

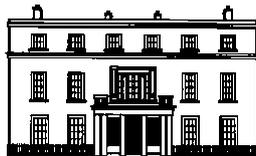
An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

**Subject Inspection of Mathematics
REPORT**

**St Brendan's Community School
Birr, County Offaly
Roll number:91491L**

Date of inspection: 4 December 2013



**AN ROINN | DEPARTMENT OF
OIDEACHAIS | EDUCATION
AGUS SCILEANNA | AND SKILLS**

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

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

Date(s) of inspection	4 and 5 December 2013
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 14 class periods• Examination of students' work• Discussion with the learning-support co-ordinator• Feedback to principal, deputy principal and teachers

MAIN FINDINGS

- The quality of teaching and learning varied from good to very good with a number of lessons featuring teaching and learning of the highest quality.
- Traditional teaching was the preferred method of lesson delivery in the majority of lessons. Where alternative approaches were adopted, the quality of student learning was at its best.
- Classroom management, student behaviour and engagement were excellent throughout.
- Timetabling provision for Mathematics is very good and the mathematics department enjoys the strong support of management.
- Assessment practices, particularly those relating to formal assessments, are very good
- Subject department planning in Mathematics is very good and features a commendable level of collaboration.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- More active teaching methods, student-centred activities and incisive teacher questioning, designed to develop the students' problem-solving skills and to create a realistic context for the lesson content should be incorporated into all mathematics lessons.
 - The size of the mathematics department should be curtailed and the current practice whereby a number of teachers teach Mathematics to one class group should be discontinued.
 - One of the teachers should be appointed to act as information and communication technology (ICT) co-ordinator for the department, to identify appropriate resources, recommend strategies for their integration into teaching and learning and source appropriate training.
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INTRODUCTION

St. Brendan's Community School is a coeducational post primary school with an enrolment of 901 students. It is the only post-primary school in the town of Birr and provides a broad and balanced curriculum which includes Transition Year (TY), the Leaving Certificate Applied and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- The quality of teaching was, in the vast majority of cases, very good with a number of lessons featuring teaching of the highest quality. All of the lessons were taught with great enthusiasm and the best lessons featured strategies to explore and exploit connections between the curricular strands and to engage the students in discussions, group and pair work.
- The majority of lessons were traditional in style with the lesson content being delivered by the teachers and the students working on assigned tasks. The many resources prepared in advance of the lessons were primarily used to support this delivery model and opportunities to use the resources to deepen student understanding were not always exploited. Future department planning in Mathematics should address this anomaly. In particular, strategies to make more innovative use school's ICT infrastructure in facilitating student learning should be agreed and implemented.
- The value of resource integration in shifting the focus from teaching to active learning was evident in some lessons. In one instance, for example, individual whiteboards were used by students, working in pairs, to design problems. The problems were then exchanged with other pairs who would attempt to solve them. This innovative approach engaged the students in challenging and meaningful tasks and led to learning of a very high quality.
- Student learning varied from good to very good with a small number of instances where the learning was excellent. Where learning was best, the lessons featured incisive teacher questioning that required the students to think deeply and to give rigorous responses. This type of questioning, which develops the students' problem-solving skills and creates a realistic context for the lesson content should feature as standard across all mathematics lessons.
- Classroom management, student behaviour and engagement were of a very high standard. Teachers and students alike demonstrated positive attitudes to Mathematics and all interactions during lessons were respectful and warm.
- Practices relating to the ongoing assessment of student progress are very good. Homework is regularly assigned and corrected. The students' copybooks are well maintained and, in the majority of cases, appropriately monitored.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- Timetabling provision for Mathematics is very good. The time allocated to teaching Mathematics is generous and the scheduling of Mathematics classes is designed to maximise student access to the level most appropriate to their needs and abilities. There is a slight anomaly in the time allocated to Mathematics in second year but management are committed to addressing this in future timetables.

- Whole-school assessment and homework policies are in place and formal assessments practices in Mathematics are very well managed. Assessment events are held regularly and the members of mathematics department collaborate very effectively in creating common papers with agreed marking schemes and in ensuring that the assessment materials are consistent, appropriate to the syllabus and of a suitable standard.
- The mathematics department is strongly supported by management. The mathematics department is well resourced and all mathematics classrooms have access to the school's ICT infrastructure and to a wide range of materials to support the type of teaching and learning espoused by Project Maths. The decision by management to cluster the majority of mathematics classrooms in one area of the school is most praiseworthy as it adds to the subject's profile and provides the teachers with easy access to the department's various resources.
- The qualifications profile of the mathematics department is very good. However, management should curtail the size of the department so that the current practice whereby a number of teachers teach Mathematics to one class group should be discontinued. The members of the department are committed to ongoing continuing professional development and have attended the workshops provided as part of the national rollout of Project Maths in full
- Procedures for identifying and supporting students with special education needs or requiring additional support in Mathematics are very good.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- Subject department planning in Mathematics is very well established. The department's various activities are managed by a very able and committed co-ordinator who receives very good support from the members of the department. While it is school policy that the role of co-ordinator rotates between the members of the department, the current incumbent should remain in place until Project Maths is fully embedded.
- A very good subject department plan for Mathematics has been developed and it represents an excellent framework to support the department's various activities. Future enhancements to the plan should include clear statements on the preferred methods for teaching the key skills and common operations in Mathematics and include strategies for teaching the different curricular strands in a more connected fashion than is currently the case.
- Individual teacher planning for lessons was, in almost every case, very good and in some cases excellent. The majority of lessons, however, would have benefited from the inclusion of more student-centred activities and higher-order teacher questioning. These should be a focus of future lesson planning in Mathematics.
- As mentioned earlier in this report more innovative use should be made of resources, particularly ICT, in enhancing teaching and learning. It is therefore recommended that one of the teachers should be appointed to act as ICT co-ordinator for the department. The role of ICT co-ordinator should involve identifying appropriate resources, recommending strategies for their integration into teaching and learning and sourcing appropriate training.

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.

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