

Knocknacarra Educate Together NS
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20410H

SCHOOL SELF-EVALUATION REPORT

1. Introduction

1.1 The focus of the evaluation

A school self-evaluation of teaching and learning in Knocknacarra Educate Together NS was undertaken in the beginning of the 2019-2020 academic year. During the evaluation, teaching and learning in the curriculum area of Numeracy (understanding and using mathematics) was evaluated. This is a report on the findings of the evaluation, and these findings will inform a three-year school improvement plan.

1.2 School context

Knocknacarra Educate Together NS is a developing Educate Together co-educational primary school located on the western edge of Galway City. With a current enrolment of 159 children, representing over 40 countries of origin, who live in Knocknacarra and the surrounding areas, the school currently has 6 mainstream class teachers and 2 learning support teachers. According to its ethos, the school seeks to promote children's academic, moral, emotional and spiritual development in the broadest sense to ensure children become well-rounded and caring citizens who are confident in their various abilities and strengths and where no child is viewed as an outsider. Therefore, maths is just one of many subjects and skill sets the school endeavours to develop. The school has been conducting a comprehensive review of the school maths plan in tandem with this self-evaluation process.

2. The Findings

2.1 Data sources

The self-evaluation process relied on data from the following sources:

- Maths standardised testing results (Drumcondra Maths assessments) from the previous three academic years.
- A written survey for children from second to fourth classes, with 77 surveys completed.
- An online survey for parents/guardians using google forms with 79 responses, a family participation rate of 51%.
- Formal and informal discussions at staff and post-holder meetings.

2.2 Findings based on all data sources

At the outset, while the school does use standardised test scores to measure children's progress, we stress that the results only present a limited perspective on children's overall abilities and maths reasoning skills. Therefore, teachers' observations as well as information gathered from ongoing continuous assessment as well as the perspectives of parents and children's attitudes towards maths and learning are all important for understanding the teaching of maths in Knocknacarra Educate Together NS.

As a developing school, the amount of data from standardised testing is limiting, making it difficult to correctly identify trends. In addition, the school used the old Drumcondra Mathematics Test in 2017 and 2018 but switched, as was recommended, to the new Drumcondra Mathematics Test in 2019. The new tests were norm-referenced recently, leading to a recalibration of mathematics testing across the country, with percentile drops naturally occurring as part of this process (for more information see <http://www.erc.ie/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Letter-for-parents-New-Drumcondra-tests.pdf>). Compared to national norms, results show that the vast majority of children in the school are scoring in the average to high average range, with the schools overall scores mirroring national averages. Some variances between classes and testing years may suggest that it would be important to ensure there is a uniform level of preparation for all types of assessment. Overall, the standardised test results suggest children's basic skills are good generally.

One area that the test results identify as being significantly lower is solving word problems. The results have consistently shown this strand to be substantially lower than other areas, particularly computation and procedures. Specifically, problem solving related to measures appears to be noticeably weaker than other areas.

According to the survey given to the children in the school, the vast majority of children say they're confident about their ability in maths. The results of the survey appear valid as similar questions indicated similar conclusions. 70% feel they usually do well. 65% say they usually find it interesting. This suggests there is generally a very positive attitude among the school population. The children feel more comfortable using equipment or solving sums on paper than in their head. A significant number of children said it made them uncomfortable when asked questions in class. This suggests scope for developing their self-confidence in expressing orally their maths knowledge and skills. Of note, most enjoy solving maths problems.

While the majority consider maths useful and interesting, 25% said it was only for school or homework. When asked about jobs that might use maths, many children found it difficult to name them or imagine how adults or themselves might apply maths outside of class, with 15% not being able to name someone they know who uses maths in their daily lives, and with teacher as the most common response listed for who required using maths in their work.

Regarding the various different strand units, there is strong confidence across the board, with most children indicating that they feel they are managing comfortably. The majority of

children from all classes feel confident with their tables and enjoy learning them. Capacity, decimals, telling time and problem solving were considered the most challenging strand units. In summary, the children's confidence is high across the board, particularly in using calculators, shape and reading graphs. The pupil's understanding of which areas provide difficulties for them closely matches trends in the standardised test results.

Teachers report a variety of practices regarding planning, teaching and assessment. All teachers write and follow a yearly scheme. Also, they complete some form of forward planning as well as a reflective monthly report submitted to the principal at the end of each teaching month. Team-teaching meetings between class and learning support teachers takes place in all classes, with stations teaching a preferred option in many classes.

Teachers use a range of teaching strategies and methods including games, use of ICT, use of assessments connected to math schemes, practical lessons using concrete materials and hands-on activities, good teaching from the whiteboards, use of various problem-solving tools, mixed-ability pair work, use of mini-whiteboards for quick assessment and good cooperation with learning support teachers who assist with stations teaching and other forms of in-class support. It was agreed that real-life maths with imaginative play based on Aistear and moving up through the school would be beneficial. Use of real, concrete materials is important. Equally, opportunities for cross-curricular maths applications should be explicitly identified and explored.

Teachers noted that regular end-of-unit assessment is of great value, particularly for supporting targeted remediation. Teachers assign a high level of importance to assessment organised or created by teachers and such assessment measures are used on a consistent basis. Some teachers use some self-assessment measures with children, commenting that the maths survey for children was a very informative exercise both for children and teachers. Therefore, there is scope and interest in exploring more opportunities for self-reflection and assessment led by the children themselves regarding their progress in maths.

Concerning the perspective of parents, 67% reported that their child likes maths. The majority of parents feel they know their child's strengths (61%), but less parents were aware of their weaknesses (41%). A noticeable 65% said they were not sure or did not feel knowledgeable about the maths programme at the school. 58% say they play maths games at home. The majority reported that they felt their child considers maths useful in everyday life. Many suggested positive things their children have said, often remarking their children find maths easy. Several parents mentioned practical ways they use maths at home with their children. Parents noted that games and the recent maths trails were helpful and mentioned positively by the children. As to negative statements, which were fewer in number, some reported their child describing maths as "too easy" while others said the work was too monotonous or too challenging. Of note, a significant number suggested their child never speaks about maths, either positively or negatively, at home. Regarding the methods their children are being taught at school, about 50% agreed that they were the same ones they

learned, but an additional 35% said they didn't understand the methods. There was a wide range of opinion regarding homework, with some parents suggesting it needed to be more challenging and others concerned that their children were finding it too difficult.

Overall, parents' comments acknowledged children are getting good support in developing their maths skills. 94% of parents are satisfied with their child's maths experience this year.

3. Summary of School Self-Evaluation Findings

3.1 Our school has **strengths** in the following areas:

- Children's basic math skills are well-developed and the majority of children are performing within or above the average range.
- The vast majority of children have a positive attitude towards maths.
- Parents feel confident that they can support their child's maths development.
- Children express confidence in their maths abilities.

3.2 The following areas are **prioritised for improvement**:

- Children have demonstrated some difficulty with solving word problems on standardised assessments. As data is limited, it would be important to determine if this is the case in senior classes as well as to develop plans to improve problem-solving skills.
- Many children do not see a clear connection between maths and real-life applications.
- A significant number of parents indicate a lack of knowledge regarding the maths programme, particularly around the computation methods taught to children.

3.3 All **legislative and regulatory requirements** have been addressed and will be reviewed on an annual basis.

This report was ratified by the Board of Management on the date below.

Paul Adams, chairperson

Matt Wallen, principal

Date of ratification