

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection of Science and Biology
REPORT

Mount Seskin Community College
Jobstown, Tallaght, Dublin 24
Roll number: 70141N

Date of inspection: 20 May 2015



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

**REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN SCIENCE AND BIOLOGY**

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

Date(s) of inspection	19 and 20 May 2015
Inspection activities undertaken <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Discussion with principal and 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 five class periods• Feedback to science and biology teachers, principal and deputy principal

MAIN FINDINGS

- The quality of the lessons observed varied from good to very good, with examples of excellent practice evident in two lessons.
- Active-learning methodologies featured prominently in the lessons observed and teaching was student centred.
- A good level of attention to students' literacy development was evident in all the lessons observed.
- Some good quality developmental feedback was provided to students on their written work but overall this was inconsistent.
- Teachers are especially commended for their extensive support for a very wide range of co-curricular and extracurricular activities.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- Teachers should carry out a review at the close of lessons to consolidate the various aspects of learning and ensure that students have a clear understanding of what has transpired.
 - The science department should agree a common approach to the provision of feedback to students on their written work.
 - It is recommended that subject department planning be reviewed and aligned more closely with the school's DEIS planning.
 - It is recommended that targets for improvement be defined more clearly and that actions taken be specifically focussed on the desired outcomes.
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INTRODUCTION

Mount Seskin Community College is a co-educational school operating under the auspices of Dublin/Dun Laoghaire ETB. The school has a current enrolment of 298 students, drawn from a wide range of cultural backgrounds. Science is an optional subject in junior cycle and Biology and Chemistry are offered as optional subjects in senior cycle. The school is participating in the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) programme.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- The quality of the lessons observed varied from good to very good, with examples of excellent practice evident in two lessons. A positive and supportive learning atmosphere prevailed and good classroom management was apparent in most lessons.
- Each of the lessons was well prepared with necessary resources to hand.
- Active-learning methodologies featured prominently in each lesson observed and, at all times, teaching was student centred.
- Students worked hard and engaged very well with the learning process. The quality of their learning was evident from their participation in lessons, the questions they asked as well as answered, and the level of interaction between them and their teachers.
- Lessons were mostly well structured. However, it is important to ensure that the learning intention is clear to students from the outset of the lesson in order that the students know what is expected of them.
- In lessons where a number of learning events have taken place, the teacher should carry out a review at the close of the lesson to consolidate the various aspects of learning and ensure that students have a clear understanding of what has transpired.
- A good level of attention to students' literacy development was evident in all the lessons observed and key words and subject-specific terminology were well highlighted and used. Actions to support numeracy development were apparent in two of the lessons.
- All of the lessons were very interactive and this was possible due to the quality of rapport between students and teachers. Students made significant contributions to lessons and these contributions were welcomed and affirmed by teachers.
- The quality students' of learning was assessed and a differentiated approach to teaching was supported through on-going questioning of students and movement of teachers amongst the students, providing individual support as necessary.
- Practical work was efficiently managed and it is noted positively that an investigative approach was promoted. Good attention was given to health and safety issues.
- Some good quality developmental feedback was provided to students in their copybooks and laboratory notebooks. Overall, however, this was inconsistent and it is recommended that the science department agrees a common approach to the provision of such feedback to students on their written work that is designed to bring about improvement.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- The sciences are well supported through good provision of resources, including ICT. All lessons in the sciences are held in a laboratory. The laboratories are well stocked and maintained with best use being made of them.
- There is scope to further promote the sciences through enhancing the displays of charts, posters, newspaper and other articles and students' project work on the laboratory walls and in the area outside the laboratories.
- Timetabling provision for the sciences is in keeping with syllabus recommendations.
- The position of science as an optional subject should be kept under active review to ensure that the position adopted by the school best meets the needs of the students.
- Very good attention to health and safety was noted during the inspection. However, it is recommended that the health and safety statement be reviewed annually.
- The members of the science team are encouraged to discuss their professional development needs with senior in-school management in order to identify and engage in appropriate professional development, in the context of the school's operating environment.
- 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.
- Common schemes of work have been prepared which describe the content to be delivered for each term of the Science and Biology courses. These schemes facilitate the use of common assessments at Christmas and in the end-of-year internal examinations.
- The inclusion in the Science scheme of a series of interventions to support students' literacy and numeracy development is positively noted and it is suggested that these be prioritised in an overt manner to ensure that they are consistently and constantly implemented.
- It is recommended that subject department planning for improvement be reviewed and aligned more closely with the school's DEIS planning. It is noted that certificate examination results have been analysed and targets for improvement have been set. However, it is recommended that, in part, these targets be reviewed and defined more clearly. The actions being taken to achieve these targets should be specifically focussed on the desired outcomes. Additional evidence should be examined to identify what is working well and where deficits are in order that planning for improvement can be focussed appropriately.

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.