



An Roinn Oideachais  
Department of Education

# Subject Inspection: Science & Agricultural Science REPORT

Ainm na scoile/School name	Our Ladys School
Seoladh na scoile/School address	Templeogue Road Terenure Dublin 6W
Uimhir rolla/Roll number	60860Q
Dáta na cigireachta/ Date of evaluation	14/11/2024
Dáta eisiúna na tuairisce/ Date of issue of report	09/01/2025

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# 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. 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 on the findings and recommendations of the report; the board chose to accept the report without response.

## 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:	
<i>Child Protection</i>	<i>Anti-bullying</i>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. The name of the DLP and the Child Safeguarding Statement are prominently displayed near the main entrance to the school.</li><li>2. The Child Safeguarding Statement has been ratified by the board and includes an annual review and a risk assessment.</li><li>3. All teachers visited reported that they have read the Child Safeguarding Statement and that they are aware of their responsibilities as mandated persons.</li></ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. The school has developed an anti-bullying policy that meets the requirements of the <i>Anti-Bullying Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools (2013)</i> or <i>Bí Cineálta (2024)</i> and this policy is reviewed annually.</li><li>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.</li></ol>

The school met the requirements in relation to each of the checks above.

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# Subject inspection

<b>Date of inspection</b>	11/11/24 & 14/11/2024
<b>Inspection activities undertaken</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Review of relevant documents</li><li>• Discussions with senior leadership team and teachers</li><li>• Examination of students' work</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Observation of teaching and learning during seven lessons</li><li>• Interaction with students, including focus group meeting</li><li>• Feedback to senior leadership team and teachers</li></ul>

## School context

Our Lady's School is a post-primary school for girls with an enrolment of 798 students. The school provides a Junior Cycle programme, a compulsory Transition Year (TY) programme, the Leaving Certificate and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme.

## Summary of main findings and recommendations:

### Findings

- The quality of teaching and learning was very good overall. Teachers placed students at the centre of the learning experiences.
- Learning that was active, experiential and collaborative featured prominently in lessons, with very high levels of student participation.
- Very good assessment practices were in use.
- Teachers' differentiation to accommodate for individual learner needs was generally very good.
- The quality of subject provision and whole-school support was very good, with scope to extend the resources for Agricultural Science.
- The quality of planning and preparation was very good.

### Recommendations

- In some instances, teachers should ensure that, when possible, lessons are sequenced so they begin with concrete learning experiences before the abstract aspects of a concept are introduced, and they explicitly teach the meaning of complex words.
- School management should ensure the provision of a greater range of resources for Agricultural Science, including spaces to grow plants, so that students have an extended growing period to do investigations during Leaving Certificate and TY.

## Detailed findings and recommendations

### 1. Teaching, learning and assessment

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment was very good overall. The majority of lessons were very good, and some lessons observed were good.
- Teachers delivered lessons with a series of very well-designed learning tasks that supported active learning. The range of tasks provided enabled students to engage with content in a variety of ways. In almost all instances, very good balance was achieved between investigation, collaborative, individual and whole-class learning.
- Students demonstrated very high levels of interest and participation. Typically, their voice was prominent, and their contributions and opinions were continuously sought and

acknowledged by teachers. Students confidently met that high expectation, expressing their understanding of concepts both verbally and in writing throughout their lessons.

- It was very good that students had to continuously think during their lessons. Teachers skilfully maximised the opportunities for students to figure out concepts and to learn experientially. Students were very capable in thinking critically, explaining their observations and reasoning through discussion. Commendably, they sustained focus throughout lessons and when some challenging concepts were being taught. Higher-order thinking was also integrated when teachers required them to compare concepts.
- Students demonstrated strong ownership of their learning. As well as productive class work, they demonstrated high levels of commitment to homework, class tests, the additional assessment components of their course, and the school's processes for supporting academic progress and reflection. They presented work in their copies neatly with attention to detail. Some senior cycle students had ably developed their own strategies for learning, such as individually composed notes on concepts.
- Assessment of learning was very well integrated throughout lessons. Teachers' questions were highly effective and these prompted thinking, clarification and sentence completion. Well-designed worksheets were used often. They supported the gradual construction of understanding in topics and provided graphic and symbolic representations of concepts. Students' regular use of 'show me' boards supported clarification and recall. Teachers' pacing of assessment was good and students were given appropriate time to think and to write responses.
- Teachers also engaged in high quality monitoring. While students were busy with their tasks, teachers used the information they had gained from assessment to support individual learners in making progress as necessary. Homework and regular tests were very well monitored with feedback given that supported progression.
- Summative assessment was appropriate through end-of-topic tests, twice-yearly school assessments and a classroom-based assessment (CBA) in Science. It is worth considering how the second CBA could be re-introduced in third year as its inclusion would support research skills and the investigation of Science in society.
- Differentiation was generally very good. It was evident that this was a whole-school teaching strategy. Many teachers set clear expectations for what students must, should and could achieve during tasks. They scaffolded learning by drawing on background knowledge, providing experiential learning and enabling students to explain their understanding often and using key words. They gave students options at times. Text was displayed in short, well-spaced sentences. Some used success criteria for tasks.
- In a few instances, differentiation could have been further supported by beginning the lesson with concrete learning before moving onto symbolic and abstract aspects of the concept, and by explicitly teaching the meaning of complex words like apparatus, endothermic and gestation. This would have made the learning more accessible to a wider range of individual learners earlier in the lesson.
- In the meeting with students, it was clear that they saw themselves as learners and appreciated the value of doing their best. They learned a lot from doing experiments, analysing evidence, thinking and discussing, and also appreciated the importance of working independently. They felt that their teachers validate their efforts and help them to make progress.

