Subject Inspection in Science

REPORT

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<tr>
<th>Ainm na scoile / School name</th>
<th>Saint Joseph's Community College</th>
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<tr>
<td>Seoladh na scoile / School address</td>
<td>Carrigaholt Road</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kilkee</td>
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<td></td>
<td>County Clare</td>
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<td>Uimhir rolla / Roll number</td>
<td>70880F</td>
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Date of Inspection: 17-10-2018
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.

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

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<tr>
<th>Date(s) of inspection</th>
<th>17-10-2018</th>
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| Inspection activities undertaken | • Observation of teaching and learning during 2 class periods  
• Examination of students’ work  
• Feedback to principal and relevant staff |

• Review of relevant documents  
• Discussion with principal and key staff  
• Interaction with students

School context

St. Joseph’s Community College is a co-educational post-primary school under the auspices of Limerick and Clare Education and Training Board. The enrolment at the time of the inspection was 135 students. The school, located in the seaside town of Kilkee, serves a broad, mainly rural, hinterland. In addition to junior cycle programmes, the Leaving Certificate, Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme and Post Leaving Certificate courses are offered by the school.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

Findings

• Teaching and learning were of very high quality.  
• Assessment practices and their use were of a very high standard.  
• Whole-school support and subject provision for the sciences is very good.  
• Recommendations from a previous inspection of Science have been successfully addressed in a systematic manner.  
• Lesson preparation and subject department planning were of very high quality.  
• The commitment, dedication and professionalism of the science teachers was evident from the quality of care they brought to their work.

Recommendations

• In the context of the new junior-cycle science specification and its emphasis on developing key skills, the very good work that has already been accomplished would be further supported by maintaining the focus on oral presentation skills and developing the use of peer teaching.

DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. TEACHING, LEARNING, AND ASSESSMENT

• In all lessons, the quality of teaching was very good. The approaches taken by the teachers placed the students and their learning needs at the centre of the learning experience.

• The lessons were very well prepared and this was evident, not just from the resources that were to hand, but from the manner in which the resources and learning activities supported students’ engagement and motivation. The teachers demonstrated expert subject knowledge and they used a range of wholly suitable teaching methods.

• All lessons were very well managed. The pacing and flow of the lessons ensured that student activity was central to the learning and that the learning took place in a relaxed but
progressive manner. Students’ behaviour was very good and it was evident that there was mutual respect among the teachers and the students.

- The atmosphere during lessons was very positive. All students’ contributions were affirmed. The teachers used suitable language and tone when speaking with the students and guiding their learning. It was especially notable that students were challenged by their teachers to develop their learning; this was done in a caring, supportive and purposeful manner.

- Students’ individual learning needs were at the core of the teaching. The teachers frequently moved around the room, engaging with students and supporting them individually. At a whole-class level, questioning was used expertly to engage students, to seek feedback and to positively challenge their thinking.

- It was clear from interaction with the students that they enjoyed learning Science. In discussing their experiences with the inspector, they showed very good knowledge of the topics under study. Moreover, they displayed very positive attitudes to the subject. Commendable work was done by the science teachers in ensuring that the learning experiences were enjoyable for all the students.

- During the lessons, the students worked very well together. They were accustomed to working collaboratively and it was clear that they were very familiar with classroom routines.

- In answering questions posed by their teachers, the students gave very high-quality answers and they demonstrated that what they had learned had changed their thinking. All of the lessons had a suitable emphasis on developing scientific inquiry skills among the students.

- The work done by the science teachers in elucidating the learning intentions for the specification has resulted in a beneficial focus on key skills. For example, oral presentation skills have been integrated into the classroom-based assessment that is part of the specification. In addition, these specific skills have been included as part of the school’s improvement plan. To further support this work, it is recommended that the focus on oral presentation skills be maintained and that students be introduced to peer teaching. Peer teaching is where students teach a concept or topic to their peers. This is often for a few minutes during a lesson and is usually done in small groups.

