

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills**

**Curriculum Evaluation
Language and Communication**

REPORT

Ainm na scoile / School name	Scoil Micheál Naofa
Seoladh na scoile / School address	Castlerea Co Roscommon
Uimhir rolla / Roll number	19789F

Date of inspection: 20-09-2017



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 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.

Curriculum Evaluation

Date of inspection	20-09-2017
Inspection activities undertaken <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussion with principal and teachers • Review of relevant documents • Pupil focus-group interview 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Observation of teaching and learning • Examination of pupils' work • Interaction with pupils • Feedback to principal and teachers

SCHOOL CONTEXT

An evaluation of Language and Communication was undertaken in St. Michael's Special School, Castlerea, Co. Roscommon in September 2017. The school operates under the patronage of the Catholic Bishop of Elphin. At the time of the evaluation, the school had an administrative principal, seven class teachers, three part-time teachers and fifteen special-needs assistants (SNAs).

St. Michael's provides education to pupils with a moderate, severe or profound general learning disability and also, to pupils with autistic spectrum disorders (ASDs). It caters for pupils from the primary stage through to the post-primary stages. The majority of pupils travel to school from a wide catchment area and avail of the school transport service. At the time of the evaluation, the school had an enrolment of forty-seven pupils.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

FINDINGS

- The overall quality of pupils' learning in Language and Communication is very good.
- The quality of learner experiences provided is outstanding. Pupils have opportunities to generalise their language and communication skills in real-life contexts, through a range of carefully constructed community-based learning experiences.
- The overall quality of teaching is excellent. Teachers demonstrate a very good awareness of the diverse range of complex learning needs and they differentiate lessons very effectively.
- The quality of school planning is exemplary. A whole-school approach to planning and assessment is adopted consistently throughout the school.
- All pupils have comprehensive individual education plans (IEPs). There is scope to reduce the number of targets selected for prioritisation.
- The school has engaged very successfully in the school self-evaluation (SSE) process. Areas for development in Language and Communication have been identified and progressed.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- To further develop the school's current good practice in relation to IEPs, fewer targets should be selected for prioritisation.

DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. THE QUALITY OF PUPILS' LEARNING

The overall quality of pupils' learning in Language and Communication is very good. The pupils present as enthusiastic and motivated learners. There is a consistent emphasis on functional and spontaneous communication. Pupils develop beneficial skills to communicate their needs and to interact with peers and staff.

Skills are developed using a variety of communication resources and appropriate interventions. Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS), assistive technology, information and communications technology (ICT) and a manual sign system, LÁMH, are used very effectively to support meaningful communication.

The promotion of life-skills and independence is a core feature of the work of the school. Well structured language activities are employed to support this area of pupils' development.

Reading and writing skills are fostered at the appropriate levels and are based on the needs and interests of the pupils. The school is currently involved with a reading initiative with Mary Immaculate College, whereby parents and their children read big books together.

Post-primary pupils, where appropriate, are working towards nationally-recognised systems of certification such as the Junior Cycle, Junior Cycle Level 2 Learning Programmes and FETAC Level 3. In a group discussion with pupils, all pupils indicated that they enjoyed their learning and described their activities very effectively.

2. SUPPORTING PUPILS' LEARNING: LEARNER EXPERIENCES AND TEACHERS' PRACTICE

The quality of learner experiences is outstanding. Many positive and beneficial interactions among pupils and staff were observed and pupils were very respectful in their interactions with each other. The corridor displays are of an exceptionally high standard. Classroom environments are print rich and pupils' achievements are celebrated through very high quality displays of their work. The organisation of the classroom settings supports pupil learning on an individualised basis, with very effective provision made also for pair and group activities. Daily school assemblies provide opportunities to acknowledge the accomplishments of pupils and to promote language skills and positive attitudes. It is highly commendable that the pupil voice is facilitated through a Students' Council and the Green School Committee.

Pupils are enabled to acquire appropriate behaviours and this facilitates their participation in a broad range of learning and curricular activities. Pupils have opportunities to generalise their language and communication skills in real-life contexts, through a range of carefully constructed community-based learning experiences. These include work experience for senior pupils. St. Michael's has also established links with a number of local primary and secondary schools. Opportunities for pupils to experience inclusive learning opportunities are developed through reverse integration. During the evaluation, the pupils were observed to be enjoying and participating beneficially in a collaborative team-teaching lesson with pupils from a local national school. This practice is highly praiseworthy.

