Subject Inspection in Science & Chemistry

REPORT

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<tr>
<th>Ainm na scoile / School name</th>
<th>St Anne’s Community College</th>
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<tr>
<td>Seoladh na scoile / School address</td>
<td>Killaloe Co Clare</td>
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<tr>
<td>Uimhir rolla / Roll number</td>
<td>70901K</td>
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Date of Inspection: 13-03-2018
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 & Chemistry 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

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<th>Date of inspection</th>
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| Inspection activities undertaken | • Review of relevant documents  
• Discussion with principal and key staff  
• Interaction with students  
• Observation of teaching and learning during three class periods  
• Examination of students’ work  
• Feedback to principal and relevant staff |

School context
St Anne’s Community College is a co-educational post-primary school operating under the auspices of Limerick and Clare Education and Training Board. At the time of the inspection the enrolment was 549 students. The school offers the Junior Cycle, an optional Transition Year, the Leaving Certificate and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programmes.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

Findings
• The overall quality of teaching was very good with lessons having a very positive atmosphere and being very well managed.
• The quality of students’ learning was very good with a particular strength being the emphasis that was placed on students developing their thinking skills and their decision-making skills.
• The overall quality of assessment was good with evidence of some very successful high-quality practices; extending the use of success criteria and goal setting by students would support the good work that has been done in academic tracking.
• The quality of whole-school support and subject provision is very good.
• Very well-prepared lessons, a progressive approach to subject planning and successful professional collaboration are significant strengths that supported the very good quality subject planning.

Recommendations
• To build on the work done with a number of year groups, the use of goal setting by students should be extended to all year groups.
• Peer collaborative review, which the science staff has begun, should be extended so that it is used in a systematic manner to support teachers in implementing the new junior cycle and in trialling new approaches to teaching and learning.
DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. TEACHING, LEARNING, AND ASSESSMENT

- The overall quality of teaching was very good. A key strength was the manner in which students in all lessons were encouraged and supported in developing their independent thinking and decision-making skills.

- The teachers all displayed a very high level of subject and pedagogical expertise. For example, they dealt expertly with questions posed by the students.

- Learning was well managed in all lessons. The students’ behaviour was exemplary. It was clear that well-established classroom and laboratory routines were in place. The students appeared comfortable and at ease in their classes.

- Group work was a very effective teaching strategy used during the lessons observed. Students’ interactions with the inspector revealed that they enjoyed working in groups and that they felt that it helped their learning.

- Where students worked in groups or individually, they benefited from excellent support and guidance from their teachers. Very good practice was evident where the teachers had prepared more advanced materials to give students who finished tasks before the other students.

- The quality of students’ learning was very good. This was evidenced by the quality of their answers and their engagement throughout lessons. In response to the inspector, students revealed that they held positive attitudes to the subject being studied and they were appreciative of the learning experiences they had enjoyed during junior cycle.

- It was evident from discussion with teachers and with students that high expectations are set for the students. This was also visible in the analysis that the teachers had done of the results obtained by the students in the certificate examinations and the standards that the teachers set for themselves in helping students to maximise their potential. This analysis, commendably, includes insightful commentary and actions to aid future development.

- In discussions with the staff, it was noted that academic tracking has been instituted as a formal school-wide practice and this is supported by a number of cohorts of students who are encouraged to set their own learning goals. To build on these good practices, it is recommended that the students be involved in systematically setting their own learning goals. It is advisable that students be supported to set goals that are not just about examination attainment but that also include areas such as skills development, self-confidence, working with others, and presenting their own work.

- Some samples of students’ work were viewed. These showed that homework is set and corrected regularly. Very good practice was observed where the students’ homework included a variety of tasks that engaged them in research. In addition, common assessments have been introduced following the last inspection in the sciences and this is commendable.

- Students’ learning was assessed most frequently during lessons through the use of questioning. Questioning was used well, with a variety of question types being used and with a clear emphasis on affording students the opportunity to develop their thinking skills.
2. SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- The timetable allocation for Science and for Chemistry meets with the relevant guidelines. The future allocation of time for Science is a matter that is under consideration by the school and the science staff is passionate in advocating for the most optimal allocation possible.

- The students are well supported by the teachers in accessing a range of science-related extra-curricular activities. The support given by the teachers to facilitating students in these activities is highly commendable.

- Science is an optional subject at junior cycle. The uptake by students is very good and the very high uptake is indicative of positive attitudes to the subject among students. Chemistry, similarly, enjoys very good levels of uptake at senior cycle.

- The previous inspection of the sciences offered one recommendation in relation to resource provision and this has been successfully addressed.

- The school is supportive of the teachers’ continuing professional development and the teachers have demonstrated a professional commitment to their ongoing professional learning and development.

- School self-evaluation is well supported by the structure the school has put in place with regard to curriculum leaders and these leaders report to the board of management periodically on the progress in their subject areas.

3. PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- The quality of planning, both for the lessons observed, and at the subject department level, was very good.

- The lessons that were observed benefited from a very high level of preparation undertaken by the teachers. All the requisite materials were to hand, suitable resources had been prepared and the lessons were well structured, with a logical flow, and were well paced.

- The structures that support subject department planning are wholly appropriate, and it was evident from the minutes of subject department meetings that the teachers meet regularly. In particular, it was noteworthy from the minutes of their meetings that both operational and pedagogical issues are included for discussion and agreement during meetings. This is very good practice.

- The work done by the science staff in planning for the new science specification at junior cycle is commendable. During the evaluation the teachers discussed with the inspector their thinking on and their work in unpacking of the learning outcomes and they have clearly done very commendable work. It would be beneficial to explore the possibility, when a suitable digital platform becomes available, of sharing with students the planning documents used by the teachers.

- The subject plans have been developed using the recommendations and advice from the last inspection in the sciences and this work has been completed to a high standard.

- Self-evaluation has become embedded as an important element of the science staff’s practice. A focus has been put on elements from Looking At Our School and the science teachers have done commendable work in developing their practices, aided by self-evaluation. One aspect of commendable significance is that the science teachers have begun the process of professional collaborative review. It is recommended that they extend this practice so that it becomes an embedded feature of their work. The aim of the practice is to support the teachers in their work implementing the new science specification at junior
cycle and to, more generally, support the ongoing development of new teaching approaches.

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 board of management of the school was given an opportunity to comment on the findings and recommendations of the report; the board chose to accept the report without response.
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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<th>Level</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Example of descriptive terms</th>
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<td>Very Good</td>
<td><strong>Very good</strong> 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 <strong>outstanding</strong> and provides an example for other schools of exceptionally high standards of provision.</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>
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<td>Good</td>
<td><strong>Good</strong> 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 <strong>very good</strong> standard.</td>
<td>Good; good quality; valuable; effective practice; competent; useful; commendable; good standard; some areas for improvement</td>
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<td>Satisfactory</td>
<td><strong>Satisfactory</strong> 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.</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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<td>Fair</td>
<td><strong>Fair</strong> 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.</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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<td>Weak</td>
<td><strong>Weak</strong> 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.</td>
<td>Weak; unsatisfactory; insufficient; ineffective; poor; requiring significant change, development or improvement; experiencing significant difficulties;</td>
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