An Roinn Oideachais
Department of Education

Subject Inspection: Religious Education
REPORT

Ainm na scoile/School name	St. Leo's College
Seoladh na scoile/School address	Dublin Road Carlow
Uimhir rolla/Roll number	61140K
Dáta na cigireachta/ Date of evaluation	23/01/2025
Dáta eisiúna na tuairisce/Date of issue of report	19/03/2025

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 Religious Education 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.

Included in this subject inspection report is a student-friendly page that provides information for the children/young people in your school about the inspection that occurred recently. It outlines for them some of the main findings and recommendations.

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	21/01/25 & 23/01/2025
Inspection activities undertaken • Review of relevant documents • Discussion with principal and key staff • Interaction with students, including focus groups	• Observation of teaching and learning during four lessons • Examination of students' work • Feedback to principal and relevant staff

School context

St. Leo's College is a post-primary school for girls with a current enrolment of 885 students. The school operates under the trusteeship of Catholic Education in Irish Schools Trust and offers the Junior Cycle (JC), an optional Transition Year programme (TY), the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme, the Leaving Certificate Applied programme and the established Leaving Certificate. Junior cycle Religious Education (RE) is a core subject.

Summary of main findings and recommendations:

Findings

- The overall quality of teaching, learning and assessment was of a high quality with many instances of very good practice observed.
- A key strength was the positive student teacher relationships; students worked in affirming and productive learning environments conducive to wellbeing.
- Teachers were well prepared for lessons and included interesting and engaging RE resources, while there was scope to further embed active learning strategies in practice across the department.
- Teachers provided students with high quality oral feedback during lessons, while written formative feedback required improvement.
- Subject provision and whole school support for RE was very good.
- Planning and preparation was highly effective and very good collaborative practice was observed among the RE teachers.

Recommendations

- To build on the effective active learning observed in the majority of lessons and increase student participation levels, all teachers should plan and employ a more diverse range of active learning strategies.
- Teachers should further develop and implement written formative feedback strategies to identify gaps in learning and areas for improvement while ensuring all students reach their potential.
- The RE department should review and update the Junior Cycle units of learning for all year groups while utilising the effective reflective practice evident during the evaluation.

Detailed findings and recommendations

1. Teaching, learning and assessment

- The overall quality of teaching, learning and assessment was of a high quality with many instances of very good practice observed.
- In all lessons observed, teachers displayed very good subject knowledge and enthusiasm for RE. Mutually respectful interactions between students and teachers were a prominent feature, with student wellbeing at the forefront of all classroom practices.
- Teachers prepared well-structured lessons for their students. Teachers were well prepared and included interesting and engaging resources such as artefacts and videos about world religions. In some instances, teachers successfully made cross-curricular links to subjects such as geography, and this very good practice effectively supported whole-school teaching and learning initiatives.
- Though learning intentions were shared in all lessons, there was a need for improvement in their deployment in a minority of lessons. The RE department should take a more consistent approach with all teachers referring to learning intentions at the beginning, during and close of every lesson.
- An effective feature of teachers' practice was the attention that was given to the development of students' literacy skills. Students capably incorporated subject-specific terminology from the RE specification, such as sacred spaces, when responding to questions and interacting in groups.
- Student outcomes were of a high quality overall, and students demonstrated good knowledge, skills and understanding in RE. In the most effective lessons, students were afforded opportunities to draw on prior learning and utilise their reflection and critical-thinking skills to support and develop their learning.
- Students were confident learners and displayed high levels of interest and enjoyment in learning topics such as Judaism and the different stages of faith. However, the quality of learning experiences varied across lessons based on the inclusion, or absence, of appropriate and effective active learning strategies. Learner experiences were best when students were actively involved in their learning, collaborated with their peers and when interesting and purposeful tasks supported learning.
- Questioning techniques were good overall, and in some instances teachers tapped into students' curiosity while supporting students to gain knowledge and insights about religion and beliefs. In some instances, there was scope to ask more targeted questions, include probing questions, and appropriate wait time. This area could be developed through sharing of best practice and peer observation.
- While highly effective oral feedback was a feature of most lessons, there was limited evidence of effective written formative feedback on students' work. Written formative feedback strategies should be further developed and improved to identify gaps in learning and ensure all students reach their potential.
- Highly effective consolidation exercises were observed in many lessons, for example, exit strategies assessed the attainment of the learning intentions and informed future planning. In other instances, lessons would have benefitted from structured assessment tasks to identify gaps in learning, and this should be addressed.
- In a significant minority of lessons, the proportion of teacher talk in lessons should have been reduced to integrate adequate time for reflection and collaboration. The most effective lessons encouraged high levels of creativity, enjoyment and independent learning skills.
- There were effective levels of support given in lessons, including one-to-one support during activities. English as an additional language (EAL) learners were effectively supported through live translations and one-one support. Differentiation practice was effective, and there were some very good examples of extension tasks both in class and for homework. RE teachers should continue to develop upward differentiation in classroom practice to ensure that all students achieve their potential as learners.

