

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection in Science

REPORT

Ainm na scoile / School name	Laurel Hill Secondary School FCJ
Seoladh na scoile / School address	South Circular Road Limerick
Uimhir rolla / Roll number	64260M

Date of Inspection: 28-03-2019



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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 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 checks 1 and 3 above. In relation to check 2, while the safeguarding statement has been ratified and is on display, the risk assessment component was not initially on display. This requirement was also met once the school became aware of the need to display the risk assessment.

SUBJECT INSPECTION

INSPECTION ACTIVITIES

Date(s) of inspection	27 & 28 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 5 class periods• Examination of students' work• Feedback to principal and relevant staff

School context

Laurel Hill Secondary School FCJ is an all-girls, post-primary school under the trusteeship of Le Chéile. The enrolment at the time of this evaluation was 619 students. In addition to the junior cycle the school offers a compulsory Transition Year programme, the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme and the Leaving Certificate.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

Findings

- The quality of teaching was very good with lessons being very well managed and students' behaviour being exemplary.
- Students' learning was very good with very high levels of engagement evident during all lessons; the use of digital technology by students was a very beneficial element of lessons.
- The teachers are wholly professional and committed in their work and this was evident in all lessons which were characterised by very high levels of support and care for students.
- The quality of assessment was good; providing more challenge for students will help to further develop their learning.
- Whole-school support is very good with a wide range of subjects on offer and a very beneficial emphasis placed on developing and supporting positive attitudes among students to studying science subjects.
- Planning for individual lessons was of very good quality and subject department planning was of good quality; deciding on one priority for each term, linked to the school's improvement plan, will help to further support subject planning.

Recommendations

- As a means of building on the existing strengths in assessment practices, promoting the development of more extensive answers and further encouraging students to justify their answers should be prioritised.
- The subject department should choose one teaching and learning priority each term, linked to the school's improvement plan, and systematically address the priority over the course of the term.

DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. TEACHING, LEARNING, AND ASSESSMENT

- The overall quality of teaching was very good and, similarly, the overall quality of learning was very good.
- Lessons were very well prepared. All of the necessary materials were readily to hand. All lessons were well structured and had clear intentions. The teachers all displayed very high levels of subject knowledge and dealt expertly with questions posed by students.
- A very suitable range of teaching methods was used. For example, questioning, teacher instruction, note taking, student performance of experimental work, the use of digital technologies, a focus on scientific literacy and affording students opportunities to present their work were some of the teaching methods that supported students' learning. There is some potential to build on the use of note taking by expanding it into note making. This is where the students would have to decide for themselves the notes they needed to make and where teachers would check at the end of lessons to assess whether students had successfully identified and noted the intended learning.
- Student collaborative work was used in many lessons, and it was a very beneficial feature. It was clear from observation that the students worked well together and that they were accustomed to working in teams. Some rooms were very purposefully laid out to facilitate collaborative work and discussion among students.
- Students demonstrated very good laboratory skills. In undertaking experimental work there was an appropriate emphasis on using the scientific method and students showed very good familiarity with it.
- The atmosphere in all lessons was very positive. There were very good relationships between the students and their teachers. Equally, the students enjoyed positive relationships and they interacted easily with each other.
- Lessons were very well managed. The students' behaviour was exemplary. Teachers demonstrated the highest levels of professional commitment and provided very high levels of individual support and care for students.
- Assessment practices were of commendable quality. They included the use of in-class questioning and the setting and correction of homework. In addition, a variety of digital tools are used to support both summative and formative assessment. Very good practice was seen across lessons where both the planned activities and the questions posed by the teacher challenged and encouraged the students to develop their thinking. As a means of building on this strength, promoting the development of more extensive answers and further encouraging students to justify their answers should be prioritised.
- Discussions by the inspector with students showed that they held positive views about their studies. They enjoyed studying Science and they demonstrated interest and enthusiasm. The answers that students gave to questions posed by their teachers and by the inspector were of very good quality.

2. SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- The quality of subject provision and whole-school support for Science was very good.

- The school offers a wide range of science subjects and there is a commendable emphasis on promoting positive attitudes among students to studying science subjects. The time allocated to Science meets with the relevant subject guidelines.
- There is very good support by the school for the teachers' continuing professional engagement, and very good engagement by the teachers in ongoing professional development. Clear records are maintained of the courses that teachers attend.
- Four laboratories, a preparation room, a storage room and an office comprise the science facilities. In addition, most teachers have their own base room. There are also outdoor facilities for ecological investigations. The school's support for the sciences is further exemplified by its provision, from its own resources, of a laboratory technician.
- Analysis of students' attainment in the certificate examinations is undertaken by the principal and shared with the teachers. This analysis provides a high-quality evidentiary basis to support subject planning and to plan for maximising students' examination attainment.
- The teachers' and the school's support for students' participation in a wide range of science-related extra-curricular activities is highly commendable. Students participate in a diverse range of activities such as the Aberdeen Angus competition, SciFest, BT Young Scientist and Technology Exhibition, Science Week and links with neighbouring businesses and third-level colleges.

3. PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- Planning for individual lessons was of very good quality and subject department planning was of good quality; deciding on one priority for each term, linked to the school's improvement plan, is recommended as this will help to further support subject planning.
- The science department places a high degree of emphasis on collaborative planning. For example, a recent initiative has been the setting up of a digital platform to enable the sharing of resources and plans. In discussions, teachers reported that subject meetings include time for them to discuss different approaches to teaching and learning. This approach is very worthwhile as it supports the teachers in working together and learning from each other.
- The school is participating in the Learning School Project, an action-research initiative funded by the Department of Education and Skills. The focus of the project in this school is on integrating the use of well-being indicators within subject areas and the science staff's engagement in this work was evident during lesson visits.

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;