An Roinn Oideachais agus Óige
Department of Education and Youth

Curriculum Evaluation: Science
REPORT

Ainm na scoile/School name	St Catherine's West National School
Seoladh na scoile/School address	Donore Avenue South Circular Road Dublin 8
Uimhir rolla/Roll number	15625B
Dáta na cigireachta/ Date of evaluation	23/04/2026
Dáta eisiúna na tuairisce/Date of issue of report	03/06/2026

What is a curriculum evaluation?

Curriculum evaluations currently report on the quality of teaching and learning in specific subjects and curriculum areas of the Primary School Curriculum (1999), and the redeveloped Primary Curriculum (2025). They affirm good practice and make recommendations, where appropriate, to aid the further development of the subject or curriculum area in the school.

How to read this report

During this inspection, the inspector evaluated learning and teaching in Science 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

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.

Included in this curriculum evaluation report is a student-friendly page that provides information for the children/young people in your school about the inspection that occurred recently. It outlines for them some of the main findings and recommendations. 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>Bí Cineálta</td></tr>
<tr><td>1. The name of the DLP and the Child Safeguarding Statement (CSS) are prominently displayed near the main door of the school / in the reception area. Following the school's adoption of the updated procedures 2025, it is also required to display a student-friendly version incorporating the name of the DLP beside the CSS.
2. The school's child safeguarding statement has been ratified by the board and includes an annual review and a risk assessment.
3. All teachers visited were aware of who to go to if they had a child protection concern.</td><td>1. The school has developed an anti-bullying policy using Appendix A of Bí Cineálta, it is reviewed annually (or earlier if required) and includes a student/pupil friendly version that is displayed where students/pupils and the school community can see it.
2. The school's anti-bullying policy is published on its website and/or is readily accessible to board of management members, staff, parents and students/pupils.
3. The board of management minutes record that the principal provides an update to the board at each ordinary board meeting that meets the requirements of Bí Cineálta.</td></tr>
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The school met the requirements in relation to each of the checks above.

Curriculum evaluation

Date of inspection	21/04/2026 – 23/04/2026
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 Catherine's West National School is an urban co-educational primary school that caters for pupils from junior infants to sixth class. It operates under the patronage of the Church of Ireland Archbishop of Dublin. At the time of the evaluation, there were 193 pupils enrolled in the school. The teaching staff comprised an administrative principal, eight mainstream teachers, three full-time special education teachers and a part-time special education teacher, based in another school.

Summary of main findings and recommendations:

Findings

- The overall quality of pupils' learning in Science was good, with some very good learning outcomes also observed. Pupils were focused and engaged learners and were able to recall and communicate key aspects of their learning,
- The overall quality of pupils' learning experiences in Science was very good. Pupils' learning was enriched by a broad range of co-curricular activities.
- The overall quality of teaching in Science was good, with some very effective practice also observed.
- Teachers used an appropriate range of strategies to monitor pupils' learning in Science.
- The quality of school planning, including school self-evaluation (SSE), in progressing pupils' learning in Science was good. The school plan for Science provided helpful guidance for teachers.

Recommendations

- To better provide for continuity and progression in the pupils' acquisition and understanding of knowledge and concepts in science, teachers should align their preparation more closely with the school plan for Science.
- To further develop pupils' investigative skills, teachers should extend their provision for scaffolded discovery learning and enable pupils to investigate their own questions, using the concept of a fair test, regularly during science lessons.

Detailed findings and recommendations

1. The quality of pupils' learning outcomes

The overall quality of pupils' learning in Science was good, with some very good learning outcomes also observed. Pupils were focused and engaged learners who listened actively and engaged purposefully in their tasks. They were able to recall and communicate key aspects of their learning, and most used subject-specific vocabulary confidently. While pupils could describe activities and investigations in which they had participated, overall, they were less secure in explaining the scientific concepts underpinning these investigations. Some pupils in

senior classes demonstrated clear understanding of the concept of a fair test, and were able to identify and control for variables. Overall, there was scope for pupils to have greater involvement in proposing hypotheses and in the design of investigations, underpinned by the scientific method.

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

The overall quality of pupils' learning experiences in Science was very good. Teachers had established positive and affirming relationships with their pupils, creating supportive learning environments. Pupils' learning in Science was enriched by a broad range of co-curricular activities, including Science Blast, Curious Minds and Forest Schools. Teachers also complemented classroom learning with field trips to places of interest, such as farms and the local canal. The school had fostered valuable links with external agencies, including Heritage Ireland, to promote pupils' understanding and care of, and for, the local environment. In some instances, teachers were encouraged to link these activities and experiences more explicitly to specific curriculum learning outcomes.

In the junior classes, pupils' understanding of life cycles within the strand Living Things was strengthened through observing chicks hatch and the metamorphosis of caterpillars to butterflies. Engagement by middle and senior pupils in the Green Schools programme and Forest Schools contributed meaningfully to their learning in *Environmental Awareness and Care*. The school was commended on its establishment of a pupil STEM Committee, empowering them to take ownership of the organisation of an annual STEM Week. Participating pupils could chose whether to present their projects and investigations during workshop sessions for individual classes or to the whole school.

