

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

**Subject Inspection of Science and Chemistry
REPORT**

**Holy Faith Secondary School
Belgrove Road, Clontarf, Dublin 3
Roll number: 60750J**

Date of inspection: 16 October 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 CHEMISTRY

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

Dates of inspection:	15 and 16 October 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 nine class periods• Examination of students' work• Feedback to principal and teachers

MAIN FINDINGS

- The quality of teaching and learning was very good in almost all lessons observed.
- Lessons were well planned and delivered in a supportive and affirmative manner.
- Students were purposefully engaged in a variety of learning activities and very good use was made of questioning strategies to assess students' progress and to develop new content.
- Practical activities were very well organised and supported the development of students' skills and understanding.
- The wide range of science subjects and the very good facilities are evidence of the very good whole-school support for the provision of science.
- Subject department planning is well established and it was evident in the course of the inspection that the science teachers work in a collegial and collaborative manner.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- In order to build on the very good attention given to the development of students' scientific literacy, it is recommended that the science department develop strategies for supporting students' general literacy development such as in the use of non-technical scientific language.

INTRODUCTION

Holy Faith Secondary School is a voluntary secondary school with a current enrolment of 638 girls. The school provides the Junior Certificate programme, a compulsory Transition Year (TY) programme, the Leaving Certificate programme and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- The quality of teaching and learning was very good in almost all lessons observed. An active, student-centred approach was evident in the manner in which students were engaged in a variety of learning activities.
- Very good planning and preparation for lessons was evident in the advance preparation of good teaching resources and in the structure and sequencing of lesson content.
- Lessons were very well managed in a supportive and affirmative atmosphere. Classroom routines have been well established and students were very cooperative and attentive in line with the high expectations set by their teachers.
- The focus and aim of lessons were very clear in all cases and students were purposefully engaged from the outset. In some cases, the intended learning outcomes were explicitly shared with students at the start of lessons.
- Very good use was made of questioning strategies to assess students' progress and to develop new content. In particular, good use was made of open-ended questions to probe students' understanding of the lesson content. Good questioning strategy also required most students to provide some input during the lessons.
- A strong focus on homework was evident in the attention given to the correction and monitoring of students' work during lessons. Very good practice was evident in the use of formative feedback in students' laboratory notebooks.
- Practical activities were very well organised and supported the development of students' skills and understanding.
- A good level of differentiation was evident in the one-to-one interactions between teachers and students and in the questions directed towards individual students.
- Lesson content was clearly communicated. Very good use was made of the information and communication technology (ICT) facilities to develop lesson content.
- Very good attention was given to the development of students' scientific literacy in terms of the correct use and understanding of scientific terms and language. In order to build on this good practice, it is recommended that the science department develop strategies to support students' general literacy development such as in the use of non-technical scientific language.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- The quality of whole-school support for the provision of science is very good.
- The school provides a wide range of science subjects. All first-year students study science before choosing whether or not to continue with the subject in second and third

year. Leaving Certificate students have an open choice of four Leaving Certificate science subjects which are also available as part of the TY programme.

- The school's three laboratories are well equipped and laid out. All laboratories have good ICT facilities and other laboratory resources are provided as required. Management is conscious of the pressures on laboratory space due to the high uptake of science subjects. It is considering plans to enhance the storage space and to facilitate the conduct of some practical activities in classrooms.
- Good provision for health and safety is evident in the provision of relevant health and safety equipment, and the inclusion of a section dealing with safety issues in science in the school's health and safety statement.
- The school supports teachers' continuing professional development by facilitating attendance at external in-service events and by organising in-school training.
- Timetabling provision for science subjects is appropriate. Some science classes, particularly in second year, are shared between two teachers. Good coordination between the relevant teachers facilitates the successful operation of this system.
- Teachers are appropriately deployed in line with their qualifications and experience.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- The quality of planning and preparation is very good.
- Subject department planning is well established. Two teachers share the responsibilities of coordinating the work of the science department. It was evident in the course of the inspection that the science teachers work in a collegial and collaborative manner. For example, teachers work very closely to maximise laboratory access for students to conduct practical activities.
- A well-coordinated approach is evident in the science plan which details schemes of work for each year and arrangements for common assessments. Good practice is evident in the schemes which outline the work to be completed in terms of intended learning outcomes, necessary resources and assessment strategies. Analysis and reflection on students' assessment outcomes is also a feature of good planning for science.
- Planning for science is conducted through regular formal department meetings and ongoing informal collaboration between the science teachers. There is also regular liaison with school management on relevant issues.
- The laboratories are very well organised and good systems are in place for the upkeep of the laboratory resources.
- The curricular provision of science subjects is complemented by a high level of extra-curricular activities such as science trips and participation in various competitions.
- Planning for science is supported by the development of an ICT based science network which facilitates the sharing of resources. Some good use has also been made of ICT to enhance students' access to science-related materials. It would be worthwhile to build on the good practice already established and explore further ways in which ICT can be used to support subject planning and interaction with students.

- Peer observation has been discussed as an initiative at whole-school level. It is suggested that the science department explore the potential of peer observation for further sharing and enhancing of good practice.

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 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.

Appendix

SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

Submitted by the Board of Management

Area 1: Observations on the content of the inspection report

The Board welcomes the comprehensive and overwhelmingly positive report on the teaching and learning of Science and Chemistry in Holy Faith.

The Board is pleased that the school's emphasis on teaching and learning was highlighted and endorsed. The excellent facilities provided by the school for the teaching of Science was noted also the collegial and collaborative manner of the science teachers.

The Board commends the teachers for their work and is appreciative of the excellent qualities of the teachers as noted by the Inspector. The Board is aware of the high standard set by the science staff for their pupils and commends the positive communications between students and teachers as noted.

The Board is very happy to note the positive remarks and comments on the use of ICT facilities and the quality and maintenance of the schools laboratories.

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

The Board is happy that the main recommendation regarding literacy has been considered and is being addressed.