

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection in Religious Education (RE)

REPORT

Ainm na scoile / School name	Good Counsel College
Seoladh na scoile / School address	New Ross Co Wexford
Uimhir rolla / Roll number	63610I

Date of Inspection: 05-04-2019



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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 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

Dates of inspection	04 and 05 April 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 eight class periods• Examination of students' work• Feedback to principal and relevant staff

School context

Good Counsel College is a voluntary secondary school for boys and is managed under the trusteeship of the Augustinian Schools Trust. The following programmes are available in the school: the Junior Cycle, an optional Transition Year (TY) and the established Leaving Certificate. The current enrolment is 838 boys.

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 in the lessons observed was very good, with some exemplary practice noted.
- The quality of whole-school provision and support for RE is very good; it is a core subject, and has a high profile in the school.
- Teachers' collaborative practice is effective overall, with areas for improvement identified in the subject plan.
- RE lessons were characterised by respectful and supportive interactions, and students were placed at the centre of the learning.
- Differentiation practices were good in most lessons, with scope for improvement in a significant minority of lessons.
- Overall, assessment practices were highly effective, the deeper embedding of written formative feedback would further support high quality teaching and learning.

Recommendations

- The RE subject plan should be developed into a flexible working document, designed to be used by teachers to reflect on and improve the quality of teaching and learning.
- Peer observation should be further developed and extended to support the sharing of effective differentiation practices, written formative feedback strategies, and the use of digital learning to support high quality teaching and learning.

DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. TEACHING, LEARNING, AND ASSESSMENT

- The quality of teaching and learning was very good overall, with lessons ranging from good to very good.
- A positive classroom atmosphere was evident. Lessons were characterised by respectful and supportive interactions, and a good balance was maintained between teacher instruction and student input.
- All lessons were well structured, with effective teacher management, and all teachers demonstrated significant subject knowledge.
- Teachers supported student learning effectively by framing lessons through learning intentions. Learning was most effective when teachers made time at the end of the lesson to assess and consolidate the learning achieved.
- The pace and pitch was appropriate in most lessons, however, in a few lessons the worksheets used were not at an appropriate level of challenge for many of the students in the class.
- Highly effective question-and-answer sessions took place in many lessons to guide and prompt students towards a deeper understanding of the topic. In a minority of lessons there was scope to ask more challenging higher-order questions, to deepen the knowledge, understanding, skills and attitudes required in the RE syllabus.
- Students were generally confident in answering questions, and in sharing their thoughts and opinions. In one highly effective lesson on the Last Supper, students asked higher-order questions conveying a deep level of engagement and interest.
- Best practice was observed when students' prior knowledge of subject specific key concepts were used to support learning. This knowledge was broadened and expanded through a variety of methodologies to support the aims and objectives of the RE syllabus.
- Active teaching and learning methodologies were a central feature of the majority of lessons. Group work was most effective when students were assigned clear roles, given instructions and allowed time to reflect at the end of the task.
- A game-based learning platform was used to optimum effect in a revision class. During this lesson students displayed high levels of motivation, engagement and enjoyment.
- In a small number of lessons, numeracy skills were supported and developed, for example, a Venn diagram was used to highlight the similarities and differences in an example of religious practice from two major world religions. This is highly effective practice.
- In another lesson, the jigsaw strategy was used at a highly effective level to deepen students' knowledge and understanding of people of faith. Discussions with students revealed that they enjoyed learning in this way, this strategy and other similar strategies should be developed and extended across the department.
- In one exam class, there was an appropriate focus on examination technique, and the layout of the junior certificate examination paper. Students were guided through the planning of answers, which supported their skills of interpretation and critical-analysis.

- In most lessons, effective resources were used, for example, video clips about a person of faith, and art work depicting the arrest of Jesus. In a small number of lessons visual resources such as photographs and video clips would have enriched the learner experience.
- In the most successful lessons the teacher created opportunities for students to draw upon experiences outside the classroom, and afforded students the opportunity to reflect on their learning.
- Effective oral formative assessment practices were evident in all lessons, however, there was scope to develop the level of written formative feedback in some of the copybooks examined.
- Purposeful homework was assigned in all lessons. In a few lessons, there was a choice of assignments given to support the different learning needs in the class. This practice should be further developed and extended across the department.
- Differentiation was effective in most lessons. Teachers gave individual support to those who were finding an assignment challenging, however, there was scope for improvement in the area of upward differentiation. Teachers should ensure that all students are being appropriately challenged so that they can reach their full potential as learners.

2. SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- The quality of leadership for learning is very good, and senior management provide valuable support to the RE department.
- Management along with the RE team, are open to the idea of providing Leaving Certificate RE in the future, if resources allow and if there is a demand from students.
- The overall provision for the subject on the school's timetable is very good. There is an even distribution of classes across the week, which supports continuity in teaching and learning.
- The RE team is supporting areas of development identified through the school's self-evaluation (SSE) process. For example, the team are engaging in peer observation, team teaching, the use of assessment for learning (AFL) strategies, and a focus on digital media in the classroom.
- Students' holistic development is fostered through the provision of a broad range of extra-curricular and co-curricular learning opportunities provided by the RE team.

3. PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- The overall quality of individual and collaborative planning is effective, with evidence of high levels of professional collaboration and collegiality among the RE department. The RE team is motivated, committed, and is working diligently to raise the profile of RE in the school.
- The RE team analyse examination results annually to assess progress, and to advise future planning.
- Commendably, the RE department meets formally throughout the year. Minutes of these meetings are shared with senior management and form part of the planning process. The RE team also meet during their own professional time and informally during lunch.

- The RE department share resources. This is a most worthwhile practice and should continue to grow and develop, particularly in the area of accessing engaging and purposeful resources.
- Good work been completed in preparing and implementing the RE plan. It is recommended that the department upload the plan into a shared drive, so that it becomes an active document which is reflective and responsive to the evolving needs of the students.
- The team have initiated planning for the implementation of the new Junior Cycle RE specification in September 2019. It is recommended that teachers collaborate to develop and plan units of learning.

The draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation were discussed with the 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;