## **2. Subject provision and whole school support**

- The quality of subject provision and whole-school support was very good.
- Very good leadership of teaching and learning was provided by the senior leadership team. They were actively supporting the opportunities for teacher professional development, whole-school approaches to learning and collaborative planning. Their leadership of the school's practices in assessment, in monitoring students' attainment and the provision of more formative reports to parents was providing students and their parents with a clear picture of the quality of learning and the steps to progression.

- In addition, ongoing engagement in the school self-evaluation (SSE) process has enabled the school to respond to evolving needs. Teaching, learning and assessment was advanced through implementing the Junior Cycle, training in differentiation and developing mainstream teaching support for additional educational needs, including dyslexia.
- Arrangements for access to the subjects were very good. Science was a core subject in the Junior Cycle programme. All students experienced a module in Agricultural Science during TY. Students were taking a *SciFest* module in TY, further enhancing investigative Science. Leaving Certificate Agricultural Science was being provided as an option each year with one class group in fifth and sixth year.
- The school provides a very good learning environment. Five excellently maintained laboratories were in place, facilitating active learning and investigative work. Each laboratory was resourced with data projectors and digital devices for students use.
- However, some essential resources for Agricultural Science should be sourced in the interests of learners' experiences in the curriculum. There used to be outdoor raised beds on site to grow crops, and these should be re-established within the grounds. The provision of a polytunnel, growth cabinets, several seedling propagators and data sensors would extend the growing season so that potentially all students of Agricultural Science could grow their own plants during TY and Leaving Certificate.
- Timetabling is generally very good with each subject allocated time according to requirements. Almost all lessons were taking place in a laboratory. It would be worthwhile extending the practice used with the current third years where no more than five class groups are timetabled simultaneously. This may enable more lessons to take place in a laboratory.

### 3. Planning and preparation

- The quality of planning and preparation was very good.
- A positive culture of collaboration was evident. Teachers were using meetings to coordinate planning, laboratory management and assessment practices.
- Teachers worked together and individually to plan lessons that met curricular requirements, students' needs and whole-school approaches. Teachers were also engaging with many opportunities for teacher professional learning in the subjects.
- Comprehensive schemes of work were developed for Junior Cycle Science and Agricultural Science courses for TY and Leaving Certificate. Within the plans, it was clear that facilitating good learning experiences and learning outcomes in the curriculum was the main priority. Rigorous attention was given to active learning methodologies and to assessment practices that meet the curricular requirements.
- It would be useful for teachers to examine the schemes of work from the perspective of further enhancing students' opportunities to experience and to progressively build on each one of the actions of the core strands. This could allow students to approach their CBAs and the Individual Investigative Study (IIS) more independently.
- It was very good that teacher reflection featured prominently in planning documents and teachers' practice. Teachers had developed a very useful shared padlet to hold links, videos and documents that support teaching and learning.
- A range of beneficial extra-curricular experiences were being provided to enhance lifelong interests in the sciences. These included science competitions and the celebration of science week.

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



An Roinn Oideachais  
Department of Education

For the students of Our Lady's  
School about their learning in  
Science & Agricultural Science  
Date of inspection: 14/11/2024

### 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 & Agricultural Science.

### What were the main findings of the inspection?



- Teaching and learning were very good.
- Students enjoyed learning.
- Students explained things very well when they spoke and when they wrote things down.
- There are very good laboratories in the school.
- Teachers planned the lessons very well.

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



- Difficult words and complicated parts of the subject should be made easier to understand.
- The school should provide more equipment for Agricultural Science, including spaces to grow plants.

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
<b>Excellent</b>	<b>Provision that is excellent</b> 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
<b>Very good</b>	<b>Provision that is very good</b> 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
<b>Good</b>	<b>Provision that is good</b> 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
<b>Requires improvement to achieve a good standard</b>	<b>Provision that requires improvement to achieve a good standard</b> 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
<b>Requires significant improvement to achieve a good standard</b>	<b>Provision that requires significant improvement to achieve a good standard</b> 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