An Roinn Oideachais agus Óige
Department of Education and Youth

Subject Inspection: Science & Physics
REPORT

Ainm na scoile/School name	St Joseph's Secondary School
Seoladh na scoile/School address	Spanish Point Miltown Malbay Co. Clare
Uimhir rolla/Roll number	62010C
Dáta na cigireachta/ Date of evaluation	26/11/2025
Dáta eisiúna na tuairisce/Date of issue of report	20/03/2026

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 & Physics 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>Bí Cineálta</td></tr>
<tr><td>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.</td><td>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</td></tr>
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The school met the requirements in relation to each of the checks above.

Subject inspection

Dates of inspection	25 and 26 November 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 five lessons • Examination of students' work • Feedback to principal and relevant staff

School context

St Joseph's Secondary School is a co-educational voluntary school. The school operates under the trusteeship of Catholic Education, an Irish Schools Trust (CEIST). There were 449 students enrolled in the school at the time of the evaluation. The school offers students the Junior Cycle, an optional Transition Year (TY) programme, the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programme and the Leaving Certificate (Established) (LCE).

Summary of main findings and recommendations:

Findings

- The quality of teaching observed in the science and physics lessons was good overall and ranged in quality from good to very good.
- The quality of learning was good; all lessons had good levels of student activity and engagement.
- Assessment practices were good overall. Most lessons used a variety of effective assessment-for-learning (AfL) methodologies to assess student understanding of lesson material.
- Whole-school support and subject provision for the sciences were good. Junior Cycle Science is a core subject and the uptake of Physics in the school is very good.
- The school had two well-resourced laboratories, though one of these rooms was quite small. Due to the uptake of the four science subjects at senior cycle, at least a quarter of all science lessons were not accommodated in the available laboratories.
- The schemes of work created for Science were very good. There is scope for the Physics schemes to be further developed to the same detailed standard, aligned with the new subject specification that started this academic year for fifth-year students.

Recommendations

- Teachers need to ensure that enquiry-based investigations, practical work and hypothesis testing become a more regular feature of science lessons, as these are key skills that need to be fully developed over the three years of Junior Cycle Science.
- The practice of passive note-taking should be avoided as it does not encourage meaningful engagement with the lesson content, and some students are likely to struggle to write all of the notes within the available time.
- Written formative feedback was an area for improvement. The science department should consider providing this feedback to students on their practical work to support them in fully developing their scientific key skills and competencies.
- To address the issue of science lessons not taking place in laboratories, senior management should review the practice of concurrent timetabling of Science, and the board of management needs to prioritise the development of additional laboratory facilities, given the high level of curriculum provision in the sciences.

Detailed findings and recommendations

1. Teaching, learning and assessment

- Overall, the quality of teaching in Science and Physics was good, with the observed lessons being of good or very good quality. The school had ensured that teacher professional learning was sought for the new senior cycle science subject specifications. It was evident that teachers had begun to engage meaningfully with practices and methodologies to support student learning.
- Teachers had prepared well for their lessons and effective use was made of digital technology in all lessons. Learning intentions were shared with students at the start of most lessons. All teachers should use the learning intentions more effectively to check on students' learning during the lesson. The teachers should ensure that time is spent at the end of lessons to summarise or to recapitulate the main learning points. Students should be encouraged to use the learning intentions to reflect on their own learning.
- Effective methodologies were used by the teachers and students during lessons. These included activating prior learning, think-pair-share exercises, clear teacher instruction, group and individual tasks, discussion of success criteria, and some investigations and practical work. As enquiry-based learning and key skills and competencies are integral to the delivery of junior and senior cycle science subjects, the science department should prioritise providing more investigations and practical work for students in all year groups.
- The quality of learning was good. Students were engaged in their learning and showed very good levels of interest and understanding of topics and used scientific terminology effectively. All classes were of mixed ability and differentiation strategies were generally good. While lessons had a good balance between the time spent on teacher instruction and student activity, some activities would have benefited from teachers ensuring that feedback was sought at the conclusion of the tasks, with a view to engaging all students and maximising learning opportunities.
- It was observed in student copybooks, and reported by students, that note-taking was a practice that could take up considerable time in lessons. The science department should share notes online so that more time can be spent in lessons on active learning.
- Classroom management was very good. Student behaviour was excellent and student-teacher interactions were very positive. The two laboratories were print-rich and had suitable scientific charts, posters, and samples of students' work on display, creating an environment that was conducive to learning.
- The quality of assessment was good overall. Questioning was generally of a very good standard. It was best when questions were distributed across the whole class and students were given time to formulate a response. In some cases, there was an over-reliance on global questioning and chorus answering. Teachers should seek to minimise this practice. AfL strategies were observed in lessons through the use of "show-me" boards and online quizzing platforms. For the most part, these strategies provided teachers with very effective information on students' levels of understanding. The science teachers should look to vary and expand on the strategies they use occasionally and ensure that they become a regular feature of lessons.
- Homework was assigned, monitored and corrected regularly. The practice of whole-class corrections of homework and tasks should be reviewed to ensure it does not take up too much time in lessons. Written formative feedback was occasionally provided to students on aspects of their work. The teachers should provide more effective formative feedback to students in their practical work. The science department could consider giving students an assigned merit or credit mark towards their year's practical work, to further support the written formative feedback process.
- The students that were met in the focus group spoke positively about their experience of learning in Science lessons. They mentioned that they had autonomy over the Extended Experimental Investigation for their classroom based assessments (CBAs). They expressed a desire that practical work would feature more regularly in science lessons.

