

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection of Science and Biology
REPORT

Hazelwood College
Dromcollogher, County Limerick
Roll number: 71850B

Date of inspection: 25 February 2013



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 SCIENCE AND BIOLOGY**

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

Date of inspection	25 February 2013
Inspection activities undertaken <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review of relevant documents• Discussion with principal and teachers• Interaction with students	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Observation of teaching and learning during five class periods• Examination of students' work• Feedback to principal and teachers

MAIN FINDINGS

- The overall quality of teaching and learning observed was of a high standard.
- Lessons were well managed by teachers resulting in a positive learning environment with very positive affirmation of student effort.
- Information and communication technology (ICT) and other visual supports were integrated effectively into lesson delivery.
- The science facilities are well organised and maintained by the science team.
- Lessons observed had a high level of preparation and planning.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- The science team should collectively review how the students' record their practical activities with reference to how the learners' skill development in this area is achieved over time.
 - The current planning documents should be reviewed by the team and a revised template agreed.
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INTRODUCTION

Hazelwood College is a co-educational school, situated in Dromcollogher, County Limerick. At the time of the inspection, it had an enrolment of 561 students. It offers a broad curriculum which includes the Junior Certificate and an optional Transition year (TY) programme. At senior cycle, students can choose between the Leaving Certificate, the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) and the Leaving Certificate Applied Programme (LCA).

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- The overall quality of teaching and learning observed was of a high standard. The learning outcome was stated in all lessons, which is very good practice. In some lessons, this was also written on the board in a dedicated section called “today we will learn”, which was very effective and helped focus student learning. A definite lesson summation, which referenced the initial learning outcome and aided consolidation of student learning, was a feature of some of the lessons observed. Such an approach should be adopted for all lessons.
- Teachers clearly delivered new material in the lessons, which included the use of subject specific key terms. At the outset, linkages with previous learning were established. This was done through the use of both lower and higher order questioning. Some good examples of probing to ascertain a student response were also observed. The students, in their responses, used subject-specific key terms effectively.
- A range of methodologies was used which allowed for balance between teacher inputs and student activity. Engagement was optimum when the methodologies used required the learners to be active in their learning. This was achieved through the use of well-prepared activities and through practical activities in which the students worked in groups of two or three students. When ICT and other visual supports were used, it was to support lesson delivery and stimulate student interest in the topics. In some instances, where student engagement was not optimum, room choice, organisation and layout should be reviewed.
- Teachers gave clear instructions to the learners throughout the lessons observed. Student work and progress with assigned tasks were monitored by the teacher, with help and guidance given when required. Teachers could further maximise the potential of student activities and tasks in the lessons in order to challenge the learner. They should also promote targeted discussion and questioning in order to further aid course integration.
- Students were able to complete the practical tasks assigned, with records of this work written in a variety of pro-forma books. The science team should collectively review how the students’ record their practical activities with reference to how the learners’ skill development in this area is achieved over time.
- Classroom management was effective and was supported by teacher movement around the room during all lessons observed. A positive rapport was evident between teacher and student with affirmation of student effort a key feature of the lessons observed. The pace of lesson delivery, the content and time management were good.
- The oral correction of homework occurred at the start of lessons. New homework, which was assigned in all lessons, was designed to reinforce the classwork for the students. In some instances only, students recorded information in relation to homework in their journals.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- Science and Biology are allocated the recommended contact time as outlined in the respective syllabuses. However, there are many different combinations of single and double lessons in operation in the school. The science team, in consultation with management and with reference to recommendations in the syllabuses, should discuss this and decide which approach to adopt.
- Junior Science is a core subject with a large percentage of senior students choosing to study Biology for their Leaving Certificate. Student choice dictates the way the option bands at senior cycle are created yearly, which is good practice.
- The school has two well-organised and well-maintained laboratories which are located beside each other. They share a preparation area, which is also well organised. A demonstration room located near the laboratories completes the science facilities available to the team. All facilities are ICT enabled with a good range of materials and equipment available for the delivery of the specific syllabuses. The area outside the laboratories has specific science noticeboards which are used to display student work and photographs of student fieldtrips and achievements and to disseminate information to the students, which is very positive.
- The science team operates a policy of regular testing of the students. In addition to the main assessment points yearly for each year group, class tests are administered on the completion of a unit of work. Common tests are used regularly, with modifications made when required to address student needs. Revision and examination plans are given to certificate examination classes to aid their study. Teachers retain records of all assessments, which is good practice.
- Science students are encouraged to enter competitions such as the Young Scientist, Young Writer and Scifest. The school also competes in quizzes during Science Week each year. Students also benefit from fieldtrips, visiting speakers and various demonstrations. The commitment of the science team is acknowledged.
- The science team has participated in a range of professional development activities. Teachers should continue to engage in professional development activities.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- A subject convenor has been appointed to co-ordinate the science department. The position is rotated among the team, which is good practice.
- Science department meetings are held each term and minutes are recorded. In addition, it is acknowledged that many informal meetings take place on a regular basis, which is positive.
- The current plans are the result of significant work and the collaboration of the science team. The integration of strategies and information relevant to student needs in the plans is very good practice. To develop them further, it is recommended that a more integrated approach showing linkages between topic lists, timeframes, learning outcomes, methodologies (including practical work), resources and assessment be agreed.

- Individual teacher planning and preparation were to a very high standard in the lessons observed. Resources including worksheets, practical and ICT equipment were sourced and available for use.

The draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation were discussed with the 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.