

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection of Religious Education
REPORT
Pobalscoil Iosolde
Palmerstown, Dublin 20
Roll number: 91302F

Date of inspection: 26 April 2013



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

REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

Dates of inspection	25, 26 April 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 four class periods• Examination of students' work• Feedback to principal and teachers

MAIN FINDINGS

- The quality of teaching in the lessons observed varied from fairly good to very good.
- Students' learning and attainment in Religious Education (RE) is generally good or very good.
- The quality of whole-school provision and support for RE is very good.
- There is a strong subject department with fully qualified and dedicated teachers.
- Subject planning is of a very good quality.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- To ensure the best learning outcomes for students, it is recommended that the principles of assessment for learning (AfL) be integrated into teachers' classroom practice.
- In planning lessons, teachers should ensure that they provide ample opportunities for oral expression by students and that their questioning techniques foster reflection and higher-order thinking.
- The regular practice of professional collaborative review of teaching and learning, including peer observation of lessons, is recommended.
- The possibility of offering RE as a Leaving Certificate subject should be kept under review.

INTRODUCTION

Pobalscoil Iosolde is a co-educational community school which has an enrolment of 469 students in the current school year. The school participates in the DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools) programme and offers a wide range of curricular programmes: the Junior Certificate, the Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP), an optional Transition Year (TY) programme, the established Leaving Certificate, the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA), and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP). RE is offered in all year groups, and is taken as an examination subject in the Junior Certificate and LCA examinations. The scope of this subject inspection is the teaching and learning of RE in junior cycle classes.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- Overall, the quality of teaching in the lessons observed varied from very good to fairly good. Where the teaching was very good, careful thought had been given to the learning intention, and to selecting appropriate and challenging tasks for the students.
- The lessons observed were generally well prepared. A range of methodologies was used, including group work and pair work. In one lesson team teaching with a science teacher was used to introduce the idea of world views on creation.
- A good range of well-chosen teaching resources was used, including slides, video clips and printed handouts. The teachers used information and communication technology (ICT) competently and to good effect.
- The atmosphere in the classrooms was good, and attractive learning environments had been created with displays of laminated pictures, keys words and example of students' work. Teachers communicated effectively with their students and were affirming of their efforts.
- In all lessons, the topic was shared with the students at the beginning of the lesson. In some lessons the intended learning outcomes were more specific than in others and were written on a slide. It is recommended that, in line with the principles of AfL, learning objectives should always be clear, specific and capable of assessment.
- In some cases, the learning outcomes were revisited and checked at the end of the lesson, as is best practice. It is recommended that time be left at the end of all lessons to check that learning outcomes have been attained.
- There was some high quality whole-class instruction in the lessons observed. However, in most lessons there was scope for greater oral expression by the students themselves and for more opportunities for them to clarify and deepen their understanding of the topics through discussion and higher-order thinking.
- It is recommended that questioning techniques associated with AfL be employed to promote students' reflection on their learning and fluency in expressing their understanding of the course material. For example, "think, pair and share", "no hands up" and "wait time" should be interspersed frequently in lessons.
- In all lessons, there was a commendable focus on key words and concepts. To build on this strength, it is recommended that teachers be attentive to the opportunities to reinforce and develop students' reading skills, for example by pre-teaching words in texts to be read in class.

- Good connections were made with the students' prior learning, and students' answering of questions and their written work in copybooks showed that the syllabus content was being covered systematically.
- Further evidence of the quality of students' learning is provided by good attainment in the Junior Certificate examinations. Particularly commendable is the high proportion of students who take higher level papers.
- Homework is given regularly and is corrected, sometimes with comments-only marking. Common tests are set across class groups at the conclusion of topics and at the end of term. Sample tests reviewed during the inspection were of a very good quality.
- Students are sometimes given the opportunity to assess their own learning by completing end-of-year reflection sheets. It is recommended that the RE department develop further the practice of student self-assessment and peer-assessment.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- Subject provision and whole-school support for RE is very good. The subject has a central place in the school curriculum and is supported by a very good RE policy. The timetable allocation to the subject is as recommended for junior cycle.
- There is a strong RE subject department in the school, with four qualified teachers on staff. Two of them are teaching junior cycle curricular RE in the current school year.
- Curricular RE is complemented and supported by the school chaplaincy department, which aims to expand and develop what is studied in the classroom. Social inclusion and faith in action projects serve as co-curricular supports for RE.
- Resources for the teaching of RE, including ICT, are very good. The teachers share the resources which they prepare in an electronic folder.
- At present, the curriculum leading to certificate examinations is followed in junior cycle and in LCA. The school management is open to the idea of offering RE as a Leaving Certificate subject; it is recommended that this be kept under consideration and implemented as resources permit.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- There is a very good whole-school approach to subject planning, and the RE plan is of a very high quality. There are detailed schemes of work for each year group, including learning objectives and time frames.
- Records of subject department meetings are kept and there is an action plan for RE which sets out long-term objectives for the subject. It is recommended that the department's action planning should be extended to include reflection on aspects of teaching and learning. The practice of professional collaborative review of teaching and learning, including peer observation of lessons, is recommended.

The board of management 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.

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Appendix

School response to the report

Submitted by the Board of Management

Area 1: Observations on the content of the inspection report.

Pobalscoil Iosolde would like to acknowledge the role of the subject inspection process as part of our commitment to excellence and ongoing evaluation. In particular, we are pleased that the inspection highlighted the high standard of teaching and learning in our school. We appreciated that the inspection acknowledged the following.

1. The central place of RE in the curriculum at Pobalscoil Iosolde which is supported by a very good RE policy.
2. The quality of whole school provision and support for RE.
3. The strong subject Department with fully qualified and dedicated teachers.
4. The very high quality of subject planning.
5. The good quality of teaching.
6. Students' learning and attainment in RE, particularly the high proportion of students who take higher level papers.
7. The very good range of resources and use of ICT in the RE department.
8. The good atmosphere in classrooms and the attractive learning environments.
9. That curricular RE is supported by the school chaplaincy and faith in action projects.

The R.E. department along with the management of the school takes satisfaction in the positive acknowledgements made in the report and look forward to reviewing and implementing the recommendations of the report.

Area 2: Follow-up actions planned or undertaken since the completion of the inspection activity to implement the findings and recommendations of the inspection

1. The use of AfL techniques will continue to form part of teaching RE at Pobalscoil Iosolde and the use of it extended.
2. Teachers will continue to provide all students with opportunities for oral expression and the promotion of higher order thinking in lessons.
3. The RE department will maintain the practice of professional collaboration and if facilitated would be open to the possibility of peer observation.
4. Where resources allow the possibility of offering RE as a Leaving Certificate Examination subject will be kept under review by school management.