

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection in Religious Education (RE)

REPORT

Ainm na scoile / School name	Oatlands College
Seoladh na scoile / School address	Mount Merrion Co Dublin
Uimhir rolla / Roll number	60050E

Date of Inspection: 07-02-2020



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agus Scileanna**
Department of
Education and Skills

SUBJECT INSPECTION

Subject Inspections report on the quality of work in individual curriculum areas within a school. 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 Religious Education under the following headings:

1. Teaching, learning and assessment
2. Subject provision and whole-school support
3. Planning and preparation

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 on the findings and recommendations of the report; the board chose to accept the report without response.

CHILD PROTECTION

During the inspection visit, the following checks in relation to the school's child protection procedures were conducted:

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.

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

SUBJECT INSPECTION

INSPECTION ACTIVITIES

Dates of inspection	05 and 07 February 2020
Inspection activities undertaken <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review of relevant documents• Discussion with principal and key staff• Interaction with students	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Observation of teaching and learning during 5 lessons• Examination of students' work• Feedback to principal and relevant staff

School context

Oatlands College is a post-primary school for boys, under the trusteeship of the Edmund Rice School Trust (ERST). The school offers the Junior Cycle programme, an optional Transition Year programme, the established Leaving Certificate, and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme. Current student enrolment is 546.

This evaluation is concerned only with the preparation of students for the Junior Certificate, Junior Cycle Awards Programme and Leaving Certificate examinations in the subject.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

Findings

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment was effective overall, practice observed ranged from very good to satisfactory.
- In the most effective lessons high quality resources were used to encourage student engagement levels.
- While effective oral formative assessment practices were evident there was scope for development in the level and quality of written formative feedback in students' copybooks.
- Overall differentiation practices were good, with scope for improvement in some lessons.
- Formal collaborative plans are underdeveloped; subject department planning is an area for improvement, particularly at junior cycle.
- Greater levels of collegiality and co-operative practice would have a positive impact on the RE department and on student outcomes and experiences.

Recommendations

- Peer observation should be further developed to extend the effective practice noted in the use of active and digital learning observed in some lessons.
- Teachers should plan for and implement effective written formative feedback strategies to support students in their learning, and to encourage them to take ownership of their learning.
- Collaboration in the RE department should be prioritised and developed in order to create a subject plan which supports the sharing of high quality resources, effective active teaching methodologies and includes prioritised actions and strategies for improvement.

DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. TEACHING, LEARNING, AND ASSESSMENT

- Teachers generally displayed very good subject knowledge. In the most effective lessons, teachers showed passion for their subject which had a visibly positive impact on student learning.
- Overall, the learning environment was good. There were positive and respectful interactions between teachers and students. Students' contributions were affirmed in all lessons.
- Almost all lessons were well planned and most teachers had gathered good quality resources to support learning and raise interest levels in topics from the RE syllabus.
- While almost all lessons were student centred, one lesson would have benefited from a greater balance between teacher instruction and student input.
- There was some very good use of the sharing of learning intentions in a few lessons, however this is an area in need of development. Teachers should take the time to revisit the learning intentions during or at the end of the lesson.
- The highly effective practice noted in some lessons was characterised by thoughtful planning and preparation which included individual and collaborative activities. In these lessons, it was evident that there were high expectations for students.
- In some instances, the high quality material and resources selected by teachers provided students with opportunities to think creatively. In these lessons, students had opportunities to link their prior learning to new learning, allowing for deep engagement with topics. This highly effective practice should be shared to develop and extend good practice across all year groups.
- Students participated well in the lessons observed and demonstrated the ability to work collaboratively. In a minority of lessons, there were times when the students became disengaged in learning. These lessons would have benefitted from clarity of instruction, seating plans and interesting stimuli to engage the students.
- There was good evidence of students' prior learning in their oral responses to teacher questioning, and students skilfully and confidently gave their opinions on topics from the RE syllabus, such as humanism and monotheism.
- Overall, there were good assessment practices, for example, students engaged very well with a digital quiz about Islam, which clearly raised their confidence in relation to their knowledge and understanding of the topic. Given students' very positive response to the use of digital learning it is worth considering the further use of digital strategies across the department to enhance learner outcomes.
- Effective literacy practices featured in most lessons through the use of key words from the RE syllabus and specification. In the most effective lessons, the contextualisation of key concepts such as monotheism and the use of subject-specific terminology were integrated seamlessly into lessons.
- To encourage students to take greater responsibility for the production and maintenance of their work teachers should increase the levels and quality of written formative feedback. To further the impact of this approach, teachers should share success criteria with students and implement strategies to encourage students to engage with feedback.

- Teachers should encourage students to extend their verbal responses to questions and support them in making links to other parts of the syllabus and specification. Teachers should include more higher-order questions to cultivate students' creative thinking and tap into their reflective skills.
- Differentiated learning was achieved mainly through group work and targeted questioning. Where appropriate, teachers should provide students with suitably challenging extension tasks and additional learning materials to ensure suitable differentiation so that all students reach their learning potential.

2. SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- The overall provision for the subject on the school's timetable is very good. Junior cycle RE is a core subject and the provision on the timetable is in line with syllabus and specification requirements. Leaving certificate RE is optional.
- Deployment of teachers is very good. All RE lessons are being delivered by qualified RE teachers.
- Commendably, senior management facilitate and support Professional Masters in Education (PME) students, and newly qualified teachers are supported through the *Droichead* programme.
- The school has moved to increase the use of digital technologies in teaching and learning in recent years. Each teacher has access to digital technology in the classroom, and all first-year students have their own tablet devices. RE teachers should fully avail of these resources, to optimise the learning opportunities for students.
- School management supports and encourages teachers to attend continuing professional development (CPD) courses. It is positive that all RE teachers have attended Junior Cycle for Teachers (JCT) cluster days.
- Attainment in certificate examinations is very good.

3. PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- The overall quality of subject planning was fair. Currently, there are no agreed common schemes of work for first year, and all other collaborative subject planning is in need of updating and development. The RE department should further collaborate to devise an effective subject plan through the use of the online platform provided by the school. It is recommended that the plan contain a developmental section outlining aims for the improvement of the subject in the school.
- It is recommended that teachers collectively develop units of learning for junior cycle RE and reflect on areas for improvement as they teach the units. These should include purposeful resources and effective active teaching methodologies that will enrich learner experiences and outcomes.
- The overall quality of individual teacher preparation for lessons observed was mostly good, with examples of high quality preparation in a few lessons, and scope for improvement in others.
- The RE department would benefit from more regular formal meetings throughout the year. An agenda for department meetings should be agreed between management and the RE

department. The agreed agenda should focus on teaching and learning in order to formalise the meetings, and support effective collaboration. Minutes of these meetings should be shared with senior management and inform future planning.

- It is recommended that the RE department analyse examination results to assess progress, and advise future planning. The data from analysis should also be used to set annual targets.

The draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation were discussed with the principal, deputy principal and subject teachers at the conclusion of the evaluation.

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 of 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 <i>very good</i> 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. 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;