- Assessment practices are well established and this was evident from the records provided by the subject department as well as from looking at students’ journals and discussion with students. The assessment practices that were used during lessons were all of very high quality. In particular, formative assessment was used very well by the teachers to get feedback from the students on their learning and to help to make the students’ learning more explicit to them. In this way, students were aware of the areas where their learning needed further attention.

2. SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- Whole-school support and subject provision for Science are of a very high standard. For example, timetabling for Science meets with the specification requirements and the deployment of teachers is wholly appropriate.

- The number of teaching hours available to the school is dependent, in the first instance, on its student enrolment. Despite being a relatively small school, the school, commendably, offers, in addition to junior-cycle Science, Biology and Agricultural Science at senior cycle.

- The science laboratory is a suitable learning space, albeit of older construction and appearance. As such, it would benefit from a programme of refurbishment and updating as resources allow.
• There is very good support by the science teachers for students’ participation in science-related extra-curricular and co-curricular activities, for example, Maths Week activities, primary schools’ science quiz, and SciFest competition.

• The school is participating in the Department of Education and Skills School Excellence Fund and within this programme the science teachers have developed a project with the local primary school.

• There is good support for the teachers’ continuing professional development and evidence was presented of training and professional development in which the teachers have engaged. In addition, the school provides placements for student teachers.

• The use of evidence, which is an inherent component of the school’s self-evaluation process, is also embedded within the subject planning process, and this was clear from reading the science plan. As well as describing the methodologies that are appropriate to the teaching of science, the subject plan includes a column where teachers can provide evidence of which methods were used when teaching specific areas of the science specification. This is an approach that has been instigated by senior management and supported by the teachers.

3. PLANNING AND PREPARATION

• The quality of subject planning and lesson preparation was very good. There are appropriate arrangements in place to support subject planning.

• The quality of the subject plan, which was examined during the inspection, is very good. It shows the excellent work done by the teachers in planning for and implementing the new science specification. The manner in which the teachers have addressed matters such as the selection of teaching methods, supports for students with special educational needs, and work on addressing the recommendations from the previous inspection of Science, illustrates their highly committed, dedicated and professional approach.

• School self-evaluation priorities are integrated into the teachers’ plan and this is commended. In particular, the science teachers work together in a professional and collaborative approach. This approach is enriching and supportive as well as facilitating them in providing for students’ needs.

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.
Appendix

SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

Submitted by the Board of Management
Part A Observations on the content of the inspection report

The Board welcomes the positive affirmation of very high quality teaching and learning of Science in our school. The report also highlights very good whole school support and subject provision for the sciences and the very good quality of subject planning and lesson preparation.

The report acknowledges very good participation in extra-curricular and co-curricular activities SciFest, Maths week activities, Primary Science Quiz and participation in the Department of Education and Skills Excellence Fund with the local primary 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 Board of Management, Senior Management and teachers will collaborate and work towards implementation of the inspection recommendation and build on the very good work that has already been accomplished by maintaining the focus on oral presentation skills and developing the use of peer teaching.
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.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Example of descriptive terms</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very Good</td>
<td>Very good</td>
<td>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</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>Good; good quality; valuable; effective practice; competent; useful; commendable; good standard; some areas for improvement</td>
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<tr>
<td>Satisfactory</td>
<td>Satisfactory</td>
<td>Satisfactory; adequate; appropriate provision although some possibilities for improvement exist; acceptable level of quality; improvement needed in some areas</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fair</td>
<td>Fair</td>
<td>Fair; evident weaknesses that are impacting on pupils’ learning; less than satisfactory; experiencing difficulty; must improve in specified areas; action required to improve</td>
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<tr>
<td>Weak</td>
<td>Weak</td>
<td>Weak; unsatisfactory; insufficient; ineffective; poor; requiring significant change, development or improvement; experiencing significant difficulties;</td>
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