



An Roinn Oideachais
Department of Education

Subject Inspection: Religious Education Report

REPORT FOR SCHOOL RESPONSE

Ainm na scoile/School name	St Angela's Secondary School
Seoladh na scoile/School address	Ursuline Convent Waterford
Uimhir rolla/Roll number	64990D
Dáta na cigireachta/ Date of evaluation	25/09/2024
Dáta eisiúna na tuairisce/ Date of issue of report	08/11/2024

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.

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">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.	<ol style="list-style-type: none">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.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.

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

Subject inspection

Date of inspection	24/09/2024 & 25/09/2024
Inspection activities undertaken <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review of relevant documents• Discussion with principal and key staff• Interaction with students, including focus groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Observation of teaching and learning during five lessons• Examination of students' work• Feedback to principal and relevant staff

School context

St. Angela's School is a voluntary secondary school with 960 female students. It is under the trusteeship of Le Chéile. As well as the Junior Cycle and Leaving Certificate programmes, the school has a compulsory Transition Year (TY) programme and offers the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) and Leaving Certificate Applied Programme (LCA).

Summary of main findings and recommendations:

Findings

- The overall quality of teaching and learning was good, with instances of very good practice observed in most lessons.
- Overall, the quality of assessment was very good; student attainment was carefully monitored in lessons and formative assessment was well embedded in practice.
- In all lessons observed, students were engaged and motivated to learn and lessons were characterised by positive, affirming and respectful interactions.
- While a few effective examples of differentiated teaching methodologies were observed, this was identified as an area for further development.
- Whole-school provision and support for Religious Education was very good and it was highly commendable that all students have the option to study Religious Education to leaving certificate level.
- Teachers' collaborative practices were very good and subject department planning was effective, with scope for development in relation to revising units of learning and the analysis of examination results.

Recommendations

- In line with the new whole-school policy on effective teaching and learning in one-hour lessons, teachers should enhance the use of student-led tasks and provide adequate time for collaborative learning opportunities to activate higher levels of student voice.
- To build on existing good practices, the Religious Education department should further implement approaches to differentiation that will provide appropriate levels of challenge and support to ensure that each student reaches their learning potential.
- The Religious Education department should review the units of learning at junior cycle and incorporate the analysis of examination results and target setting in subject planning.

Detailed findings and recommendations

1. Teaching, learning and assessment

- Teaching and learning was effective overall and there were instances of highly effective practice. Teachers prepared interesting and purposeful resources to support learner outcomes and raise interest levels. In the very good lessons observed, teachers successfully incorporated collaborative and active learning tasks to enhance learner outcomes and experiences.
- While all lessons included collaborative tasks, a more structured approach to collaborative and active learning was required in many lessons to raise enjoyment levels and improve the learner experience.
- Teachers exhibited very good subject knowledge and a strong passion for the subject, which had a positive impact on learner outcomes and experiences. Students in the focus group reported that they enjoyed Religious Education and found the subject interesting.
- Teachers utilised a very good range of effective resources to enhance learning, including video clips, worksheets, and images.
- Classroom management was very good, and this fostered a positive and affirming learning environment conducive to wellbeing. In all lessons observed, teachers shared and discussed learning intentions in terms of what the students were going to be able to do at the end of the lesson. In the most effective lessons, these were revisited to consolidate the learning.
- Prior learning was effectively used to scaffold new learning, introduce new topics and enhance learner outcomes. The contextualisation of key concepts and the use of subject-specific terminology were integrated well into lessons.
- While differentiation was effective, this was mainly achieved through targeted questioning and individual support. A departmental approach to developing varied differentiation strategies is recommended to support all learners in reaching their potential.
- Assessment was very good. There was very good use of mini whiteboards to check on progress during lessons. Questioning was a key strength of the Religious Education department, and teachers skilfully asked higher-order questions while supporting and developing critical thinking and analytical skills to elicit high-quality student responses.
- Teachers provided very good oral feedback on student work completed, and responded well to individual needs, providing good levels of additional support where needed.
- Very good practice was noted when student self-assessment was effectively utilised as a platform to provide feedback and discuss success criteria. This review provided opportunities for students to reflect on their learning and to note improvements they could make in the future. This practice was highly commendable.
- Students were confident learners and displayed very good levels of interest in learning topics such as rituals. Overall, the quality of learning experiences was varied. Learner experiences were best when students were actively involved in their learning and when interesting and purposeful resources were used. Students in the focus group were very positive about their learning experiences and favoured opportunities to engage effectively in collaborative activities.
- Teachers effectively supported and encouraged reflection on the diversity of beliefs and values in our world today, in keeping with the key aims of Religious Education. In the most effective lessons, there was a very good emphasis on the development of students' key skills in Religious Education with a focus on reflection and independent learning.
- While there was effective use of digital technology in many lessons to support teaching and learning, there was potential to develop and expand the integration of digital technology across the department. During the student focus group meeting students expressed an interest in using more digital technology in the classroom to support their learning.

2. Subject provision and whole school support

- Whole school provision and support for Religious Education was very good. Religious Education formed part of the core curriculum within the framework for Junior Cycle and Leaving Certificate Religious Education was available to all students. Religious Education was appropriately timetabled at both junior and senior cycle.
- Support for and engagement in teacher professional learning (TPL) was very good. Teachers have attended recent training from the support services concerning Junior Cycle and Senior Cycle Religious Education.
- Senior management actively promoted a culture of continuous improvement in teaching and learning. There was a strong commitment to the promotion of effective lesson structure in one-hour lessons to best support learner outcomes and experiences. It was noted that the school had only recently moved to one-hour lessons and this strong leadership, guidance, and support from senior management was highly commendable.
- It was positive that the school was implementing a whole-school assessment policy and had replaced some Religious Education in-house examinations with classroom-based assessments and short in-class formative assessment tasks.
- The Religious Education team was working closely with the Additional Educational Needs department to ensure high levels of communication to enable teachers to meet the needs of all students.
- A good range of co-curricular activities were organised to support student engagement and interest in the subject. For example, trips to places of religious significance and a multi-cultural day.
- Very good structures were in place to support collaborative planning and to enable teachers to further develop their practice.

3. Planning and preparation

- The overall quality of planning and preparation was very good.
- The Religious Education team was highly collaborative and collegial and members displayed a shared passion for the subject. They made good use of the school's digital platform to share resources and a bank of stimuli had been developed and shared among the team.
- The quality of reflection on teaching and learning practice was a significant strength observed during the evaluation. The Religious Education department was committed to reflecting on their practice and developing effective teaching, learning and assessment practices.
- In line with effective practice, the position of subject co-ordinator for Religious Education was rotated and the minutes from all subject department meetings were recorded in the shared folder.
- The subject plan was prepared comprehensively but there were some areas in need of improvement such as reviewing units of learning for Junior Cycle and a clear focus on the analysis of examination results and target-setting.

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.