

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

**Subject Inspection of Science and Biology
REPORT**

**St. Joseph's College
Lucan, Co. Dublin
Roll number: 60263V**

Date of inspection: 3 May 2012



**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(s) of inspection	2 & 3 May 2012
Inspection activities undertaken <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Discussion with deputy principal• Discussions with science and biology teachers• Review of teachers' notes, plans and records• Interaction with students	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Examination of students' laboratory notebooks and copybooks• Observation of teaching and learning in fourteen class periods• Feedback to science and biology teachers and deputy principal

MAIN FINDINGS

- The quality of teaching was good in all lessons observed and was very good in more than half of these lessons with examples of very good practice evident in all lessons.
- A positive and supportive learning atmosphere was evident in all lessons observed and teachers worked hard to provide quality learning opportunities for students.
- The sciences are well supported through appropriate timetabling and good provision of resources, including ICT. Teachers are especially commended for their extensive support for a very wide range of co-curricular and extracurricular activities.
- A high level of collegiality and shared purpose characterises the work of the science department which is ably led and coordinated. The contents of the science department folder reflect current practice within the department and are very useful and practical.
- The manner in which the science department analyses the outcomes of the third-year Christmas examinations and plans for stated improvements to take place during the remainder of the school year is especially impressive.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- It is recommended that the good practice of sharing the learning intention with students at the beginning of lessons and reviewing the lessons in terms of these stated objectives at the close of lessons becomes standard across the science department.
- It is recommended that teachers agree and implement a common approach to the provision of developmental feedback to students on their written work and their laboratory reports.

INTRODUCTION

St. Joseph's College is a girls' school operating under the trusteeship of CEIST. It has a current enrolment of 877 students, drawn from a wide range of socio-economic and cultural backgrounds. Science is a core subject in junior cycle and Biology, Chemistry and Physics are offered as optional subjects in senior cycle. The sciences are included on the curriculum of the school's compulsory Transition Year (TY) programme.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- Teachers prepared well for their lessons resulting in the quality of teaching being good in all lessons observed and very good in more than half of these lessons with examples of very good practice evident in all lessons.
- A positive and supportive learning atmosphere, underpinned by good classroom management, was evident in all lessons observed. Teachers worked hard to provide quality learning opportunities for students and it was obvious that they had high expectations regarding the quality of students' learning.
- Students responded by working hard and engaging very well with the learning process. The good quality of their learning was evident from their participation in lessons, the questions they answered and asked and the level of interaction between teachers and students. The quality of students' class work as observed during the inspection and their engagement with the inspector provided additional evidence of good quality learning.
- Lessons were mostly well structured, with a clear opening phase that was characterised by a review of previous learning. The good practice of sharing the desired learning outcomes with students at the beginning gave direction to most lessons and these learning outcomes were mostly revisited and students' progress evaluated at the close of lessons. It is recommended that such practice becomes standard across the science department.
- Students benefited from the appropriate use of a variety of student-centred teaching methodologies including the creative use of information and communication technology (ICT) that was evident in some lessons.
- Questioning was well used to challenge students to recall information and to encourage them to think at a deeper level. Students contributed significantly to lessons and their input was sought and valued by teachers.
- Students were assessed in an ongoing manner through questioning, through individual attention that was enabled by the high level of teacher circulation in the classrooms, and by means of an examination of their homework.
- Students were frequently affirmed for their work in class. Written work was less frequently affirmed and, while the quality of such work as observed was generally very good, it is recommended that teachers agree a common approach to the provision of developmental feedback to students on their written work and their laboratory reports.
- Practical work was efficiently managed and an investigative approach was promoted. Good attention was given to health and safety issues. Students were well briefed in advance of carrying out their investigations and were given opportunities to discuss and rationalise their results afterwards.

- Subject-specific terminology was well attended to but evidence of a systematic approach to students' literacy was not apparent. It is recommended that this area be developed, over time, in conjunction with a whole-school policy on literacy.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- Provision for the sciences is well supported through appropriate timetabling and good provision of resources, including ICT. All students have weekly access to a laboratory and laboratories are well stocked and maintained with best use being made of them. Very good use has been made of the laboratory walls to display student-made charts and project work.
- Very good attention to health and safety that was noted during the inspection. However, it is recommended that the health and safety statement be reviewed annually.
- The science teachers are appropriately qualified and deployed and continuing professional development of staff is well supported by senior management.
- Teachers are especially commended for their extensive support for a very wide range of co-curricular and extracurricular activities.
- An appropriate system of formal and informal assessment and of issuing reports to parents is in place. The use of common assessments with all year groups is commended.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- A high level of collegiality and shared purpose characterises the work of the science department which is ably led and coordinated. A commendable level of reflective practice is evident from the documents presented and from the discussions that took place during the course of the inspection.
- The contents of the science department folder reflect current practice within the department and are very useful and practical. A delivery schedule is available for all courses and this facilitates the provision of common Christmas and end-of-year examinations. It is suggested that the planning documents be extended to provide additional detail on assessment modes, including assessment for learning.
- Senior management has made good provision for meetings of the science department and there is evidence of this time being well used to plan, to manage ongoing issues and to discuss curricular and academic matters of relevance. Especially impressive is the analysis of the outcomes of third-year Christmas examinations and the resultant planning for stated improvements to take place during the remainder of the school year. It is suggested that the analysis of the Leaving Certificate results already taking place be used as a basis for similar planning for improvement.

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