An Roinn Oideachais agus Óige
Department of Education and Youth

Subject Inspection: Science & Biology
REPORT

Ainm na scoile/School name	Wilson's Hospital School
Seoladh na scoile/School address	Heathlands Multyfarnham Co. Westmeath
Uimhir rolla/Roll number	63300Q
Dáta na cigireachta/ Date of evaluation	21/04/2026
Dáta eisiúna na tuairisce/Date of issue of report	07/09/2026

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 under the following headings:

1. Teaching, learning and assessment
2. Subject provision and whole-school support
3. Planning and preparation
4.

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 was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the report; a response was not received from the board.

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

During the inspection visit, the following checks in relation to the school's child protection and anti-bullying procedures were conducted:	
Child Protection	*Bí Cineálta*
1. The name of the DLP and the Child Safeguarding Statement (CSS) are prominently displayed near the main door of the school / in the reception area. *Following the school's adoption of the updated procedures 2025, it is also required to display a student-friendly version incorporating the name of the DLP beside the CSS*. 2. The school's child safeguarding statement has been ratified by the board and includes an annual review and a risk assessment. 3. All teachers visited were aware of who to go to if they had a child protection concern.	1. The school has developed an anti-bullying policy using Appendix A of *Bí Cineálta, it is reviewed annually (or earlier if required) and includes a student/pupil friendly version that is displayed where students/pupils and the school community can see it.* 2. The school's anti-bullying policy is published on its website and/or is readily accessible to board of management members, staff, parents and students/pupils. 3. The board of management minutes record that the principal provides an update to the board at each ordinary board meeting that meets the requirements of *Bí Cineálta.*

During the inspection visit, the following checks in relation to the boarding facilities' child protection procedures were conducted:	
Child Protection	
1. The name of the DLP and the Child Safeguarding Statement are prominently displayed near the main entrance to the boarding facility.	2. The Child Safeguarding Statement has been ratified by the management authority and includes an annual review and risk assessment.

The school met all the requirements in relation to child protection checks.

Subject inspection

Date of inspection	20/04/2026 and 21/04/2026
Inspection activities undertaken • Review of relevant documents • Discussion with principal and key staff • Interaction with students, including focus group	• Observation of teaching and learning during six lessons • Examination of students' work • Feedback to principal and relevant staff

School context

Wilson's Hospital School is a co-educational post-primary school located in Multyfarnham, County Westmeath operating under the trusteeship of the Church of Ireland. The school caters for boarders and day students. There were 454 students enrolled at the time of the inspection. The school offers the Junior Cycle, a compulsory Transition Year (TY), the Leaving Certificate established (LCE), the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) and the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA). The school had two classes for students with autism.

Summary of main findings and recommendations:

Findings

- The overall quality of teaching and learning was effective, with many examples of highly effective practice observed.
- Students demonstrated high levels of interest in Science and Biology. Teachers facilitated students to work collaboratively in over half of the lessons observed; students capably displayed their ability to communicate and work with others.
- It was very positive that the science department had embraced a dual approach to assessment. They valued the assessment of skills and had replaced one house exam in second year with the classroom-based assessment (CBA).
- Overall, the subject provision and whole-school support for Science and Biology were very good.
- The quality of planning and preparation was effective, with a highly effective approach to improvement planning observed.

Recommendations

- To enhance approaches to in-class assessment, teachers should select strategies that gather answers from all students in order to inform teaching and to progress learning.
- While students were given opportunities to input their ideas for investigations; an area of focus for the science and biology department, is to provide even more opportunities for students to engage in developing the skills outlined in the *Nature of Science* learning outcomes.
- The time given to junior cycle Science falls slightly short of the minimum requirement; senior management should ensure the minimum requirement is given to the subject as soon as possible.
- Senior management should lead a review of how the school reports can best capture student performance in the classroom-based assessment (CBA) and provide formative feedback to students and parents.
- The science and biology teachers can enhance their schemes of work by explicitly planning for the development and assessment of scientific skills.

