



An Roinn Oideachais
Department of Education

Subject Inspection: Mathematics Report

REPORT

Ainm na scoile/School name	Portumna Community School
Seoladh na scoile/School address	St. Brigid's Road Portumna Co. Galway
Uimhir rolla/Roll number	914130
Dáta na cigireachta/ Date of evaluation	12 October 2022
Dáta eisiúna na tuairisce/ Date of issue of report	19/01/2023

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 Mathematics 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.

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:	
<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> and this policy is reviewed annually.2. The board of management minutes record that the principal provides a report to the board at least once a term on the overall number of bullying cases reported (by means of the bullying recording template provided in the <i>Procedures</i>) since the previous report to the board.3. The school's 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

Dates of inspection	11 and 12 October 2022
Inspection activities undertaken <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review of relevant documents• Discussion with principal and key staff• Interaction with students	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Observation of teaching and learning during six lessons• Examination of students' work• Feedback to principal, deputy principal and relevant staff

School context

Portumna Community School is a co-educational, multi-denominational post-primary school with 466 students enrolled. As well as the Junior Cycle and Leaving Certificate programmes, the school offers an optional Transition Year (TY) programme, Leaving Certificate Applied and Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme.

Summary of main findings and recommendations:

Findings

- The overall standard of teaching was good with highly effective teaching practices observed in some lessons.
- Learning was of good quality overall; outcomes were best where students had opportunities to actively engage with the lesson content.
- A range of effective assessment strategies was observed with scope to improve how students' work is monitored and how learning is supported with written formative feedback.
- Subject provision and whole school support for Mathematics was very good.
- Planning and preparation was good overall; individual lesson planning ranged from fair to very good with best outcomes for students in lessons with clear learning intentions.
- The mathematics department has undergone a lot of change in recent years; the members demonstrated high levels of professionalism and are working collaboratively and diligently to provide students with high quality and enjoyable learning experiences in Mathematics.

Recommendations

- All teachers in the department should build in opportunities for students to have active engagement with lesson content.
- The quality of how students' work is monitored requires improvement and teachers should incorporate more written formative feedback to support learning.
- The mathematics department should look at how best to use team teaching to support students' learning experiences and outcomes and to support purposeful involvement in mathematics lessons.

Detailed findings and recommendations

1. Teaching, learning and assessment

- The overall quality of teaching was good with highly effective practices observed in some lessons. These included using specially prepared tasks to make real life connections to the lesson content, assessing understanding and prior knowledge through questioning and differentiating to ensure all students enjoyed elements of challenge and success.
- Learning experiences and outcomes were best where students had active engagement with lesson content. This was achieved when students were provided with opportunities for discussion and comparison as well as working collaboratively on suitably pitched tasks.
- In the lessons observed, students enjoyed safe and affirming learning environments where they were happy to offer suggestions and seek clarifications. There was very good rapport evident between students and teachers and among students.
- Many examples of effective questioning were observed, particularly where it was used to check understanding and knowledge, identify prior learning, include, re-cap and give students opportunities to use the relevant terminology in context.
- Some written formative feedback was seen on students' work. All students should receive regular written formative feedback on their work as well as after testing. It should include guidance on what needs to be improved, how to make the improvements and affirmation for what is done well.
- There was scope to improve how students work is monitored. Where students are required to monitor their own work, the teacher should provide guidance on how best to do this and keep a check on how it is being completed.

