An Roinn Oideachais
Department of Education

Subject Inspection: Mathematics
Report

REPORT

Ainm na scoile/School name	Elphin Community College
Seoladh na scoile/School address	Elphin Castlerea Co Roscommon
Uimhir rolla/Roll number	72280O
Dáta na cigireachta/ Date of evaluation	23/02/2024
Dáta eisiúna na tuairisce/Date of issue of report	27/05/2024

What is a subject inspection?

Subject Inspections report on the quality of work in individual curriculum areas within a school. They affirm good practice and make recommendations, where appropriate, to aid the further development of the subject in the school.

How to read this report

During this inspection, the inspector evaluated learning and teaching in Mathematics under the following headings:

1. Teaching, learning and assessment
2. Subject provision and whole-school support
3. Planning and preparation

Inspectors describe the quality of each of these areas using the Inspectorate's quality continuum which is shown on the final page of this report. The quality continuum provides examples of the language used by inspectors when evaluating and describing the quality of the school's provision in each area.

The board of management of the school 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.

Actions of the school to safeguard children and prevent and tackle bullying

<table>
<tr><td colspan="2">During the inspection visit, the following checks in relation to the school's child protection and anti-bullying procedures were conducted:</td></tr>
<tr><td>Child Protection</td><td>Anti-bullying</td></tr>
<tr><td>1. The name of the DLP and the Child Safeguarding Statement are prominently displayed near the main entrance to the school.
2. The Child Safeguarding Statement has been ratified by the board and includes an annual review and a risk assessment.
3. All teachers visited reported that they have read the Child Safeguarding Statement and that they are aware of their responsibilities as mandated persons.</td><td>1. The school has developed an anti-bullying policy that meets the requirements of the Anti-Bullying Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools (2013) or Bí Cineálta (2024) and this policy is reviewed annually.
2. The school's current anti-bullying policy is published on its website and/or is readily accessible to board of management members, teachers, parents and students.</td></tr>
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The school met the requirements in relation to each of the checks above.

Subject inspection

Dates of inspection	22 & 23 February 2024
Inspection activities undertaken • Review of relevant documents • Discussion with principal and key staff • Interaction with students, including a focus group meeting	• Observation of teaching and learning during six lessons • Examination of students' work • Feedback to principal, deputy principal and relevant staff

School context

Elphin Community College is a co-educational post-primary school which operates under the auspices of the Galway Roscommon Education and Training Board with a current enrolment of 195 students. The school provides the Junior Cycle, a compulsory Transition Year (TY), the Leaving Certificate and Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme.

Summary of main findings and recommendations:

Findings

- Overall, the quality of teaching and learning was good.
- Some good assessment strategies were observed during lessons; there was scope to broaden the range of methodologies used.
- Subject provision and whole school support for Mathematics was of good quality.
- Individual lesson planning ranged from very good to requiring improvement where didactic teaching styles predominated.
- Subject department planning requires improvement with an immediate need to work collaboratively on the plan for TY mathematics.
- Teachers and students were adept at using digital technology to support teaching and learning; very good digital technology facilities were available in the school.

Recommendations

- Teachers should plan to incorporate more active and collaborative learning opportunities for students.
- A broader range of assessment strategies should be used in lessons by the teachers and be a focus area for improvement at subject department meetings.
- The mathematics department needs to update the TY plan for Mathematics.
- The mathematics teachers should review how they plan collectively and collaboratively to further develop the subject department plan to better support teaching and learning.

Detailed findings and recommendations

1. Teaching, learning and assessment

- The overall quality of teaching was good. The teachers who were observed demonstrated very good subject knowledge and showed high levels of enthusiasm for Mathematics and confidence when teaching.
- There was scope in the majority of lessons observed for a better balance between purposeful student input and teacher exposition. In these lessons, students would have benefitted from more active engagement with the lesson content. Students worked well collaboratively and benefitted from the chance to learn from each other when given the opportunitiy.
- Overall, the quality of learning was good. Rapport with teachers and among students was very good resulting in safe learning atmospheres in the lessons observed. Students were happy to offer solutions, ask questions and compare their work when required.
- Homework was assigned regularly and corrected in class. An innovative and effective use of digital technology was noted when the homework task set was to watch a short online clip. The purpose was to remind students of prior learning and set them up for successful engagement with the new learning in the next lesson.
- It is best practice to assess students' prior knowledge including their understanding of terminology and of lesson content. This was done well in some instances but there were others where the teacher proceeded to explain without considering students' prior knowledge and learning experiences.
- Good use of questioning was used in some lessons to allow students to explain and justify their answers. Where more open ended questions were used, students were provided with opportunities to use the terminology purposefully and to formulate their thoughts when explaining. It also allowed the teacher to ascertain levels of understanding and progress among the students. There was scope in the majority of lessons to broaden the range of questioning strategies used to assess students' learning and understanding.
- Assessment is an area for development across the mathematics department. The NCCA Focus on Learning would be a useful resource to support this work.
- Classroom management was good and students seating arrangements were directed by the teachers. There were some instances where a more inclusive seating plan would have benefited a small number of students.
- There was a good focus on ensuring students were familiar with using Maths Fornulae and Log Tables along with calculators. In-class and online resources were used well to support students' learning in some of the lessons observed.
- To support students with additional educational needs, information is provided verbally at staff meetings and individual learning plans are available in hard-copy in the office. Some information is available online but the very good digital technology systems available could be used more effectively to share information and allow teachers to provide updates on each individual's progress.
- In the focus group meeting, students were very complimentary about their teachers and the levels of help available. They reported finding it enjoyable and helpful when they had opportunities to work collaboratively.