Detailed findings and recommendations

1. Teaching, learning and assessment

- The overall quality of teaching and learning was effective, with many examples of highly effective practice.
- There was a pleasant and cooperative atmosphere in all lessons observed. The interactions between teachers and their students were respectful. Students were eager and attentive during lessons, demonstrating high levels of interest in Science and Biology. Student behaviour was very good during the inspection.
- All teachers planned well-structured lessons with very purposeful learning activities. In the most effective lessons, students were provided with opportunities to work collaboratively, which enabled them to think independently and express their understanding between peers. Students expressed how they found it very beneficial to engage in pair work. As appropriate, all teachers should include pair-work in their lessons to support the development of key skills and competencies with regards to working with others.
- Overall, students were confident to ask questions and teachers welcomed their curiosity. Selected students answered their teachers' questions capably. It is important for all teachers to ensure that every student demonstrates their learning. Teachers should use strategies that gather answers from all students in order to inform teaching and to progress learning.
- It was very positive that the science department replaced one house exam in second year with the CBA. This supported a dual approach to assessment and gives the CBA its rightful prominence among written examinations.
- In a few of the observed lessons, students had the opportunity to engage in hands-on practical work. Students were asked for their input in designing the method for this investigation, and this was commendable. Students worked safely and efficiently during their investigation. In a small number of lessons, teacher demonstration was used. As all outcomes in the Science and Biology specifications are achievable by students, the use of demonstrations should be limited.
- While students were given opportunities to input their ideas for investigations; an area of focus for the science department, is to provide even more opportunities for students to engage in developing the skills outlined in the *Nature of Science* learning outcomes. This involves more opportunities to select and use apparatus, design investigations, and engage in research starting early on in first-year.
- In one lesson, the learning activity was expertly designed by the teacher to ensure that students evaluated data independently as intended in the learning outcome. In another lesson, the use of concrete materials to support student understanding was very beneficial. These very good practices observed, should be extended to ensure that students experience tangible observable experiences to develop deep understanding before moving to more abstract concepts in Science and Biology.
- A sample of students' copybooks and folders were viewed, and these were well maintained. It was evident that students frequently transcribed notes. To enhance this approach, all teachers should provide opportunities for students to capture their learning in their own words, using key words, diagrams and symbols as appropriate.
- All teachers provided support and verbal feedback to students during lessons. There was evidence of teacher oversight on the copybooks sampled. To augment this and to support student progress, all teachers should facilitate the provision of formative feedback on students' investigative logs. This feedback could be provided by peers; the teacher or the student could use exemplars and identify ways they themselves could enhance their work in future.

2. Subject provision and whole-school support

- Overall, the subject provision and whole-school support for Science and Biology were very good.

- All students studied Science during the Junior Cycle programme. All students completed modules in Biology, Physics, Chemistry and Agricultural Science during TY. Students reported that these modules supported their subject choices for senior cycle. There was very good uptake of Biology. The school also offered Science to students in LCA.
- Appropriate time was given to Biology on the timetable. The time given to junior cycle Science falls slightly short of the minimum requirement; senior management should ensure the minimum requirement is given to the subject as soon as possible.
- The senior management promoted teacher collaboration and learning. Commendably, the school's teaching and learning committee hosted regular "teach meets" where teachers shared effective practice. A recent *Forbairt* initiative encouraged peer observation among teachers. The school reported a very good uptake on this worthwhile initiative among teachers.
- The science department aimed to provide feedback to students, after their Subject Learning and Assessment Review (SLAR) meeting and within one month of the CBA, which is good practice. While the descriptors for CBAs were shared with parents on the school's communication platform, the school reports did not provide formative feedback on student skill progression. Senior management should lead a review of this approach with a view to incorporating feedback on student performance in the CBA on school reports.
- The senior management had supported teachers to develop ideas they had for modules for TY, and cross-curricular initiatives such as robotics and a Science, Technology, Engineering, the Arts, and Mathematics (STEAM) event for visiting primary school students. There were many examples of extra-curricular activities, events and competitions that promoted Science and Biology.

3. Planning and preparation

- The quality of planning and preparation was effective. Examples of highly effective approaches to planning for improvement were also observed.
- The science department had two co-ordinator roles one for junior cycle Science and another for senior cycle Biology. The role of co-ordinator was clearly defined. The science team demonstrated good collaborative practices with many roles and responsibilities shared amongst the team. They met regularly during the year and kept detailed minutes of their decisions and actions. In addition, during informal interactions between teachers the sharing of very useful practice occurred; the science teachers are encouraged to explore ways to capture these rich exchanges and decisions in their minutes or plans.
- Highly effective approaches to subject department improvement planning were evident. The science team had identified three targets with clear actions and a timeframe to achieve their aims.
- Planning for Science was useful. Huge effort had been made to identify the intended learning and specific assessments for each of the learning outcomes in the science specification. Commendably, the science teachers had also linked each learning outcome to a *Nature of Science* learning outcome. When the science teachers next review their plans, they should seek to make further connections between learning outcomes and make even more explicit links to the specific scientific skill in focus.
- Teachers had reviewed their TY modules considering the new TY programme statement (TYPS). To enhance their modules, teachers should clearly outline where and how their module aligns to the student dimensions and developmental indicators in the new TYPS.
- A scheme of work for the redeveloped Biology specification, along with a very useful subject plan was in place. Biology teachers should now focus on designing learning activities that allow students to develop the necessary scientific skills and key competencies for senior cycle. To plan for this, teachers should seek ways to incorporate an aspect of the *Nature of Science* in all lessons.

The draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation were discussed with the principal, deputy principal and subject co-ordinators at the conclusion of the evaluation.

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For the students of Wilson's Hospital School about their learning in Science & Biology

Date of inspection: 20 and 21/04/2026

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 Science & Biology.

What were the main findings of the inspection?

- Teaching and learning were effective. Students found the subjects interesting.
- Students had many opportunities to work with each other during lessons.
- There were very good opportunities to study Science and Biology.
- The planning for the subject was effective. The teachers had a very good plan for improving Science in the school.

What did the inspector recommend to make teaching and learning better in Science & Biology?

- To improve assessment, teachers should ask all students a few key questions during lessons.
- Teachers have been asked to give students more opportunities to investigate and research in lessons.
- Senior management have been asked to ensure Science gets the minimum time required.

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