The overall quality of teaching is excellent. It is evident that the staff is highly committed and capable. Teachers demonstrate a very good awareness of the diverse range of learning needs. They differentiate lessons very effectively for individual pupils in relation to the learning process, content and tasks. Pupils develop language skills through individual station work and group work. Objects of reference, visual timetables and schedules indicate clearly the sequence of activities for individual pupils. Wait-time is effectively used by teachers to allow pupils every opportunity to participate. Circle-time, story, poetry, music activities and cross-curricular projects are employed beneficially to support learning. Opportunities are provided to use and apply language skills in practical and purposeful activities, such as cooking and gardening. ICT is used very skilfully to enhance the language skills of pupils. It is noteworthy that St. Michael's school became the first special school to be named a "Digital School of Distinction".

Planning and preparation is of a very high standard in all classrooms. A whole-school approach to planning and assessment is adopted consistently throughout the school. The programme of learning provided in each classroom is informed by extensive assessment: including classroom observations, standardised material and recorded data. Pupils' learning needs are identified, addressed and monitored through well-planned IEPs. This good practice should be further developed by selecting fewer targets for prioritisation.

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

The quality of school planning is exemplary. The school plan in Language and Communication informs teaching and learning. The school has engaged very successfully in the SSE process and areas for development in Language and Communication have been identified and progressed. A thematic approach for vocabulary enrichment has been adopted very effectively throughout the school.

School improvement plans have been constructed and implemented. Useful development planning has been undertaken by the school over many years.

The culture of St. Michael's special school is one of improvement, collaboration, innovation, reflection and creativity in teaching and learning.

4. CHILD PROTECTION

The following aspects of the *Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post Primary Schools* were checked during the evaluation:

1. Teachers' access to a copy of the school's Child Protection policy
2. The prominent display of the name of Designated Liaison Person near the main entrance

The school was fully compliant with both aspects.

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 of St Michael's School welcomes the positive and affirming report arising from this evaluation.

We take pleasure in acknowledging reference made to the skilful, capable and effective teaching that is consistently demonstrated throughout the school. In particular, we appreciate the recognition that the overall quality of teaching is excellent. The highly committed staff of St. Michael's organise inclusive, differentiated, practical and purposeful opportunities very effectively to support pupil learning on an individualised basis. Extensive assessment, planning and preparation is of a very high standard and the school is honoured that this was found to be of exemplary quality.

Moreover, the board of management are proud that the report highlights pupil enjoyment, enthusiasm and motivation and are pleased that the celebration of pupils' achievements and accomplishments was acknowledged to be an area of strength. The outstanding quality of the learner experience confirms very good practice that reflects the mission and ethos of St. Michael's School.

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 of management appreciates the recognition given in the report to the comprehensive and well-planned individual education plans that identify, address and monitor pupils' learning needs. Research indicates that teaching is the most powerful influence on student achievement. It acknowledges the pedagogical skills required to enable high-quality learner experiences and outcomes. Staff in St. Michael's fully embrace this domain of their role and share an ongoing commitment to school self-evaluation and professional reflection. As part of this process, the school will perfect current good practice for the selection of priority learning targets ensuring that they are few in number. The Board is confident that this will further enhance the culture of St. Michael's, described in the report as being one of "improvement, collaboration, innovation, reflection and creativity in teaching and 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	Example of descriptive terms
Very Good	<p>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.</p>	<p>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</p>
Good	<p>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.</p>	<p>Good; good quality; valuable; effective practice; competent; useful; commendable; good standard; some areas for improvement</p>

<p>Satisfactory</p>	<p>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.</p>	<p>Satisfactory; adequate; appropriate provision although some possibilities for improvement exist; acceptable level of quality; improvement needed in some areas</p>
<p>Fair</p>	<p>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.</p>	<p>Fair; evident weaknesses that are impacting on pupils' learning; less than satisfactory; experiencing difficulty; must improve in specified areas; action required to improve</p>
<p>Weak</p>	<p>Weak applies where there are serious deficiencies in the areas evaluated. Immediate and coordinated wholeschool action is required to address the areas of concern. In some cases, the intervention of other agencies may be required to support improvements.</p>	<p>Weak; unsatisfactory; insufficient; ineffective; poor; requiring significant change, development or improvement; experiencing significant difficulties;</p>