2. Subject provision and whole school support

- Overall, the quality of subject provision and whole-school support was good. Appropriate time is allocated to Mathematics at both junior and senior cycles and every effort is made to ensure the lessons are spread across the week to provide regular contact with the subject. Concurrent timetabling from second year onwards allows for movement between levels.
- Every effort is made to support and encourage all students to remain studying at the highest level for as long as possible. Good systems are in place to ensure students and parents consider the implications of moving from higher level classes. It is

recommended that ordinary level class group formation for junior cycle be left as long as possible and not done automatically at the beginning of second year.
- Management is supportive of all cross and extra-curricular events to promote Mathematics and related skills.
- The mathematics department is co-ordinated on a rotating basis in line with best practice. Formal meetings are held at least twice yearly and the minutes are retained in the online department folder. Many informal meetings occur throughout the year where teachers share resources and discuss topics.
- Management support and encourage engagement with continuing professional development (CPD) and teachers have availed of subject specific and whole-school opportunities to upskill. It is good practice to include discussion around how the learning from CPD is incorporated into lessons at subject department meetings.
- Very high-quality digital technology resources were available to teachers and students and there were many examples of it being used to support both teaching and learning.

3. Planning and preparation

- Individual lesson planning was good overall. Tasks were progressive in all lessons observed but there was scope to incorporate more active and collaborative learning opportunities for students. For the most part, students were reliant on explanations from teachers and engagement was largely passive.
- The TY plan for Mathematics needs to be updated to reflect better the principles of the programme. As well as content acquisition, there should be a focus on skill development through experiential and discovery learning opportunities. The TY learning experiences should be clearly distinct from junior cycle and leaving certificate lessons. The absence of examination pressure allows for innovation and creativity in planning for TY students.
- Collective and collaborative planning requires improvement. Schemes of work are shared on an online platform and consist of a broad outline of topics and timelines. There is scope to further develop these plans to incorporate clear learning intentions, specific ongoing assessment strategies, tasks and resources as well as teachers' reflections as to what works well and what may need modifying.

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.

An Roinn Oideachais
Department of Education

A summary report for the students of Elphin Community College about their learning in Mathematics 23/02/2024

What kind of inspection did your school have?

Recently, an inspector called to your school to carry out a subject inspection. The inspector visited some classes and had a talk with the principal and teachers. They also met with a focus group of students who study Mathematics. The inspector wanted to hear what the focus group of students had to say about their learning experience in that subject.

What were the main findings of the inspection?

The inspector saw many things during the inspection. The main findings were:

- The quality of teaching and learning was good overall.
- The number of ways students' work is corrected and how they are advised to improve should be increased.
- Digital technology facilities in the school were very good.

What did the inspector recommend to make teaching and learning better in Mathematics?

- To provide more chances for students to work together in lessons.
- To plan for a broader range of learning experiences for TY Mathematics students.
- To use more of a variety of ways to check what students already know, to see how they are getting on with their learning and to tell them how to improve.

Thank you for taking the time to read this report.
A special thank you to the students who participated in the focus group.

Appendix

SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

Submitted by the Board of Management

Part A Observations on the content of the inspection report

The Board of Management of Elphin Community College welcomes this inspection report on the quality of teaching and learning in our Mathematics Department. The Board of Management notes the recognition of effective practice as well as the strengths identified in teaching, learning and assessment.
It also recognises that subject and whole-school support for Mathematics is good, with the innovative and effective use of high quality digital resources and technology supporting student learning and engagement beyond the classroom.

Part B Follow-up actions planned or undertaken since the completion of the inspection activity to implement the findings and recommendations of the inspection.

Our school is committed to implementing the recommendations of this report which will inform teaching and learning in the Mathematics Department and in all other departments in our school in the years ahead.

The Inspectorate's Quality Continuum

Inspectors describe the quality of provision in the school using the Inspectorate's quality continuum which is shown below. The quality continuum provides examples of the language used by inspectors when evaluating and describing the quality of the school's provision of each area.

	Description	Examples of descriptive terms
Excellent	**Provision that is excellent** is exemplary in meeting the needs of learners. This provision provides an example for other schools and settings of exceptionally high standards of provision.	Excellent; exemplary; outstanding; exceptionally high standard; with very significant strengths
Very good	**Provision that is very good** is very effective in meeting the needs of learners and is of a very high standard. There is potential to build on existing strengths to achieve an excellent standard.	Very good; of a very high quality; very effective practice; highly commendable; very successful
Good	**Provision that is good** is effective in meeting the needs of learners. There is need to build on existing strengths in order to address the aspects to be developed and achieve a very good standard.	Good; of good quality; effective practice; competent; useful; commendable; good standard; strengths outweigh the shortcomings; appropriate provision although some possibilities for improvement exist
Requires improvement to achieve a good standard	**Provision that requires improvement to achieve a good standard** is not sufficiently effective in meeting the needs of learners. There is need to address certain deficiencies without delay in order to ensure that provision is good or better.	Fair; less than effective; less than sufficient; evident weaknesses that are impacting on learning; experiencing difficulty; shortcomings outweigh strengths; must improve in specified areas; action required to improve
Requires significant improvement to achieve a good standard	**Provision that requires significant improvement to achieve a good standard** is not meeting the needs of learners. There is immediate need for significant action to address the areas of concern.	Weak; poor; ineffective; insufficient; unacceptable; experiencing significant difficulties; serious deficiencies in the areas evaluated; requiring significant change, development and improvement to be effective