2. Subject provision and whole-school support

- The quality of subject provision and whole-school support was good. Science is a core subject for junior cycle students. The school offers students Agricultural Science, Biology, Chemistry, and Physics at senior cycle. Students sample the senior cycle science subjects in TY on a modular basis.
- The time allocation for Science was good. Lessons were an hour in length and students had two periods of Science a week in the three years of junior cycle. The time allocation for Physics in senior cycle was very good, with four class periods per week in fifth-year and three class periods in sixth-year. This is a generous allocation, and the school should review if it is possible to achieve a better balance between senior and junior cycle science subjects to support the teachers in providing more investigative work in junior cycle.
- The school had two well-resourced and well-maintained laboratories. Due to the increase in enrolment in the past few years and the increased uptake of science subjects in the school, almost a quarter of all science lessons did not take place in these laboratories. The Department of Education and Youth has granted permission for the school to proceed with a new extension, which will contain an extra laboratory. The board of management should try to expedite the acquisition of the extension to support better laboratory access for science subjects. In the short term, senior management should review the practice of concurrent timetabling of Science as this impacts on the time available to students in the laboratories.
- Health and safety equipment, including first-aid kits and fire extinguishers, were in the laboratories. Chemicals were stored appropriately in the preparation rooms.
- Senior management facilitated teachers' professional learning. Teachers gave of their time to support and encourage students' participation in extra-curricular and co-curricular activities such as SciFest, the Stripe Young Scientist competition, Science Week and educational trips. The school participated in Trinity College Physics department's Pitch Tar experiment. The students that were met in the focus group spoke positively about their experience of learning in Science and Physics and appreciated the extra-curricular learning opportunities that the school provided for all science students.

3. Planning and preparation

- The quality of the science department's planning was very good. A subject co-ordinator was appointed, and minutes of department meetings were maintained. These minutes included records of discussion on teaching and learning strategies. A large quantity of online resources had been gathered, created and shared by the science teachers. Whole-school self-evaluation initiatives in homework were incorporated into the department plans. It would be useful if the science teachers, as part of this homework strategy, were to vary the type of homework provided to students so that key competencies and skills are practised more frequently.
- The schemes of work for Junior Cycle Science were very good. They included suitable timeframes, learning intentions that were linked to specific and detailed teaching methodologies and assessment modes, and a teacher reflection section which supported annual review and improvement. As the new specification for Physics started this academic year, the schemes for Physics should be further developed to the same detailed standard as those for Science in due course.
- State certificate examination results were analysed against national norms annually by the science teachers. There was scope to devise further strategies for improvement in some areas that could be measured against set targets within the context of the school. The strategies and their effectiveness should be discussed on a regular basis and recorded in minutes of meetings.

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.

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Department of Education and Youth

For the students of St Joseph's Secondary School about their learning in Science & Physics

Dates of inspection:
25 & 26 November 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 Science & Physics.

What were the main findings of the inspection?

- Science lessons were good or very good in terms of teaching and learning.
- Students enjoyed science lessons that involved investigations and experiments.
- Almost a quarter of Science lessons did not take place in the laboratories.

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

- Students should be given notes online, or as handouts, so that they do not have to spend too much time in lessons writing them into their copybooks.
- The school should try to change the timetabling of Science lessons so that more of them can take place in the laboratories. This would provide students with more time for scientific investigations and practical work.

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

Appendix

SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

Submitted by the Board of Management

Area 1 Observations on the content of the inspection report

We wish to acknowledge the following findings:

- Very good Teaching and Learning.
- The diverse use of Teaching Methodologies.
- The very good subject provision and whole school support.
- The positive and respectful classroom environment where students were actively engaged in learning and well behaved.
- The very good subject planning and Department organisation.

The Board of Management will seek to progress:

- Our approved Additional Accommodation with renewed focus on a new lab to ensure students have more class time in a lab setting.
- The development of a department-wide approach to written feedback and a variety of homework assignments.
- The enhancement of students' skills in effective note-making rather than passive note-taking.

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