

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

**Subject Inspection in Science**

**REPORT**

<b>Ainm na scoile / School name</b>	Sandymount Park Educate Together Secondary School
<b>Seoladh na scoile / School address</b>	The Sandymount Building 16 Simmonscourt Road Ballsbridge
<b>Uimhir rolla / Roll number</b>	68305F

**Date of Inspection: 01-10-2019**



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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 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.

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>Date of inspection</b>	01-10-2019
<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 three one-hour lessons</li><li>• Examination of students' work</li><li>• Feedback to principal, deputy principal and relevant staff</li></ul>

### School context

Sandymount Park Educate Together Secondary School is a new co-educational post-primary school located in a temporary building in Dublin 4. During the evaluation, the school was providing the Junior Cycle programme to first and second years only. There were seventy-eight students attending.

### SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

#### Findings

- The quality of the teaching, learning and assessment observed was very good.
- The teaching approaches used were excellent; the learning activities and experiences provided very good challenge, meaningful differentiation and good motivation for learners.
- Learning was greatly enriched by the very high level of student voice, excellent relationships and the engagement of all learners.
- Very good formative assessment practices enabled students to understand intended learning, the criteria for success and to improve their contributions to lessons.
- Whole-school support and subject provision for Science are very good, and there is very good leadership of teaching and learning, including professional collaboration.
- Planning is highly focused on agreed whole-school actions for teaching and learning and good practice in implementing the Junior Cycle Science specification; planning for developing students' note making skills and scientific skills is implicit and could be explicit.

#### Recommendations

- To build even further opportunities for learner independence, it is suggested that within the notes which are available digitally during and after lessons, teachers ensure that students are directed, according to ability, toward more opportunities for active note making.
- The very high level of existing attention to planning for students' early and progressive development of scientific skills could be outlined the yearly subject plans.

## DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### 1. TEACHING, LEARNING, AND ASSESSMENT

- The quality of the teaching, learning and assessment observed was very good. Through very skilful teaching and excellent lesson preparation, students of all ability were productively challenged throughout the lessons.
- The excellent sequence and structure of all lessons actively engaged learners through varied, purposeful, well-paced and interesting tasks that were designed to suit the interests and needs of the student cohort, while also being in accordance with the Junior Cycle Science curriculum specification. The teaching approaches used enabled students to attain very good understanding of scientific concepts through activities and scientific inquiry.
- The quality of learning was greatly enriched by very high level of student dialogue in lessons. Students were continually challenged to explain their understanding, to think out loud, and to justify their responses, and they successfully achieved those high expectations. This is generating very high quality learner outcomes in Junior Cycle key skills.
- Through the teacher's proficient use of shared learning intentions, combined with tasks that involved students in co-creating success criteria, students were highly involved in their learning and in reflecting on their individual progress.
- Each task that was set for students brought them along the journey towards understanding concepts. A highly effective flow of activities and well-planned differentiation enabled all to experience challenge and success. Worksheets were sometimes differentiated using colour-coding and the learners understood and sometimes self-selected where to begin working. Within the tasks, learners processed new information, linking it to previous information and, at times, they were given the opportunity to apply their knowledge in the next activity.
- Students displayed very good strengths in communicating learning. All learners, according to their ability, demonstrated their understanding competently. They contributed confidently through verbal engagement and in writing, including handwritten and digital formats.
- Students' written work in copybooks and laboratory reports was very good and greatly supported with teacher feedback and students' use of a well-designed copybook checklist. In using the checklist, students have clear criteria that they can apply to their own assignments.
- Individually, students availed of the ongoing opportunities to verbalise and to write their learning. They were observed listening carefully, thinking about the best way to phrase their contributions and making improvements to their written work.
- The teacher's assessment practices greatly progressed learning. Through a balance of in-class assessment and the correction of assignments, the teacher used focused criterion-based feedback that enabled learners to see where they needed to make improvements.
- Learner independence was promoted in the careful guidance to students during individual, group and whole-class activities to think critically about their own work relative to success criteria, checklists and teachers' digital notes. To further develop independence and reduce the possibility for unintentional reliance, it is suggested that with the lesson notes which are available digitally during and after lessons, teachers ensure that students are directed, according to ability, toward using active note making and recording learning in their own words on these.
- Learning was greatly enhanced by excellent relationships, the very high level of respect in which students hold fellow students and their very high regard for their teacher.

## 2. SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- There is very good whole school support for Science, including curricular access, timetabling, staff deployment and resourcing. The laboratory is very well resourced for student practical work and for digital teaching and learning. It provides an orderly, safe and stimulating learning environment where every student can engage in scientific investigation and research. All science lessons take place within.
- Leadership of teaching and learning is very good. The principal and deputy principal use the school self-evaluation (SSE) process to respond to students' existing and evolving needs and interests. They promote teaching that challenges and engages all learners. They achieve this through staff collaboration at weekly planning meetings. This has led to well-developed whole-school approaches to group work, homework, positive behaviour for learning, students' written work in copybooks and the use of digital devices and platforms.
- Ongoing teacher professional development is encouraged and facilitated, and the outcomes of this are shared through in-school collaboration.

## 3. PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- The overall quality of planning and preparation for teaching and learning in Science in this school is very good. Lessons were excellently prepared and very good practices are being employed in subject planning for the new Junior Cycle Science curriculum.
- The yearly subject plans for first and second years are very well-thought-out, using a combination of inter-related learning outcomes and concepts from the specification. In unpacking the curriculum learning outcomes for this cohort of students, the teacher has paid particular attention to action verbs, key skills and scientific skills to be developed. In accordance with the school's ethos, the plans also include opportunities for students to develop skills in ethical education.
- A high level of attention was paid to planning for students' early development of good foundation skills, scientific skills and the Nature of Science learning outcomes, including conducting investigations and research, identifying relationships in scientific data, producing accurate graphs and laboratory report writing; it would be a good idea to explicitly list the opportunities for the progressive development of these skills in the yearly plan for first year.
- The teacher has integrated the school improvement plan (SIP) into planning for science lessons. Using the SSE report and the SIP, lesson planning is very focused on provision for a good balance of teacher and student voice, active learning including group work, good differentiation, modelling strategies, using learning intentions and success criteria and enhancing skill development in all learners. This is highly commended.
- Commendably, the science teacher has forged professional collaborations with science teachers in other schools and uses this to share expertise and build capacity in implementing the new Junior Cycle Science curriculum. Work is ongoing to devise learning opportunities for students beyond the curriculum, including the established whole-school event, the 'festival of learning' and to becoming involved in *SciFest*.

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

# **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 the very positive findings of this inspection report. It is encouraging to see our vision and ethos evident in classroom practice, particularly the presence of the student voice, excellent relationships and skilful teaching that challenges all learners.

Staff collaboration around whole-school approaches to group work, written work, assessment, differentiation and the use of digital technology are contributing to student learning and wellbeing; we are pleased to see this recognised in the report.

The observation that students were highly involved in their learning, reflective and contributing confidently in a variety of formats is very encouraging in our ongoing efforts to realise the vision, aims and values of our developing school.

## **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 use of learning intentions, success criteria and careful guidance of individual, group and whole-class activities is acknowledged as promoting learner independence. We take on board the recommendation to build further opportunities for learner independence within our digital notes and will use our planning meetings to build capacity in this area.

The high level of attention to the development of good foundational and scientific skills will be made explicit and outlined in yearly plans going forward.

## 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;