- During the focus group, students confirmed that they enjoyed RE, especially learning about different major world religions. Students indicated that they favoured opportunities to engage in collaborative activities and learned best when the teacher used a variety of teaching methodologies and interesting stimuli. It was evident from their responses that students' experiences varied in relation to levels of support given and time to collaborate in lessons.

2. Subject provision and whole school support

- Subject provision and whole-school support for RE was very good; senior management provided very high-quality support to the department. RE was a core subject at junior cycle and provision on the timetable was in line with specification requirements. Leaving certificate RE was not provided at the time of the evaluation.
- The quality of leadership for learning was very good; school management encouraged and facilitated attendance at relevant continuing professional development (CPD) courses. It was evident that the RE team were supporting areas of development identified through the school self-evaluation (SSE) process, for example, assigning purposeful homework.
- The RE department had good access to digital technology, including class sets of devices. RE teachers had base classrooms and these were well-maintained and print-rich, environments.
- Very good structures were in place to ensure sharing of expertise and highly effective practice within and across subject departments. The RE department worked closely with the school's Teaching, Learning Assessment and Reporting (TLAR) team to support and drive improvement.
- Co-curricular activities were organised to support and develop students' knowledge and understanding in RE, such as visits to formal places of worship.

3. Planning and preparation

- The overall quality of planning was highly effective and there was evidence of high levels of collegiality and support among the team. The department's planning was very well supported by the school's digital platform and teachers had spent considerable time creating high-quality resources that were successfully integrated into lessons.
- The overall quality of individual teacher preparation for lessons observed was of a high standard.
- Regular informal and formal subject department meetings fostered discussion on key topics, while ensuring consistency in house examinations. However, teachers should prioritise co-professional dialogue with further focus on teaching and learning practices and this should be documented to inform improvement.
- Reflection on teaching and learning practice was a strength observed during the evaluation. It was evident that the RE department was committed to reflecting on their practice with a view to improvement. The RE team should build on this positive approach to further build capacity and bring about consistency in practice.
- Detailed schemes of work were in place and were shared on the school's online platform. It was positive that a teacher reflection component was included to support the evolving needs of students. It is timely now for the RE team to review JC RE units of learning, based on their own reflective practice.
- Two subject coordinators effectively led the department. The RE coordinator's role was well developed and effectively supported a collaborative and collegial team approach.
- Commendably, the RE department was engaging with data from the analysis of certificate examinations and this effective practice was being used to inform future planning. It was very good that an academic monitoring system was in place and students' attainment was tracked across junior and senior cycles.

The draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation were discussed with the principal a deputy principal and subject teachers at the conclusion of the evaluation.

An Roinn Oideachais
Department of Education

For the students of St. Leo's College about their learning in Religious Education
Date of inspection: 23/01/2025

What kind of inspection did your school have?

A subject inspection was completed in your school. The inspector observed lessons and spoke with the principal and teachers. The inspector met with a group of students to talk to them about their learning in Religious Education.

What were the main findings of the inspection?

- Teaching and learning was good with some very good practice observed.
- Teachers and students got on well together.
- Teachers were well prepared for lessons and used good resources; however, active learning needed to be improved in some lessons.
- Teachers gave good verbal feedback to students while written feedback on students' work required improvement.

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

- Though there were good examples of active learning, all teachers should plan and provide more active learning opportunities for students so they can become more involved in their learning.
- Teachers should provide more written feedback to students to identify areas for improvement and to better support learning.
- Teachers should revise parts of their planning.

Thank you for taking the time to read this page.
Special thanks to the students who participated in the focus group.

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	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

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 St. Leo's College welcomes the Religious Education Inspection Report and acknowledges the affirmation of effective practices throughout this report, namely:

- The high quality of teaching, learning and assessment observed 'with teachers displaying very good subject knowledge and enthusiasm for RE'
- The positive student-teacher relationships and mutually respectful interactions between students and teachers, with a clear focus on student wellbeing- 'student wellbeing at the forefront of all classroom activities'
- The high standard of teacher individual preparation of well-structured lessons with attention given to the development of literacy skills for all students and differentiated support provided for EAL students
- Students' confidence, interest and enjoyment in learning, demonstrating 'good knowledge, skills and understanding in RE', culminating in high quality student outcomes
- Highly effective planning and preparation, very good collaboration and sharing of expertise within the RE subject department and beyond
- High quality oral feedback and good questioning techniques deployed during lessons
- Teacher individual and collaborative reflection on teaching and learning with a view to improvement
- Effective analysis of data, tracking and monitoring student attainment as key elements of the academic monitoring system
- Very good provision and whole-school support for RE as a Junior Cycle subject.

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

The Board equally welcomes the recommendations outlined in this report and is committed to ongoing improvement.
RE department members are committed to working collaboratively on the development of a more diverse range of active learning methodologies and written formative feedback strategies, with a view to ensuring that all students are reaching their full potential. In addition, teachers will increase their focus on upward differentiation and effective questioning techniques.
The department also plans to develop a more conscious and consistent approach to referencing learning intentions at the beginning, during and at the end of every lesson.
The RE department has commenced a formal review of Junior Cycle units of learning and schemes of work.