

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

**Subject Inspection in Science & Biology**

**REPORT**

<b>Ainm na scoile / School name</b>	St. Mary's C.B.S.
<b>Seoladh na scoile / School address</b>	Mill Park Road Enniscorthy Co Wexford
<b>Uimhir rolla / Roll number</b>	63560T

**Date of Inspection: 16-01-2019**



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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 Science & Biology 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.

## **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>	15 and 16-01-2019
<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

St. Mary's CBS Enniscorthy is a boys-only post-primary school with a current enrolment of 693 students. The school offers the Junior Cycle, an optional Transition Year (TY) programme, the Leaving Certificate programme, the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme and the Leaving Certificate Applied programme.

### SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

#### Findings

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment ranged from good to very good, and was excellent at times.
- Some good support for students' literacy development was evident.
- Whole-school support for the sciences is very good.
- Teachers work hard to support the provision of co-curricular and extra-curricular opportunities for students.
- Individual teacher planning and preparation and subject-group planning are both very good.
- Planning documents are of a high standard and are comprehensive in content.

#### Recommendations

- It is recommended that teachers revisit the implementation of the school's literacy and numeracy strategies to ensure that implementation is progressing as planned
- Teachers should plan for evidence-based improvement, by setting targets and listing the specific actions to be implemented to achieve these targets.

## DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### 1. TEACHING, LEARNING, AND ASSESSMENT

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment ranged from good to very good, and was excellent at times. Elements of very good teaching were observed in all lessons visited.
- All lessons were well planned and prepared and the required resources were to hand. Lessons were well structured with clear opening, developmental and closing phases.
- Differentiated learning outcomes were appropriately shared with students during the opening stages of lessons and these formed the basis of lesson content. In the best lessons, the learning outcomes were revisited at key transition points during the lesson and students had a clear sense of where the lessons were going and what was expected of them.
- In some lessons, it is important to ensure that new learning is appropriately consolidated during the close of lessons.
- Learning activities were student centred and meaningful, and resources prepared by teachers were of a high quality and designed to support learning.
- Students engaged very well in the learning process and were enabled to make significant contributions in all the lessons observed. Their behaviour and application to their work was very good at all times.
- The lessons were very interactive, and provided students with very good opportunities to engage with each other and with their teachers to explore topics and demonstrate their learning. There was a good balance between teacher-centred and student-centred phases in the lessons.
- Questioning techniques were well used. Questions ranged from simple lower-order to more challenging higher-order questions and students were appropriately challenged. Distribution of questions amongst students was good.
- Of particular note was the manner in which, in most lessons, the lesson material was progressively developed, in keeping with the differentiated learning outcomes. This approach supported an increasing level of challenge which encouraged students to achieve to the highest level that they were capable of. Overall differentiation was very good and teachers circulated and provided individual support to students on an ongoing bases.
- Ongoing in-class assessment was of a high standard and included the use of a variety of Assessment for Learning techniques, for example show-me boards, exit slips and traffic lights. Teachers also monitored students' responses to questioning, the quality of their engagement and contributions to discussions; and they responded to students' needs in a suitably supportive manner.
- Very good examples of written formative feedback were observed on students' written work. This feedback was affirming of students' efforts and designed to promote improvement.
- Some good support for students' literacy development was evident in one lesson. Overall, however, it is recommended that teachers revisit the implementation of the school's literacy and numeracy strategies to ensure that implementation is progressing as planned.

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

- Whole-school support for the sciences is very good.
- Four well-equipped and well-maintained laboratories are available to the science department. Use of these is maximised through preparation of an agreed timetable and all students have at least weekly access.
- Storage and preparation areas are tidy and well stocked and chemicals are stored in a safe manner.
- The school offers a full range of science subjects to senior students. TY provision is imaginatively based on modules such as forensic science, survival science and sports science, rather than being based on the individual science subjects.
- The time allocated to each science subject is appropriate and meets or exceeds subject specification requirements.
- There is a good system in place to formally assess students' progress and report to their homes.
- Teachers were very positive with the support provided by senior school management regarding the provision of resources and for continuing professional development, including support for membership of the Irish Science Teachers Association.
- Teachers work hard to support the provision of co-curricular and extra-curricular opportunities for students, to include participation in the ISTA Science quiz, and support for SciFest and Science Week events.

## **3. PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

- Individual teacher planning and preparation and subject-group planning are both very good. It is evident that a high-quality, collegial and mutually supportive science department is in place.
- The science department is very well led by the co-ordinator and there is very good sharing of the workload of the department amongst the members.
- Planning documents are of a high standard and are comprehensive in their content. The time required for each topic in Science and Biology is listed in the plans. However the plan for junior Science should be further developed, to match that for Biology, in describing a schedule for course delivery.
- It is very positive that minutes of science department meetings record discussion in a variety of areas, including curricular and pedagogical issues as well as house-keeping arrangements.
- Teachers work to common agreed schedules and common assessments are used to the greatest extent possible.
- Certificate examination outcomes are analysed and rationalised. While outcomes have been good, there is still a need to plan for evidence-based improvement, by setting targets and listing the specific actions to be implemented to achieve these targets.

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

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.

## 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
<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;

# **Appendix**

**SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT**

**Submitted by the Board of Management**

## **Area 1 Observations on the content of the inspection report**

The board of management welcomes the findings and recommendations outlined in the recent subject inspection of Science and Biology.

The board is pleased that the quality of teaching, learning and assessment was reported to range from good to very good and was observed as excellent at times. The board recognises that the science teachers work hard to support the provision of co-curricular and extra-curricular opportunities for students. The board is also pleased to see that the report noted the practice of very good individual planning and preparation of teachers, and also that the quality of subject group planning was highly commended in the report.

## **Area 2 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 welcomes the recommendations set out in the inspection report as a means of developing and expanding on the existing good practice of the Science and Biology team.

The science teachers are already proactive in incorporating the literacy and numeracy strategies set out in our school self-evaluation plan. However, the team will revisit the strategies to make sure that implementation is progressing as planned.

The board of management, as well as the Science team, welcome the constructive advice offered during the inspection days in relation to evidence-based improvement. The school will follow up on the advice given by setting targets and listing the specific actions to be implemented to achieve these targets. This advice will be applied to whole school planning as well.