

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**  
**Department of Education and Skills**

**Subject Inspection of Religious Education**  
**REPORT**

**St Paul's Secondary School**  
**Monasterevin, County Kildare**  
**Roll number: 61702D**

**Date of inspection: 2 October 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**

<b>Dates of inspection</b>	1, 2 October 2013
<b>Inspection activities undertaken</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Review of relevant documents</li><li>• Discussion with principal and teachers</li><li>• Interaction with students</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Observation of teaching and learning during five class periods</li><li>• Examination of students' work</li><li>• Feedback to principal and teachers</li></ul>

**MAIN FINDINGS**

- The quality of whole-school provision and support for Religious Education (RE) is very good.
- Good progress has been made in developing a subject plan for RE.
- The RE subject department consists of two fully-qualified and committed teachers, who work well together.
- The quality of teaching in the lessons observed was fairly good, with some good practice and definite scope for improvement.
- Students' learning and attainment in RE are generally good or fairly good.

**MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS**

- It is recommended that there be a sharper focus on specific and appropriately challenging learning outcomes in every lesson.
  - In their planning, teachers should focus on developing a wider range of teaching methodologies and on embedding the principles and practice of assessment for learning (AfL) in all lessons.
  - Opportunities should be provided in every lesson for students to develop their literacy skills and in particular their oral communication skills.
  - An analysis of the certificate examination results in RE should be carried out annually and targets for improvement should be set.
-

## **INTRODUCTION**

St Paul's Secondary School is a voluntary secondary co-educational school under the trusteeship of the Bishop of Kildare and Leighlin. In addition to the Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate programmes, the school offers the Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP), an optional Transition Year programme and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme. The school participates in the DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools) action plan. At the time of the evaluation, there were 301 students enrolled in the school.

While a programme of religious education is offered in all year groups, students do not study the Leaving Certificate RE examination syllabus. This evaluation is concerned only with the preparation of students for Junior Certificate examinations in the subject.

## **TEACHING AND LEARNING**

- The content of all the lessons observed was appropriate and followed the outline in the subject plan. A review of students' copybooks and written tests showed satisfactory progress through the planned programme of work.
- Student-teacher rapport was very good in all cases: students' efforts were affirmed and they were encouraged in their learning.
- An appropriate range of teaching resources was used, including ICT, the textbook and hand-outs prepared by the teachers. Good use was made of the "show me" boards in some of the lessons to revise and check students' learning, and it is recommended that their use be extended.
- In all lessons a general learning objective was shared with the students at the beginning of the lesson and written on the board. This good practice should be developed by ensuring that the objectives are specific, appropriately challenging and capable of being assessed at the end of the lesson by the teacher and by the students themselves.
- Many opportunities were provided for pair work and discussion, and some of the students' contributions demonstrated a good understanding of the subject matter. It is recommended that opportunities be provided in every lesson for students to develop their oral communication skills and to deepen their understanding of concepts by means of whole-class discussion and higher-order questioning.
- In most lessons, teachers' questioning produced answering that gave evidence of good prior learning. However, in general there is scope for the subject department to develop its practice as regards questioning in class. The use of AfL strategies such as "no hands up", "wait time" and "think, pair, share" is recommended.
- Subject-specific key words were prominently displayed in the classroom and referred to. However, there was scope for development in the way written texts were approached and utilised during the lessons observed. It is recommended that the teachers refer to the JCSP literacy and numeracy website for a range of reading strategies that they could adopt.
- In some lessons, poor time management meant that there was insufficient time to draw conclusions, check learning outcomes or to properly explain the homework task. On occasions also, the structure and pace of lessons lent itself to poor engagement on the part of some students.
- Homework was given in every lesson, and the students' copybooks and examples of corrected tests show that their work is corrected regularly, with helpful comments and

advice for improvement. It is commendable that homework is differentiated to take account of students' ability.

- The end-of-topic tests prepared by the teachers are of a very good quality and showed evidence of good learning, with some very good examples of long answers and extended paragraph responses. Commendably, the JCSP learning statements are used by the students to record their progress.

#### **SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT**

- Subject provision and whole-school support for RE is very good. The subject is compulsory and is taken as an examination subject up to Junior Certificate level. The timetable allocation is as recommended for junior cycle.
- This year, for the first time, there is a subject department consisting of two fully-qualified RE teachers, both of whom are committed to their subject. This positive development augurs well for the future of the subject in the school.
- It is recommended that the teaching materials sourced and prepared by teachers be stored on a shared electronic folder. It is also recommended, in the interests of supporting students' literacy development, that there be a set of English dictionaries in each classroom.
- The RE department's good assessment practices are supported by the school's assessment policy, which includes provision for regular assessment and recording of results on e-portal.

#### **PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

- There is a good whole-school approach to subject planning: subject departments meet formally four times a year and minutes of these meetings are kept.
- Good work has been done in preparing an RE plan, which sets out the school context for the subject and contains a broad outline of the Junior Certificate syllabus as it is delivered over the three years. In further developing the annual programme of work, it is recommended that more precise time frames be provided and that each section of the syllabus be cross-referenced to the textbook and other resources.
- The subject plan contains a brief section on "effective teaching methodologies". It is strongly recommended that this section be extended to describe in more detail a wider range of teaching methodologies, including AfL strategies and strategies to enhance students' literacy. Teacher self-evaluation and peer observation of teaching in other subject departments is also recommended, as described in the Inspectorate's guidelines on school self-evaluation.
- Statistics have been prepared showing the percentage of students taking higher and ordinary level in the Junior Certificate examination for the last six years, compared with national statistics. It is recommended that the subject department continue this good work by carrying out a more detailed analysis of examination results year on year and by setting realistic targets for improvement, in line with best DEIS practice.
- The teachers have carried out an informal SWOT analysis of their subject department, and there are plans to survey the students regarding their experience of studying RE. This is very commendable, and will provide a basis for planning and development.

---

The draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation were discussed with the principal and the 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 of Management of St Paul's Secondary School welcomes this report by the Inspectorate.

The Board of Management commends the very good whole school support of Religious Education. As 2013 is the first year that the school has had two fully qualified teachers of RE, the Board is confident that the subject will develop significantly with the hard work and enthusiasm of the teachers. The Board of Management acknowledges the dedication and commitment of the RE teachers to the promotion and development of the subject. It also appreciates the considerable time and effort that is spent by the RE teachers in the promotion of the school's Catholic ethos through the many Christian celebrations and activities throughout the year.

#### **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 following actions have been undertaken since the initial inspection:

The RE Department now has a sharper focus on specific and appropriately challenging learning outcomes in every lesson. These learning outcomes are displayed on the board at the beginning of each lesson; students record them in their copies and revisit them at lesson end.

In addition to the AfL strategies already in place, the RE Department has added to the range of teaching methodologies. Teachers have begun integrating these into the delivery of lessons.

Suggestions for ways to develop literacy skills and oral communication skills have been included in the department plan. Along with those methods already used by teachers, these will also be implemented in lessons.

An examination of the certificate examination results via a subject analysis spreadsheet has been carried out and will be carried out annually. Targets and strategies for improvement have been set.