



An Roinn Oideachais
Department of Education

Curriculum Evaluation: English Report

REPORT

Ainm na scoile/School name	Castleblakeney National School
Seoladh na scoile/School address	Castleblakeney Ballinasloe County Galway
Uimhir rolla/Roll number	16464I
Dáta na cigireachta/ Date of evaluation	24/09/2024
Dáta eisiúna na tuairisce/ Date of issue of report	26/11/2024

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(s) 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

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

During the inspection visit, the following checks in relation to the school's child protection and anti-bullying procedures were conducted:	
<i>Child Protection</i>	<i>Anti-bullying</i>
<ol style="list-style-type: none">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.	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. The school has developed an anti-bullying policy that meets the requirements of the <i>Anti-Bullying Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools (2013)</i> or <i>Bí Cineálta (2024)</i> 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.

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

Curriculum evaluation

Date of inspection	23/09/2024 & 24/09/2024
Inspection activities undertaken	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 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

Castleblakeney National School is a co-educational rural primary school located in the village of Castleblakeney, County Galway. The school operates under the patronage of the Catholic Bishop of Elphin. At the time of the evaluation, the school had three mainstream class teachers, one full-time special education teacher (SET), one part-time SET shared with other local schools and two full-time special needs assistants. There were 46 pupils enrolled from junior infants to sixth class.

Summary of main findings and recommendations:

Findings

- The quality of pupils' learning in English was very good.
- Overall, the learning experiences provided for pupils were very good.
- The overall quality of teaching, including the provision for pupils with special educational needs (SEN), was very good; teachers created an inclusive environment supportive of all pupils.
- Teachers developed very effective strategies for assessing pupils' progress and used this information to enhance teaching and learning.
- Whole-school planning, including school self-evaluation (SSE), was very good in progressing pupils' learning in English.

Recommendations

- All teachers should now prioritise the development of the element *Exploring and using* to enable pupils to explore and use language for a wide range of purposes, across a variety of genres and for a multitude of audiences.
- Team teaching should be further developed to ensure pupils are provided with rich language learning experiences.

Detailed findings and recommendations

1. The quality of pupils' learning outcomes

The overall quality of pupils' learning in English was very good. Pupils were motivated to learn and took pride in their achievements. During focus group discussions, pupils shared their enjoyment in the subject. Almost all pupils demonstrated good listening skills during lessons observed. Pupils were articulate and shared their knowledge, thoughts and ideas willingly during interactions. At the time of the evaluation, early literacy skills, such as phonological and phonemic awareness, were being developed. Commendably, the learning outcome *phonics, word recognition and word study* was well developed from junior infants to sixth class. Pupils in senior classes used existing language skills and knowledge to interpret text in other languages. In lessons observed, pupils recited rhymes and poetry with good expression and fluency. In particular, pupils recalled artistic elements and literary features of poetry with confidence. Pupils were exposed to a range of poets, notably Irish poets, to develop various learning outcomes

across the strands. Spelling was taught in a structured, systematic manner and monitored weekly. Most pupils wrote legibly and fluently in cursive script. Pupils demonstrated good comprehension strategies and, when asked, read with appropriate pace, fluency and accuracy. Most pupils demonstrated an awareness and understanding of a variety of genres and produced samples with and without writing frames across all stages. To further develop pupils' skills in this area, it is recommended that classrooms create free-writing stations with prompts, scaffolds and dictionaries to support them in their work.

Unequivocally, pupils' knowledge and skills in the elements of *Communicating* and *Understanding* were very good. All teachers should now prioritise the development of the element *Exploring and using* and enable pupils to explore and use language for a wide range of purposes, across a variety of genres and for a range of audiences.

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

Pupils' learning was supported very effectively through high-quality learning experiences. All interactions in the school were respectful, fostering a positive and inclusive atmosphere. The school's strong community ties, including collaboration with local advocates of literature have helped nurture pupils' interest and engagement in literacy. Initiatives like the reading bench in the garden, educational games, and targeted interventions to support pupils with special education needs (SEN) were used effectively to enhance pupils' literacy and learning experiences. Additionally, the school's extracurricular activities, such as chess, helped develop strategic thinking and listening skills, while participation in *Active Schools* initiatives promoted literacy through the relevant application of skills across all strands. Pupils participated in musical drama productions during their time in school which has contributed positively to the development of pupils' confidence and competence in English.

