

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection in Religious Education (RE)

REPORT

Ainm na scoile / School name	St Mary's Academy CBS
Seoladh na scoile / School address	Railway Road Carlow
Uimhir rolla / Roll number	61120E

Date of Inspection: 08-03-2019



An Roinn Oideachais
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 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.

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	7 and 8 March 2019
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 five class periods• Examination of students' work• Feedback to principal, deputy principal and relevant staff

School context

St Mary's Academy CBS, Carlow is a voluntary secondary school for boys under the trusteeship of the Edmund Rice Schools Trust (ERST). The school has a current enrolment of 513 students. In addition to the Junior Cycle, the school offers the established Leaving Certificate, the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) and an optional Transition Year (TY) programme.

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 quality of whole-school provision and support for Religious Education (RE) is very good.
- Overall, the quality of teaching and learning observed was good, with some scope for improvement in all lessons observed.
- Lessons were mostly student-centred and activity-based learning was a central feature, however, this practice could have been further enhanced through the use of more engaging and creative resources.
- Teachers' collaborative practice is very good overall, the team works effectively to raise the profile of RE in the school and to increase attainment in examinations.
- Differentiation and assessment practices were good in most lessons, with highly effective practice observed in a few lessons.
- Subject planning and teacher preparation was effective overall, with scope for further development in the integration of resources and reflective practice.

Recommendations

- The RE team should collaborate to build a bank of creative resources and share methodologies that will further motivate students, and increase participation in learning activities.
- Subject planning meetings should focus on teaching and learning, which will support planning and preparation for the implementation of the new RE Specification for junior cycle in September 2019.

DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. TEACHING, LEARNING, AND ASSESSMENT

- The quality of teaching observed was good overall, with lessons ranging from good to very good.
- Overall, the quality of learning was good, however, in a minority of lessons there were times when students became disengaged in learning as the pace was too slow. These lessons would also benefit from the use of suitable learning supports and interesting resources to engage the students.
- All lessons were well structured with effective teacher management. Lessons were characterised by respectful and affirming interactions between the students and teachers.
- Learning intentions were shared with students at the outset of every lesson, and all lessons ended with a consolidation exercise. The success criteria for tasks were mostly shared with students prior to the commencement of tasks to support understanding and increase confidence. This is very good practice.
- In one highly effective lesson, students were asked to reflect on possible sources of meaning in life and they displayed very good reflective and critical-thinking skills during this task. The task enriched the student voice and gave students a platform for genuine engagement with the subject matter.
- In another lesson, highly effective targeted questioning was used to develop and evaluate students' understanding of parables. Global question-and-answering sessions were effectively deployed in lessons to ascertain what the students already knew, and identify areas which were in need of improvement. However, there were missed opportunities to ask more probing and meaningful higher-order questions.
- There was good evidence of students' prior learning in their oral responses to teacher questioning. Students confidently gave their opinions, and shared their knowledge on concepts from the RE syllabus, such as moral values and forgiveness.
- There was a good balance between student input and teacher instruction. Highly effective practice was noted where teachers created opportunities for very high levels of student engagement and contribution to the lesson.
- When appropriate, opportunities were taken to make linkages to other parts of the RE syllabus to support learning and to help students to make connections.
- In all lessons, teachers used examples and experiences from outside the classroom to deepen the students' understanding of key concepts from the RE syllabus. This is highly commendable practice.
- Commendably in one lesson, the teacher encouraged the use of students' innovative skills by giving them the opportunity to create a model image representing what gives meaning in their lives.
- Most students had access to a tablet device, however, they were primarily used to access textbooks. It is recommended that they are used for extension activities, and teachers should consider piloting the use of digital resources which are interesting and purposeful in the RE classroom.

- Differentiation was good in all lessons observed. In one lesson, there was a choice of classroom and homework tasks to suit varying learning styles and learning needs. This practice created a positive learning environment, which was highly conducive to student learning.
- Purposeful homework was assigned in all lessons, however, it is important that homework is monitored regularly, and that students receive formative feedback on their efforts. Teachers should consider developing a formative assessment strategy to develop and embed written formative assessment practices across the department.
- Attainment in certificate examinations is good, and the numbers taking higher-level in Junior Certificate RE is commendable.

2. SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- Senior management provides excellent support to the RE department. The overall provision for the subject on the school's timetable is in line with syllabus requirements for optimum provision.
- The RE teachers are deeply committed to the subject and have worked hard to raise the profile of RE in the school. An RE programme for TY has been developed, and students in senior cycle take non-curricular RE. The school is open to the prospect of providing Leaving Certificate examination RE in the future, if there is a demand and the resources allow.
- All RE lessons are being delivered by qualified RE teachers. These teachers are professional and enthusiastic.
- There is a clear shared vision amongst the members of the RE department. The guiding vision for the school is promoted and supported through the many extra-curricular activities the RE department provides to the school community.
- The school has recently carried out a review regarding the future of RE as an examination subject for junior cycle students. Following this review, a decision has been made to implement the new RE Specification in September 2019.
- Each teacher has access to information and communications technology (ICT) in the classroom to enhance learner experiences and outcomes. It is recommended that peer observation takes place across the RE department to develop and share best practice in the use of ICT.
- Commendably, the RE team is supporting various initiatives running in the school such as the Droichead programme and a new academic student tracking system designed to raise attainment levels.
- All RE teachers recently attended a cluster day for Junior Cycle Religious Education, and the team have initiated planning for the implementation of the new Junior Cycle RE Specification in September 2019.

3. PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- Overall, the quality of collaborative planning is effective, with some highly effective individual lesson preparation noted.

- The RE plan has been diligently prepared and detailed schemes of work are in place, however, it is recommended that these working documents are reflective and progressive.
- There was evidence of a very good level of collegiality within the RE department. All resources are in a shared drive, which should continue to grow and develop particularly in the area of digital strategies. These resources should also be incorporated into the subject plan.
- Commendably, the subject co-ordinator's role is rotated annually to build leadership capacity within the department.
- The RE department meets formally four times throughout the year. It is recommended that teaching, learning and assessment practices are prioritised on the agenda of subject meetings.

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;

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 this very positive report and acknowledges the hard work and commitment of the members of the RE department to the subject and to raising the profile of RE in the school. The professionalism and enthusiasm of the teachers involved is recognised and commended by the board. The board is pleased to note that the overall quality of teaching and learning ranged from good to very good. The recommendations within this report will help to inform subject planning going forward and will also be considered in the context of school self-evaluation.

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 RE team will collaborate to build a bank of resources that can be accessed by staff to enhance learner outcomes. Planning for the implementation of the New Junior Cycle RE specification will form an integral part of all subject department planning meetings. The members of the RE department will work towards developing a formative assessment strategy to embed written formative assessment practices.