



An Roinn Oideachais  
Department of Education

# Subject Inspection: Science & Biology

## REPORT

Ainm na scoile/School name St Bricin's College

Seoladh na scoile/School address Railway Road,  
Belturbet,  
Co. Cavan

Uimhir rolla/Roll number 70350W

Dáta na cigireachta/  
Date of evaluation 02/05/2025

Dáta eisiúna na tuairisce/  
Date of issue of report 17/09/2025

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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(s) 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

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

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
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| 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

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| <b>Date of inspection</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                            | 02/05/2025                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| <b>Inspection activities undertaken</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Review of relevant documents</li><li>• Discussion with principal and key staff</li><li>• Interaction with students, including focus groups</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Observation of teaching and learning during 4 lessons</li><li>• Examination of students' work</li><li>• Feedback to principal, deputy principal and relevant staff</li></ul> |

## School context

St Bricin's College is a co-educational school under the trusteeship of Cavan Monaghan Education and Training Board (ETB). The school offers the Junior Cycle, an optional Transition Year (TY), the established Leaving Certificate, the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) and the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA). The current enrolment is 252 students. Recent extensions to the school building have seen the addition of eleven new classrooms, two classes for young people with Autism and a special class for young people with moderate general learning disabilities.

## Summary of main findings and recommendations:

### Findings

- The overall quality of teaching and learning observed was very good with some instances of excellent practice.
- Lessons took place in a positive, supportive environment where teachers affirmed and encouraged students consistently; student behaviour and classroom management were excellent throughout the evaluation period.
- Exemplary teaching was characterised by the use of success criteria, which clearly outlined what high-quality work looked like and set aspirational targets for learners.
- Discussions with the student focus group highlighted their appreciation for the supports provided by teachers.
- The use of digital technology played a significant role in supporting learning, particularly through presentations, video clips and animations that clarified complex concepts or demonstrated a skill.

### Recommendations

- Teachers are encouraged to create more opportunities in lessons for student voice and collaborative learning activities.
- The science team should discuss how best formative feedback can be used to support students in their learning.
- In order to further develop the schemes of work for both Junior Cycle Science and Leaving Certificate Biology, the learning outcomes should be linked to relevant resources and methodologies.

## Detailed findings and recommendations

### 1. Teaching, learning and assessment

- The overall quality of teaching and learning observed was very good with some instances of excellent practice. Lessons took place in positive, supportive environments

where teachers consistently affirmed and encouraged students. Student behaviour and classroom management were excellent throughout the evaluation period.

- Teachers enthusiasm and passion for Science and Biology were evident and contributed significantly to student engagement in the subject.
- Learning intentions were clearly established in all lessons and provided a strong framework to guide students through the lesson topic. Highly effective practice was seen where these intentions were explicitly connected to prior learning and framed in terms of what students should understand and be able to do by the end of the lesson. Starter activities were used to very good effect to engage learners at the outset of lessons. Exemplary teaching was characterised by the use of success criteria, which clearly outlined what high-quality work looked like and set aspirational targets for learners.
- Teachers employed a variety of strategies to maximise student engagement, including the use of physical models of the human body and heart, model-making activities, and film clips that illustrated complex scientific concepts. These resources were seamlessly integrated into lessons to bring learning to life. Student engagement was further enhanced where teachers made explicit links to students' personal experiences and interests, for example, discussing the biological effects of frostbite in relation to students' own understanding of cold weather.
- Excellent practice was observed where a series of activities were sequenced to build up a picture of the circulation of the blood in the heart, providing good background knowledge for the planned investigation into the effect of exercise on the heart. Learners were challenged to evaluate, analyse, identify controls and variables. A well-planned template guided learners to write-up the experiment in a structured manner.
- Explanations were exceptionally clear and consistently linked to students' prior knowledge and experiences. A very good focus on developing learner's literacy skills was observed in lessons as learners were encouraged to explain the meaning of key words and show how they could be used in a sentence. Student numeracy was encouraged by getting learners to measure, record times and make estimations and mental calculations.
- Collaborative learning was encouraged in many lessons, with students working in pairs or small groups. The most effective instances of group work were those where activities were carefully structured and instructions were clear, promoting the development of students' use of subject-specific terminology. In a minority of instances, there was too much teacher-led instruction and in such instances, teachers were encouraged to create more opportunities for student voice and collaborative learning activities.
- The use of digital technology played a significant role in supporting learning, particularly through presentations, video clips and animations that clarified complex concepts or demonstrated a skill.
- Teachers demonstrated strong subject knowledge, and individual lessons were thoughtfully planned. Very good examples of reactive differentiation were observed, with teachers providing immediate support when students encountered difficulties. Additionally, some teachers differentiated learning materials proactively, provided adapted worksheets and used presentations with subtitles for learners whose first language was not English. These very effective strategies should be embedded into subject planning.
- A broad range of questioning techniques was observed, with both higher-order and lower-order questions used effectively to assess and extend students' learning. This was very effective in challenging learners to think for themselves. Teachers allowed ample wait time and encouraged students to elaborate beyond one-word answers.
- Homework was assigned regularly, incorporating a diverse range of tasks. The school's digital platform was utilised effectively for sharing and storing student work, further supporting students' learning. Students in the focus group mentioned this as a particularly effective way of catching up on missed work and described the science teachers as very approachable whenever they experienced difficulty in their learning.
- Some examples of very good written formative feedback were evident, where students received clear, actionable advice on how to improve their learning and organise their ideas effectively. Students' notebooks were generally neat and well maintained, and

many students kept well-organised folders of class notes and worksheets. Nevertheless, in some cases, students' organisational standards could be further improved, and teachers should continue to promote and model best practice in this area. The science team should discuss how best formative feedback can be used to support students in their learning.

- Discussions in the student focus group highlighted their appreciation for the supports provided by teachers. Students spoke enthusiastically about opportunities to experiment and research topics of their choice, particularly through Classroom-Based Assessments (CBAs), and expressed a strong desire for more opportunities to engage actively in their science learning.

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

- The school had a well-maintained laboratory, which was tidy and well organised. Classrooms visited and the laboratory featured attractive and informative displays of student-generated work, with a notable emphasis on literacy development through displays of action verbs and scientific language prompts. Members of the science department actively engaged in professional development, most recently having attended inputs on the revised senior cycle sciences.
- The science department placed strong emphasis on the development of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) opportunities for learners, particularly through their engagement with the BT Young Scientist exhibition and other competitions. Teachers are commended in their commitment to extending Science beyond the classroom environment, through activities and events designed to enhance their learning and foster a broader interest in scientific enquiry. Students in the focus group were very appreciative of the commitment of their teachers to the extra-curricular science competitions.

## **3. Planning and preparation**

- The Science department operated in a collegial and collaborative manner, underpinned by a shared enthusiasm and passion for the subject. A comprehensive subject plan was in place for both Science and Biology. To further enhance the effectiveness of the plans, it is recommended that the learning outcomes be more explicitly aligned with corresponding resources and methodologies.
- Subject department meetings were held regularly, and the role of subject coordinator is rotated among team members, promoting shared leadership and responsibility. The school's online platform was used effectively for the sharing of resources, supporting collaboration and consistency across the department.

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



An Roinn Oideachais  
Department of Education

For the students of St Bricin's  
College about their learning in  
**Science & Biology**

Date of inspection:

02/05/2025

### 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 & Biology**.

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



- The quality of teaching and learning was very good with some excellent practice.
- Student behaviour and classroom management was excellent.
- Some very good and excellent examples of active teaching methods were seen in lessons.

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



- In some instances, there was a need for less teacher talk and more student voice in the lesson.

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        |