detailed findings and recommendations

1. The quality of pupils' learning

Overall, the quality of pupils' learning was very good. During the evaluation pupils were observed enjoying their learning and were motivated and enthusiastic to learn.

Pupils' early literacy skills were very well developed and they demonstrated a very good understanding of the conventions of print. Pupils' reading ability was very appropriately aligned with their individual level of ability. Pupils had valuable opportunities to read from a range of

reading schemes, as well as big books, social stories, real books and online books. The emphasis on functional literacy and the use of the Language Experience Approach (LEA) to support the development of pupils' reading skills was highly effective practice.

Pupils' writing skills were developed systematically. Very high quality samples of pupils' handwriting, digital artefacts and functional writing were observed in copybooks, portfolios and through displays. It was highly commendable that pupils had opportunities to link their writing to real-life situations such as letter writing.

A very worthwhile emphasis was placed on the development of oral language skills, including speaking, listening and turn-taking. Pupils were enabled to communicate using a wide range of approaches and modes of communication. The use of assistive technology was highly commendable. It was praiseworthy that there was a systematic whole-school approach to the development of Irish Sign Language (ISL). Pupils were observed using the ISL signs appropriately. Pupils very good knowledge of rhymes, poetry and songs in both English and Irish was notable.

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

The overall quality of learner experiences was of a very high standard. School management created an inclusive and very supportive learning environment. The corridor displays were outstanding. Classroom environments were print-rich and pupils' achievements were celebrated through photographs and very high quality displays of their work. Many positive and beneficial interactions among pupils and staff were observed. The pupils in the focus group described a variety of valuable learning experiences, including opportunities for reading, using information and communications technology (ICT), Home Economics, Woodwork and being members of the Green School's Committee. The teachers should now consider extending pupil participation through the establishment of a Student's Council.

Pupils engaged very effectively in meaningful learning activities during the lessons observed. A multi-sensory approach was provided by teachers and pupil choice was evident. Pupils worked individually, in pairs and in groups. Pupils have been provided with very valuable opportunities to participate in a wide range of co-curricular learning experiences such as, *BLAST: Arts in Education*, Creative Schools and they are part of a Creative Cluster with other schools.

Pupils had opportunities to generalise their language and communication skills in real-life contexts through a range of carefully constructed community-based learning experiences. Pupils visited local shops, the beach, the garden centre, swimming and bowling. Very successful links were made with the local library.

Teaching was of a very high standard. It was evident during the evaluation, that the staff were very capable to deal with the diverse range of learning needs and worked collaboratively. The teachers were highly committed to upskilling and continuing professional development (CPD). Teachers communicated very high expectations of pupils' learning. The teachers adopted a thematic approach to teaching content and skills and differentiated for individual needs exceptionally well. Very effective teaching methodologies were observed. This included the use of concrete materials, visual supports, active learning, games, quizzes and the use of ICT. It was highly commendable that playful approaches were employed including, *Aistear*: *the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework.*

Overall, teachers maintained extensive records of pupils' learning and progress. All teachers prepared individual support plans for pupils. This process was highly collaborative with parents; parental inputs were sought into the individual support plans. Management and teachers had identified the need to review and stream-line the current support plans for individualised pupils. This is a necessary action to ensure that records of pupils' learning and progress are clear, useful, and easy to interpret and share.

Teachers used a very good range of assessment tools to monitor pupil progress on an ongoing basis. This included teacher observation, photographic evidence, checklists, teacher designed tasks and tests, rubrics, pupil profiles, formal assessments, online quizzes and assessment for learning (AfL) strategies. It was highly commendable that pupils self-assessed their learning at the end of the lessons observed.

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

The quality of school planning, including SSE, was highly effective. The frequently reviewed school plan in Language and Communication provided very valuable guidance to teachers. The SSE process was firmly embedded in the school and areas for development in Language and Communication had been identified and progressed. A whole-school, targeted approach to the development of ISL was clearly evident in all settings. Teachers are highly commended for their classroom practice in relation to implementing many of the SSE language and communication approaches such as allowing pupils adequate time to process and respond in their own way. It was praiseworthy that teachers, pupils and parents were involved in the school improvement 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 are delighted with the outstanding Curriculum Evaluation Inspection Report. The recognition of the very high standard of pupil learning experiences is testament to the dedication and commitment of our entire staff and confirms that the school provides an inclusive and holistic learning experience for every student.

The Board are particularly pleased that the report highlights the very high standard of teaching observed which reflects teachers' unwavering dedication and their consistently high expectations of pupils' learning as well as the highly effective and collaborative efforts between staff and parents for the benefit of all pupils.

The Board also commend the work of school management and teachers for the high quality of school planning noted by the inspectors. The Board are proud that the outstanding corridor displays and positive pupil input have been acknowledged as they contribute to fostering a sense of pride and engagement among our pupils.

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

The Board acknowledges the inspectors' confirmation in the report that work has already commenced on implementing the one recommendation outlined in this evaluation. The teaching staff has already undertaken a review of the current support plans for Pupil Profiles and Individual Education Plans (IEPs) and is aligning existing school templates with the NEPS School Support Plan template. Furthermore, staff are exploring electronic recording methods to ensure clear and useful records of students' learning and progress, which will facilitate easier sharing and continuity among teachers.

This approach will establish a consistent framework for individual support planning across all the curricular areas, benefiting every student throughout their time at the school. The Board also notes the inspectors' recognition that this recommendation had already been identified by teachers during the School Self-Evaluation(SSE) review process, and work had begun prior to the evaluation.

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;