An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Curriculum Evaluation

English

REPORT

Ainm na scoile / School name	St Brendan's National School
Seoladh na scoile / School address	The Square Eyrecourt Ballinasloe
Uimhir rolla / Roll number	15997P

Date of Evaluation: 20-10-2016

Date of issue of report: 07-02-2017

AN ROINN OIDEACHAIS AGUS SCILEANNA | DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND SKILLS

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 English under the following headings:

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

Curriculum Evaluation

INSPECTION ACTIVITIES DURING THIS INSPECTION

Date of inspection	20-10-2016
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 Brendan's National School is a co-educational school catering for pupils from junior infants to sixth class. It is situated in the village of Eyrecourt and at the time of the evaluation there were sixty-two pupils enrolled. The teaching staff consists of three mainstream class teachers and one full-time support teacher.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

FINDINGS

- The overall quality of pupils' learning in English is good.
- The quality of pupils' oral language skills varied from satisfactory to very good and the standard of writing achieved by some senior pupils in the school newspaper is excellent.
- Pupils' learning is supported by good quality learning experiences and effective teachers' practice.
- The current deployment of a special educational needs (SEN) teacher to the mainstream setting to teach English does not make best use of this resource to meet the needs of pupils and should be reviewed in line with best practice and with Circular Sp Ed 02/05.
- School planning and school self-evaluation (SSE) are used effectively to progress pupils' learning in English.
- The overall quality of assessment is satisfactory. There is considerable variety in practice and whole-school approaches to assessment are not sufficiently comprehensive.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Teachers should plan for and implement oral language lessons that explicitly develop pupils' communication skills.
- The principal should deploy the SEN teacher in a manner that best caters for the individual needs of the pupils, and in line with Circular Sp Ed 02/05.
- Teachers should develop a broader range of assessment strategies and explicitly model assessment for learning approaches (AfL) to support pupils as they engage in assessment of their own work.

DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. THE QUALITY OF PUPILS' LEARNING IN ENGLISH

The quality of pupils' learning in English is good. Pupils' enjoyment of learning is evident and they demonstrate their motivation to learn in their positive approach to classwork. Their oral language skills range from satisfactory to very good. In some instances, pupils were very articulate and communicated their ideas very clearly. However, many pupils' confidence in speaking in front of others was low. Consequently, teachers should plan for and implement oral language lessons that explicitly develop pupils' communication skills.

Pupils' achievement in standardised tests in literacy is in line with realistic expectations and is consistently maintained year-on-year. Most pupils read with fluency and apply comprehension strategies very effectively to enhance their understanding of reading material.

The overall quality of writing is good, and all pupils engage with the writing process very effectively. In the senior classes, most pupils work collaboratively to produce a very high quality, bi-monthly newspaper for distribution in the community. Writing samples in this instance are of a very high standard and the use of information and communications technology (ICT) is highly commendable. The most successful components of the work undertaken in the production of the newspaper, including purposeful writing, collaboration and writing for an audience, should be applied across the school to further develop all pupils' standard of writing.

Pupils make meaningful connections between learning in English and other areas of the curriculum, most notably in project work in Social, Environmental and Scientific Education.

2. SUPPORTING PUPILS' LEARNING IN ENGLISH: LEARNING EXPERIENCES AND TEACHERS' PRACTICE

The learning experiences provided to support pupils' learning are commendable. Pupils demonstrated high levels of interest and participation in the lessons observed. Pupil learning is celebrated through various displays of pupil work throughout the school building. Pupils in some settings develop independent learning skills through frequent engagement with dictionaries and online research. Commendably, frequent visits to the local library and meetings with local and national authors are arranged.

In most lessons observed, teachers used predominantly whole-class teaching methodologies which led to high-quality discussion for learning. In addition, there was evidence of the effective use of drama, ICT and collaborative learning in some settings. These approaches should be used more frequently to enhance pupils' learning experiences.

The overall quality of teachers' practice is good, although this ranged from satisfactory to very good. In some settings, planning was based on specific learner outcomes appropriate to the multi-grade setting, but, in others, the plans were generic for all pupils. While there was very little evidence of written planning for individual pupil needs, some teachers addressed pupils' difficulties informally during the lessons observed. Consequently, to cater effectively for all abilities, teachers should plan for the range of needs in each setting.

Currently, the SEN teacher withdraws the full second class for literacy. This practice does not make best use of resources as it does not sufficiently support differentiated teaching and learning for all pupils in the school. The principal should ensure that the SEN teacher is deployed in a manner that caters for the needs of all pupils, in line with Circular Sp Ed 02/05.

The use of assessment to support learning is satisfactory. Standardised tests are administered annually and in some cases the results are usefully examined in conjunction with pupil achievement in ability tests. While each teacher records pupil progress in class assessments, the quality of assessment in one setting was unsatisfactory as it was pitched inappropriately and did not inform future teaching and learning. Self-assessment strategies have commenced in some settings, but there was little evidence of formative feedback in copybooks. Teachers should develop a broader range of assessment strategies, and explicitly model AfL approaches to support pupils as they engage in assessment of their own work.

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

School planning and SSE are used effectively to progress pupils' learning in English. The whole-school plan for English was redrafted in 2014 as part of the SSE process and provides comprehensive instructional guidance. The contents of the plan are reflected in teachers' notes, and were evident in all lessons observed.

As part of the school's improvement plan, comprehension strategies and writing genres are prioritised for development and are taught at each class level throughout the year. Progress on these approaches is regularly discussed and monitored by the teaching staff. In order to formalise the approaches and standards expected at each class level, it is advised that a clear plan to guide instruction in writing genres be further developed and implemented by all teachers.

Most of the learning targets in the current school improvement plan for literacy have been achieved and the teachers are conscious of the need to review and reset targets for learning in the future. To this end, the current investigation of an alternative spelling programme to improve pupils' spelling standard is commendable.

Appendix

SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

Submitted by the Board of Management

Part A Observations on the content of the inspection report

We accept the findings of the report and are pleased that the overall quality of pupils' learning in English is found to be good. This reflects our commitment to good quality learning experiences and effective teacher practices.
Our engagement with the SSE process culminating in our comprehensive revised English plan has ensured whole school progression in the targeted areas of comprehension strategies and writing genres. We were encouraged by the recognition of the children's motivation and positive attitude towards literacy.
As a staff we actively endeavour to foster a love of reading in our pupils and provide them with opportunities to express themselves effectively through their writing.

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

As a school, we take the report's recommendations on board.
Oral Language had been identified as part of our SSE as an area to be addressed.
Work has already begun on this with the full implementation of the Aistear programme.
We look forward to training in the new Language Curriculum to support us further in the delivery of Oral Language lessons.
We continuously monitor pupil progress and strive to support each child according to their specific needs. We take note of Circular Sp Ed 02/05 and will adapt accordingly.
We have also been developing assessment strategies as part of our SSE. While some strategies are already in place, we recognise the need for a broader range of assessment strategies.
We have sought in-school support from PDST later in this school year.

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 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. Overall, learners have access to a basic level of provision. 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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