An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection in Science & Biology & Agricultural Science

REPORT

Ainm na scoile / School name	Scoil Chriost Rí
Seoladh na scoile / School address	Presentation Secondary School Borris Road Portlaoise
Uimhir rolla / Roll number	63451O

Date of Inspection: 03-05-2017

AN ROINN OIDEACHAIS AGUS SCILEANNA | DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND SKILLS

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 Science & Biology & Agricultural Science under the following headings:

1. Learning, teaching 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.

Subject Inspection

INSPECTION ACTIVITIES DURING THIS INSPECTION

Dates of inspection	02 and 03 May 2017
Inspection activities undertaken • Review of relevant documents • Discussion with principal and key staff • Interaction with students	• Observation of teaching and learning during ten class periods • Examination of students' work • Feedback to principal and relevant staff

SCHOOL CONTEXT

Scoil Chríost Rí is a girls' post-primary school managed under the trusteeship of CEIST. The school caters for an enrolment of 963 girls. It offers the Junior Certificate, Leaving Certificate, an optional Transition Year (TY), the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) and the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programme.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

FINDINGS

- The quality of teaching and learning was good or very good in all the lessons observed.
- Classroom management was uniformly very good, as was student engagement and behaviour.
- Teaching methodologies were student centred and active learning predominated in most classrooms.
- Information and communications technology was well used and practical work was safely and efficiently managed.
- Subject provision and whole-school support for the sciences is very good.
- Planning and preparation is very good in an effective and well-led science department.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- A greater amount of written feedback, designed to promote improvement, should be provided to students on their written work
- Chemical storage arrangements should be reviewed and the colour-coded format be used to determine the location of stored chemicals.
- The science department should document, in greater detail, how the new junior science specifications is being planned and managed in order that all colleagues can benefit from shared experiences
- The science department should plan for evidence-based improvement, by setting targets and listing the specific actions to be implemented to achieve these targets.

DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. TEACHING, LEARNING AND ASSESSMENT

- The quality of teaching and learning was good or very good in all the lessons observed and examples of very good practice were evident in all lessons.
- All lessons were well planned and well prepared, with all necessary resources to hand.
- Classroom management was uniformly very good, as was student engagement and behaviour. There was very good evidence of learning in all lessons.
- Teachers were very affirming of students' efforts, were very inclusive and had a very good level of rapport with students.
- Consequently, lessons were very interactive and students were enabled to make significant contributions in all lessons.
- The learning environment was always positive and supportive, the quality of questioning was very good in most lessons and students were well challenged by their teachers.
- In a small few cases, there was a need to use more directed questions, allowing students thinking time and encouraging them to put their hands up when ready with an answer.
- Teaching methodologies were student centred and active learning predominated in most classrooms. A good variety of methodologies was used overall, including group work and pair work.
- Lesson were well structured and objectives were appropriately shared with students in all lessons. Lesson content was reviewed at the close of each lesson.
- Teachers moved very well throughout the classrooms in most lessons, monitoring and supporting students as required and the level of differentiation was mostly very good.
- Students' literacy development was well supported in most lessons. However, numeracy support was less evident.
- Information and communications technology was well used in a variety of stimulating ways to enhance lesson presentations, which were clear and to the point.
- Practical work was safely and efficiently managed with useful plenary sessions before and following laboratory activities.
- A good range of assessment modes was used in general. However, while many elements of *assessment for learning* techniques were evident in many of the lessons, overall, the use of such techniques was not systematic and consistent.
- Oral feedback to students on their work was good. Written feedback to students, designed to promote improvement, was largely absent with the exception of a small number of instances where good quality feedback was provided to students on their written work.

2. SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- Subject provision and whole-school support is very good. Science is a core subject in junior cycle and on the TY programme, and all the science subjects are available to students on the Leaving Certificate curriculum.

- The time allocation to all the science subjects is in keeping with syllabus recommendations.
- The use of the very good laboratory facilities is maximised and these are well equipped and well maintained.
- Chemical storage arrangements should be reviewed and the colour-coded format be used to determine the location of stored chemicals.
- Good systems are in place for assessing and reporting on students' progress.
- All required health and safety equipment is in place and students made use of relevant personal protective equipment when carrying out practical work.
- A variety of extra-curricular and co-curricular activities are generously supported by teachers and school management.

3. PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- Planning and preparation is very good and is managed by an effective and well-led science department, where a very high level of collegiality was apparent.
- Planning documents were comprehensive and clear and coursework delivery was appropriately scheduled and co-ordinated to facilitate common assessments where possible.
- Minutes of meetings demonstrate evidence of the range of issues considered, from on-going arrangements to manage a busy science department, to curricular and pedagogical issues.
- The new junior cycle science specification is being well implemented but there is a need to document, in greater detail, how this implementation is being planned and managed in order that all colleagues can benefit from shared experiences.
- Certificate examination outcomes are analysed and rationalised. While outcomes have been good, there is still a need to plan for evidence-based improvement, by setting targets and listing the specific actions to be implemented to achieve these targets.

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; a response was not received from the board.

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.

Level	Description	Example of descriptive terms
Very Good	***Very good*** applies where the quality of the areas evaluated is of a very high standard. The very few areas for improvement that exist do not significantly impact on the overall quality of provision. For some schools in this category the quality of what is evaluated is ***outstanding*** and provides an example for other schools of exceptionally high standards of provision.	Very good; of a very high quality; very effective practice; highly commendable; very successful; few areas for improvement; notable; of a very high standard. Excellent; outstanding; exceptionally high standard, with very significant strengths; exemplary
Good	***Good*** applies where the strengths in the areas evaluated clearly outweigh the areas in need of improvement. The areas requiring improvement impact on the quality of pupils' learning. The school needs to build on its strengths and take action to address the areas identified as requiring improvement in order to achieve a *very good* standard.	Good; good quality; valuable; effective practice; competent; useful; commendable; good standard; some areas for improvement
Satisfactory	***Satisfactory*** applies where the quality of provision is adequate. The strengths in what is being evaluated just outweigh the shortcomings. While the shortcomings do not have a significant negative impact they constrain the quality of the learning experiences and should be addressed in order to achieve a better standard.	Satisfactory; adequate; appropriate provision although some possibilities for improvement exist; acceptable level of quality; improvement needed in some areas
Fair	***Fair*** applies where, although there are some strengths in the areas evaluated, deficiencies or shortcomings that outweigh those strengths also exist. The school will have to address certain deficiencies without delay in order to ensure that provision is satisfactory or better.	Fair; evident weaknesses that are impacting on pupils' learning; less than satisfactory; experiencing difficulty; must improve in specified areas; action required to improve
Weak	***Weak*** applies where there are serious deficiencies in the areas evaluated. Immediate and coordinated whole-school action is required to address the areas of concern. In some cases, the intervention of other agencies may be required to support improvements.	Weak; unsatisfactory; insufficient; ineffective; poor; requiring significant change, development or improvement; experiencing significant difficulties;