

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

**Subject Inspection in Religious Education (RE)**

**REPORT**

<b>Ainm na scoile / School name</b>	The High School
<b>Seoladh na scoile / School address</b>	Zion Road Rathgar Dublin 6
<b>Uimhir rolla / Roll number</b>	60670L

**Date of Inspection: 29-03-2019**



## **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 was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the report; a response was not received from the board.

## **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

<b>Dates of inspection</b>	28 and 29 March 2019
<b>Inspection activities undertaken</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Review of relevant documents</li><li>• Discussion with principal and key staff</li><li>• Interaction with students</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Observation of teaching and learning during six class periods</li><li>• Examination of students' work</li><li>• Feedback to principal and relevant staff</li></ul>

### School context

The High School is a fee-charging, co-educational post-primary school with a current enrolment of 718 students. The school provides the Junior Cycle, a compulsory Transition Year (TY) programme and the established Leaving Certificate.

This evaluation is concerned only with the preparation of students for the Junior Certificate examination in the subject.

### SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

#### Findings

- The overall quality of teaching and learning was very good, with some areas for improvement identified in the delivery of activity-based learning and group work.
- Teachers' collaborative practice is very good; the RE team is dynamic, motivated and is working hard to raise attainment levels in the subject.
- Assessment practices were of a good quality, however, written formative feedback practices are in need of further development and improvement.
- Differentiation practices were effective overall, with highly effective practice observed in a few lessons.
- Individual planning was very good, and each teacher has effectively implemented strategies prioritised in the school improvement plan.
- The timetabled hours for Junior Certificate RE fall below the requirements for optimum subject provision.

#### Recommendations

- Consideration should be given to increasing the timetabled hours for Junior Certificate RE.
- The RE department should implement strategies to improve the level and quality of written formative feedback on students' work, in order to progress learning, and as a way of encouraging the students to reflect on their work.
- The RE team should further explore and implement activity-based learning methodologies, and should share best practice in relation to the effective delivery of group tasks.

## DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### 1. TEACHING, LEARNING, AND ASSESSMENT

- Overall, the quality of teaching and learning was very good, with lessons ranging from highly effective to effective. Students were at the centre of the learning experience in all lessons, and a wide variety of teaching and learning methodologies were utilised to activate the student voice.
- Classroom management was effective. The level of challenge and support was appropriate and lessons progressed at a good pace. Students were responsive, and the majority were willing to engage with challenging material.
- Lessons were characterised by positive, respectful and affirming interactions between the teachers and students. Student encouragement and support was a key feature of all lessons.
- In the most effective lessons, the teachers' passion for and expert knowledge of the subject had a positive effect on the learning environment, and enhanced the levels of student engagement and motivation.
- The majority of lessons were explicitly shaped by learning intentions, which were clearly shared with students at the outset of lessons. These were for the most part referred back to during the lesson to assess the level of learning achieved.
- The use of information and communications technology (ICT) was skilfully and effectively deployed in some lessons, but could have been used to better effect in other lessons to increase engagement levels. Teachers should share best practice in this area, perhaps through engaging in peer observation.
- In one highly effective lesson, an interesting video clip on ritual was used to very good effect to engage and motivate learners. The RE department should explore the further use of creative and interesting resources across the department.
- Teacher questioning was a predominant activity that took place in all lessons, and was used to assess students' recall and progress. Questioning was most effective when students were challenged to develop and explain their answers and show their understanding of key concepts such as meditation. In some lessons, higher-order questions were used to encourage critical-thinking skills. This is very good practice.
- There was very good evidence of students' prior learning in their oral responses to teacher questioning, and students confidently gave their opinions on topics from the RE syllabus, such as prayer and ritual.
- Commendably, teachers availed of opportunities to make linkages to other parts of the RE syllabus, and other subjects such as history, to support them in making connections, and to deepen their understanding of key concepts from the RE syllabus.
- Group work was a central feature of all lessons. Students displayed good collaborative skills, and they appeared to enjoy learning in this way. Group tasks would benefit from the use of clear instructions, designated roles, a clear time allocation, and the sharing of success criteria prior to the commencement of the task.
- Overall, differentiation was effective and teachers demonstrated a keen awareness of the individual needs of students. In one lesson, there was a choice of homework tasks to suit the

varying learning needs. This highly effective practice should be developed across the department.

- Purposeful and creative homework was assigned in some lessons. The RE department should agree and implement a homework policy which will consolidate, or extend the learning that takes place in class.
- In the majority of lessons, oral feedback was central to formative assessment. Although there was some evidence of written formative feedback on students' work, there is scope for further development in this area. The RE department should agree on, and implement written formative feedback strategies that will progress learning, and will encourage students to reflect on their work.
- Attainment in certificate examinations is very good, and the numbers taking the higher-level paper in Junior Certificate RE is highly commendable.
- School self-evaluation (SSE) priorities such as active-teaching methodologies and assessment for learning (AFL) strategies are supported in the RE classroom.

## **2. SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT**

- The timetabled hours for Junior Certificate RE fall below the requirements for optimum provision. Consideration should be given to increasing the timetabled hours for Junior Certificate RE to support and enhance learner outcomes, and the student experience of the subject.
- Junior Certificate RE is accessible to all students, and, an RE module for TY has been developed. The RE department is preparing and planning for the introduction of the new Junior Cycle RE specification in September 2019.
- School management is keen to introduce Leaving Certificate RE in the future and the RE team is very supportive of and enthused by this very positive development.
- The RE team provides a wide range of extra-curricular activities, for example annual trips to religious buildings in their local area.
- Management supports and facilitates teachers to access ongoing continuing professional development (CPD) opportunities. Commendably, the RE team has participated in peer observation initiatives and Junior Cycle for Teachers (JCT) cluster days.

## **3. PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

- Teachers were well prepared for lessons, and individual lesson planning was very good. All lessons had a clear structure and were well paced.
- Very good structures are in place to support collaborative planning for the subject. The work of the subject department is co-ordinated very effectively. Formal meetings are held every month, with a key focus on teaching and learning, which is very good practice.
- A comprehensive RE plan is in place, however, further development and updating is recommended, particularly in relation to extending the use of digital resources, and written formative feedback strategies.

- The RE team is engaging with data from the analysis of certificate examinations. This effective practice is being used to inform future planning and to set targets. This is most worthwhile.
- Sourcing creative and engaging resources should be a standing item on the agenda of meetings, particularly in the context of planning for the introduction of the Junior Cycle RE specification in September 2019.

The draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation were discussed with the principal, a 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
<b>Very Good</b>	<b>Very good</b> 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 <b>outstanding</b> 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
<b>Good</b>	<b>Good</b> 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
<b>Satisfactory</b>	<b>Satisfactory</b> 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
<b>Fair</b>	<b>Fair</b> 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
<b>Weak</b>	<b>Weak</b> 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;