During the pupil focus-group discussion, pupils spoke very positively about their engagement in co-curricular scientific activities, including Science Blast. Those on the STEM Committee described their leadership of annual STEM Day enthusiastically. Pupils shared that they preferred 'hands-on' lessons where they could see how things work to those that focused on explanation. They also observed that they would welcome more opportunities to engage in practical and investigative activities during science lessons and "interact with it ourselves".

The overall quality of teaching in Science was good, with some very effective practice also observed. Almost all lessons observed were well structured and made explicit provision for new learning. Teachers modelled subject-specific vocabulary effectively and made good provision for talk and discussion. They also made helpful links between pupils' learning in Science and other curriculum areas, including History and Mathematics. Most teachers made skilful use of questioning techniques to probe and extend pupils' knowledge and understanding. They also made effective use of digital technologies to enhance their teaching and support pupils in conducting research.

In some instances, lessons were primarily didactic. While teachers enabled pupils to engage in practical activities, this mainly involved following prescribed steps rather than engaging in genuine enquiry. In the best instances, teachers enabled pupils to participate in scaffolded discovery learning and to work scientifically. To build on this good practice, teachers were encouraged to extend their use of methodologies that promote the development of the pupils' scientific skills as well as knowledge, support them in generating their own ideas and questions for investigation using the scientific method, and apply their knowledge in 'designing and making' tasks.

Teachers dutifully monitored and assessed pupils' learning in Science through questioning, observation and maintaining samples of their work. They also made provision for pupil self-assessment, including strategies such as 'thumbs up' and 'traffic lights'. In the best instances, they enabled pupils to evaluate their work in line with specific criteria. Overall, there was scope for teachers to use assessment information more effectively to monitor pupils' learning in both the skills and content in Science. To this end, teachers were encouraged to agree and implement a whole-school approach to assessment that included the recording of pupils' progression in Science and the provision of formative feedback.

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

The quality of school planning, including school self-evaluation (SSE), in progressing pupils' learning in Science was good. School leaders and teachers had engaged collaboratively and comprehensively in the SSE process. The school's current focus on Wellbeing was reflected in the caring and respectful school atmosphere and in improved pupil attendance. It was also reflected in the promotion of pupil voice, including through elections for, and active participation on, the STEM Committee and Green Schools Committee.

The quality of whole-school planning, including school self-evaluation (SSE) was good. The school plan for Science helpfully delineated the strands and strand units at each class level in line with the spiral curriculum. Teachers engaged conscientiously in lesson preparation, including recorded preparation. To better provide for the progressive development of pupils' knowledge and scientific skills, teachers were encouraged to align their preparation more closely with the school plan and align speakers and educational visits more closely with relevant curriculum outcomes.

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For the pupils of St Catherine's West National School about their learning in Science

Date of inspection: 21/04/2026 – 23/04/2026

Introduction

Your school had an inspection of Science recently. This page for pupils describes what the inspector found and gives ideas about what the school should do to make learning better.

What did the inspector do during the visit?

The inspector visited classrooms and talked to teachers and pupils about the work they were doing. An inspector also met with a focus group of pupils to talk to them about their learning.

What did the inspector find?

Here are some of the main things:

- Pupils' learning in Science was good.
- The teachers organised activities, including Science Blast and Forest schools, to help make the pupils' learning interesting. The pupils were very proud of the STEM day that the older pupils organised for them.
- The teachers taught Science well.
- The school had a good plan for how Science should be taught.

What the inspector said the school should do to make learning better

- Teachers should help pupils to learn new information and skills in Science as they move from one class to the next.
- Teachers should give pupils more opportunities to do investigations in lessons and, like scientists, make sure that their tests are fair.

Thank you for taking the time to read this page.
A special thank you to pupils who took part in the focus group.

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 and staff of St. Catherine's NS welcome the positive findings of the inspection, particularly in relation to the quality of pupil's learning, the very good learning experiences provided and the effective teaching observed in Science. The Board is especially pleased that the positive relationships between staff and pupils were acknowledged and is very proud of the pupils' ability to articulate their learning so confidently, as demonstrated during classroom interactions and focus group discussions where pupil voice was clearly valued and heard.

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

We also note with satisfaction that the wide range of field trips, events & co-curricular activities were recognised as enhancing pupils' learning and contributing positively to the school community.

We accept the recommendations outlined in the report and are committed to progressing these. A staff meeting was held following the inspection at which feedback was discussed in detail. A progression grid has since been developed to support teachers in interpreting the school plan with greater clarity and to ensure consistent progression in pupils' learning across all class levels. The school will continue to build on this work with a focus on further developing pupils' investigative skills through increased opportunities for enquiry based learning.

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