

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection of Mathematics
REPORT

Saint Brendan's College
Belmullet, County Mayo
Roll number: 72050U

Date of inspection: 1 March 2016



A N R O I N N | D E P A R T M E N T O F
O I D E A C H A I S | E D U C A T I O N
A G U S S C I L E A N N A | A N D S K I L L S

**REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN MATHEMATICS**

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

Dates of inspection	29 February and 1 March 2016
Inspection activities undertaken <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review of relevant documents• Discussion with principal, deputy principal and teachers• Interaction with students	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Observation of teaching and learning during nine class periods• Examination of students' work• Feedback to principal, deputy principal and teachers

MAIN FINDINGS

- Good or very good learning and teaching was observed in most lessons with some exemplary practices noted and some scope for improvement in a small minority of lessons.
- Mathematics has a very positive profile in the school and students engaged enthusiastically with lesson activities.
- Subject provision and whole-school support for Mathematics are very good.
- The teachers of Mathematics are very well qualified and have engaged very well with continuing professional development (CPD).
- Students in need of additional numeracy support are catered for through a combination of well-co-ordinated in-house supports and external initiatives.
- Practices in relation to planning and preparation for Mathematics are very good.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- The very good practices observed in relation to active and collaborative learning should be further shared by the teachers of Mathematics with a view to extending these practices to all lessons.
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INTRODUCTION

St Brendan's College is a co-educational school operating under the auspices of the Mayo, Sligo and Leitrim Education and Training Board. The school participates in the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) initiative, the Department of Education and Skills action plan for educational inclusion. The programmes offered are the Junior Certificate, the Junior Certificate School Programme, an optional Transition Year (TY), the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme and the established Leaving Certificate.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- The standard of learning and teaching was good or very good in most of the lessons observed with some exemplary practices noted. There was scope for a wider range of methodologies to be used in a small minority of lessons to further engage students with their learning.
- Where best practice was observed, students' active engagement with the lesson content was central to the methodology used, a discovery approach to learning was evident and students' prior learning was used as the basis upon which to build further learning.
- Where practice was less effective, there was an over-emphasis on teacher presentation and students were passive for large sections of the lesson. In such cases, it is recommended that the balance of the lesson be weighted more heavily in favour of student activities, both individual and collaborative, to facilitate deeper engagement with the lesson content.
- There was considerable consistency observed in relation to lesson structure. Learning outcomes were used to give students a focus for the lesson in most cases and, commendably, these learning outcomes were revisited at the end of lessons for the purpose of recapitulating the content covered and the skills developed.
- Pair work was incorporated to very good effect in some lessons and student engagement with such activities ranged from good to exemplary. In the best examples, students were issued with clearly defined tasks, timeframes for completion were set and there was a requirement for students to provide feedback to the class. The further sharing of best practice in relation to these types of activity is recommended.
- Homework was issued in all of the lessons observed and students' work was well presented in the sample of copybooks reviewed. There are good routines in place with regard to the correction of homework and it is evident that students are conscientious when it comes to making corrections to their work.
- All of the lessons observed were conducted in an atmosphere of mutual respect and all interactions between students and teachers were positive and constructive.
- Teachers have created stimulating learning environments for students. In most classrooms, students' own work is on prominent display in the form of project work. This content is complemented by a range of additional visual resources including posters and charts containing key terminology. These resources were referred to by teachers in a number of cases to further support the lesson content.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- Subject provision and whole-school support for Mathematics are very good. Timetable provision is in line with syllabus requirements in all year groups and there is a generous provision of six periods per week for sixth-year students. The teachers of Mathematics demonstrate very high levels of volunteerism and commitment to their students by providing additional tuition outside of regular class-contact hours as needs are identified.
- First-year and TY students are taught in a mixed-ability setting in line with best practice. In other year groups, students are taught in level-specific classes where concurrent timetabling facilitates the movement of students between levels where necessary. Students are encouraged to study at the highest level possible. Where students wish to change level, there are good procedures in place to ensure that the decision is made in a consultative and well-informed manner.
- The teachers of Mathematics all have a long association with the school, have a very good qualifications profile and have engaged enthusiastically with CPD. Of particular note is the school's involvement in an instructional leadership course in which six members of staff, including the principal and deputy principal, have participated. Involvement in such initiatives demonstrates a progressive approach, rooted in delivering the best possible outcomes for students.
- A range of supports is in place for students who are experiencing difficulties with numeracy. One-to-one and small-group tuition are the main forms of support used. This provision is augmented by a number of numeracy initiatives supported by the North Mayo School Completion Programme and facilitated by teachers from within the school.
- The mathematics department is very well resourced. All classrooms are equipped with a data projector and sound system and all classrooms have internet access through both hard-wired and wi-fi connections. In addition, all teachers have been supplied with laptop computers for use in lessons. Other resources, including visualisers, subject-specific software and a range of practical mathematical equipment are available for use in lessons.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- The standard of planning and preparation for Mathematics is very good. The mathematics department is co-ordinated on a rotating basis in line with good practice. Meetings are held regularly throughout the year and the minutes of these meetings are retained in the subject department folder.
- A comprehensive planning document has been compiled that gives a very good overview of how the teaching of Mathematics is organised in the school. Particularly good practice is evident in the identification of cross-curricular links with other subjects.
- Schemes of work for each year group and for each level of study are well developed and are stated in terms of learning outcomes. Teachers demonstrate a reflective approach to short-term planning. All schemes of work are annotated with comments from teachers in relation to progress and challenges. The next stage of development should include the further tailoring of resources, methodologies and assessment modes to individual learning outcomes.
- The aims and objectives of the TY mathematics programme are well founded and are rooted in the consolidation of learning from junior cycle and the further development of positive dispositions towards Mathematics. As the programme continues to evolve, a key-

assignment approach should be adopted that further develops students' capacity to learn both independently and in collaboration with their peers.

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.