Classrooms were print-rich environments, carefully designed to meet pupils' needs. During the evaluation, teachers made effective use of parallel teaching. Pupils participated in whole-class, small-group, pair, and individual work, and engaged diligently in learning activities. It is recommended that class teachers, in collaboration with the SET, further develop team teaching practices especially in the early years in order to provide early, timely intervention for pupils with additional needs. In most lessons observed, core text books were utilised. All teachers should ensure pupils' next steps in their learning are aligned to their emerging needs and draw from a variety of resources and text types. During focus group discussions, pupils spoke positively about buddy reading as part of World Book Day activities. In order to further enhance pupils' disposition to reading, teachers should endeavour to coordinate buddy reading amongst all pupils throughout the school year.

Pupils during the focus group discussion detailed how digital technology is used to support their learning. Pupils are developing their typing skills in middle and senior classrooms and use these to produce written documents and presentations. In order to further pupils' digital skills, pupils should be provided with the option of representing their work orally, visually or in written format. While more diverse text types, such as podcasts and audiobooks are needed to support all learners, teachers commendably read from a variety of novels often linked to other curricular areas. In addition, each classroom featured a well-stocked library, regularly updated by teachers to reflect pupils' interests. All pupils had access to supplementary readers which teachers used effectively to progress pupils reading skills.

Teachers' individual practice was of a very high standard. Lessons observed were well-paced and structured. All teachers demonstrated highly commendable preparation for teaching, both visible and invisible, with clear long-term targets set for all class levels. Classrooms provided a supportive and inclusive environment where all pupils were closely monitored to ensure their needs were met.

Teachers used a variety of assessment practices including standardised testing, teacher designed tests and tasks and teacher observation. To further enhance these practices, all teachers should use checklists and rubrics to encourage pupils to be more agentic in their learning.

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

The overall quality of whole-school planning, including school self-evaluation (SSE), in progressing pupils' learning was very good. Short-term planning was effective ensuring consistent classroom practice across the school. The school plan for English commendably detailed whole-school approaches and initiatives bespoke to the school. Leadership and teachers have effectively used the SSE process to ensure development across a variety of academic areas and its impact is evident within the school.



An Roinn Oideachais
Department of Education

For the pupils of Castleblakeney
N.S. about their learning in English
Date of inspection: 24/09/2024



Introduction

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



Meeting with pupils

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 in the school are doing well in English. You enjoy sharing your thoughts in class.
- Teachers make learning interesting and use books, games and computers to help with your learning in English.
- Teachers make sure that every pupil gets the help they need, especially pupils who might need a little more support to do their best.



What the inspector(s) said the school should do to make learning better

- The teachers should give pupils more chances to write about what interests you by having a free-writing station in each classroom.
- Teachers should encourage you to check your work to help you learn to feel more responsible.
- Teachers should teach together more often in the classroom, especially when helping pupils who need extra support, so everyone can have lots of fun learning.

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

Part A Observations on the content of the inspection report

The Board of Management welcomes the publication of this Curriculum Evaluation Report on the teaching of English in Castleblakeney NS and commends the staff and pupils on the very positive findings therein.

The Board is pleased that the report acknowledges and affirms the very high standard of teacher practice, the provision of high-quality learning experiences, the very high levels of pupil participation in an inclusive and supportive environment where children are motivated to learn and take pride in their achievements.

The findings of this inspection are a testament to the excellent collaboration that exists at all levels in the school community. In particular, the Board appreciates that the welcoming, inclusive and respectful environment that defines our school is captured in the report.

The Board welcomes the recommendations and will seek to implement them in the coming months.

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

Following consultation with staff the following actions will be taken in response to the recommendations in the report.

Teachers will consciously prioritise the development of the element Exploring and Using to enable children to further develop their language skills for a wide range of purposes, across a variety of genres. Teachers will encourage children to become more agentic in their learning.

An area will be reserved in each classroom for free writing activities. These areas can be added to over time.

Teachers will continue to develop team teaching throughout the school.

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