2. Subject provision and whole school support

- Subject provision and whole school support for Mathematics was very good.
- Mathematics lessons were well distributed throughout the week. Some groups had a split double on one day of the week due to timetabling constraints but management have acknowledged feedback from the mathematics department on this arrangement and will endeavour to meet future timetabling requests from the department where possible.
- Concurrent timetabling ensured students could move between levels while remaining at the highest level for as long as possible. Commendably, the mathematics department set high expectations for the number of students following the higher level course.
- Students had opportunities and were supported to partake in extra-curricular events which promote Mathematics. There is a drop-in mathematics help-desk session run weekly by the mathematics teachers who volunteer their time. Assistance is also available at the homework club to support Mathematics.
- School management was highly supportive of continuing professional development. As well as supporting and encouraging individual requests for further training, whole school events are organised to build capacity, awareness and knowledge among staff.
- The special educational needs department ensure mainstream teachers are well informed of students' individual needs and the agreed strategies to support them. A combination of face-to-face meetings and effective use of the of shared digital platform ensure there is a robust two-way communication system in place to support students with additional needs and report on their progress in mathematics lessons.
- There is a need to improve how team teaching is being used in lessons. The range of options to ensure students are benefitting from this additional resource should be explored, and guidance should be provided for teachers on expectations, possibilities and accountability measures to evaluate its effectiveness.

- School policies are regularly reviewed and updated, and school self evaluation processes support the integration of whole school improvement targets into subject department planning.

3. Planning and preparation

- Individual lesson planning was good overall. The quality ranged from fair to very good with best outcomes for students where clear learning intentions were used to plan the lessons.
- There was scope for improvement in lessons where the focus was more on covering content without sufficiently identifying and using students' prior learning and knowledge to set the pace.
- The well planned lessons had sufficient flexibility built in to modify the pace when students were doing well.
- Learning experiences and outcomes were best where students had active engagement with the lesson content. This was facilitated through the use of well planned activities and tasks which provided opportunities for students to discuss, compare, measure and analyse. Lesson planning should take into account the days that a team teacher is available. Teachers should plan accordingly to ensure students are benefitting from this additional and valuable resource.
- A digital platform is used by the mathematics teachers to share plans, resources and relevant policies. It was well populated with scope to further develop it a means of sharing strategies for assessment and to support some teachers in the department to broaden the range of methodologies they presently use.

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.

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	Example of descriptive terms
Very Good	<i>Very good</i> applies where the quality of the areas evaluated is of a very high standard. The very few areas for improvement that exist do not significantly impact on the overall quality of provision. For some schools in this category the quality of what is evaluated is <i>outstanding</i> and provides an example for other schools of exceptionally high standards of provision.	Very good; of a very high quality; very effective practice; highly commendable; very successful; few areas for improvement; notable; of a very high standard. Excellent; outstanding; exceptionally high standard, with very significant strengths; exemplary
Good	<i>Good</i> applies where the strengths in the areas evaluated clearly outweigh the areas in need of improvement. The areas requiring improvement impact on the quality of pupils' learning. The school needs to build on its strengths and take action to address the areas identified as requiring improvement in order to achieve a <i>very good</i> standard.	Good; good quality; valuable; effective practice; competent; useful; commendable; good standard; some areas for improvement
Satisfactory	<i>Satisfactory</i> applies where the quality of provision is adequate. The strengths in what is being evaluated just outweigh the shortcomings. While the shortcomings do not have a significant negative impact they constrain the quality of the learning experiences and should be addressed in order to achieve a better standard.	Satisfactory; adequate; appropriate provision although some possibilities for improvement exist; acceptable level of quality; improvement needed in some areas
Fair	<i>Fair</i> applies where, although there are some strengths in the areas evaluated, deficiencies or shortcomings that outweigh those strengths also exist. The school will have to address certain deficiencies without delay in order to ensure that provision is satisfactory or better.	Fair; evident weaknesses that are impacting on pupils' learning; less than satisfactory; experiencing difficulty; must improve in specified areas; action required to improve
Weak	<i>Weak</i> applies where there are serious deficiencies in the areas evaluated. Immediate and coordinated whole-school action is required to address the areas of concern. In some cases, the intervention of other agencies may be required to support improvements.	Weak; unsatisfactory; insufficient; ineffective; poor; requiring significant change, development or improvement; experiencing significant difficulties;