



An Roinn Oideachais
agus Óige
Department of Education
and Youth

Subject Inspection: Mathematics REPORT

Ainm na scoile/School name Firhouse Community College

Seoladh na scoile/School address Firhouse Road
Dublin 24

Uimhir rolla/Roll number 70140L

Dáta na cigireachta/
Date of evaluation 13/05/2025

Dáta eisiúna na
tuairisce/Date of issue
of report 22/09/2025

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.

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

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>
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.	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	12 and 13 May 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 six one-hour lessons, one of which featured team-teaching • Examination of students' work • Feedback to the principal, both deputy principals and subject teachers

School context

Firhouse Community College is a co-educational secondary school under the patronage of Dublin and Dun Laoghaire Education and Training Board. The school has a current enrolment of 824 students. The school offers the Junior Cycle, Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP), a compulsory Transition Year programme (TY), the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA), the Leaving Certificate (Established) (LCE) and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP).

Summary of main findings and recommendations:

Findings

- The quality of teaching and learning ranged between good and very good.
- Task-based approaches featured in most lessons, and all teachers demonstrated a thorough understanding of the students who required additional support, with appropriate differentiation strategies in place.
- The quality of assessment was very good. Approaches to formative feedback were under review with scope for a similar focus on formative assessment practice.
- The quality of subject provision and whole-school support in Mathematics was very good.
- Overall, the quality of planning and preparation in the mathematics department was very good; with further development of senior cycle schemes of work required.
- The mathematics teachers worked proactively and collaboratively to develop resources and teaching approaches. It would be valuable to capture teachers' reflections to inform planning and practice.

Recommendations

- The mathematics teachers should review and further develop the effectiveness of formative assessment practice.
- It is recommended that the mathematics department provide greater detail within the senior cycle schemes of work and align the ordinary and higher levels as much as possible to minimise loss of content if students change level.
- The TY scheme of work for Mathematics should be revised to provide alternative material to the leaving certificate syllabi, engaging a variety of teaching approaches and diverse learning experiences.
- The mathematics teachers should record and use their individual reflections on the schemes of work to inform planning and practice.

Detailed findings and recommendations

1. Teaching, learning and assessment

- Overall, the quality of teaching and learning ranged between good and very good.
- Classroom environments were welcoming and encouraging. Student work was celebrated with visual displays on classroom walls in most lessons visited.
- In most of the lessons observed, teachers deployed starter activities very effectively to focus students' attention, and there was a very successful balance between teacher input and student activity in these lessons.
- All teachers shared learning intentions with their students which were revisited at the end of the lesson. In most lessons, teachers simply asked the students as a collective to affirm that the intention was achieved. In one lesson the teacher developed a short formative assessment task, this involved the teacher asking a questions based on the learning intentions. Students completed the question and ticked whether they had achieved the intended learning. Students submitted the task enabling the teacher to assess learners' progress. This very good practice could be developed further by returning the task to students for them to record this progress in a dedicated space, fostering students' ownership of their learning.
- All teachers placed an appropriate emphasis on keywords and student competency in mathematical literacy. Mathematics teachers should build on this very good practice by cultivating student dialogue that further supports students' successful engagement with mathematical concepts.
- All teachers made effective use of digital technologies to support learning.
- Teachers provided students with opportunities to discuss their work with the person seated next to them. In a small number of lessons, this partnership involved structured and purposeful pair work that enabled students to explore, share, analyse and explain their learning, developing their critical thinking skills. This is very effective practice. In a statistics lesson, for instance, students collaborated to identify the accuracy of mathematical averages. The mathematics teachers should further develop opportunities for students to engage in strategically designed pair work or group work so that they can strengthen their key skills as mathematicians, including communicating and working with others.
- All teachers had a thorough knowledge of students who needed additional support and team-teaching featured in one of the lessons observed. Differentiation strategies were evident in all lessons observed and were most effective where teachers appropriately challenged all students' learning needs.
- During the focus group discussion, students reflected very positively on their experience of Mathematics in the school. They spoke very highly of their teachers, and felt encouraged and supported with their learning. Students also appreciated a range of additional resources they could access, including notes and videos uploaded to the school's digital platform and revision classes that had been provided.
- In most of the lessons observed, teachers adopted task-based methodologies to progress the learning. The student focus group particularly enjoyed these learning experiences because they felt they had to take greater responsibility for their learning and think more critically.
- It is highly commendable that the mathematics department encouraged all students to take part in extra-curricular events and co-curricular activities promoting Mathematics including the opportunity to participate in national competitions.
- The quality of assessment was very good overall.
- Effective homework practices included regular assignment and correction in class. This correction generally consisted of self or peer assessment, comparing homework against fully worked solutions presented by the teacher. Alternatively, students submitted assignments for correction.
- Teachers administered common assessments at key points during the year. This is very good practice.

- Very commendably, the mathematics teachers were developing various approaches to formative feedback, consistent with their subject action plan.
- All teachers used a combination of class activities and questioning to assess students' understanding and progress. This practice was most successful when teachers strategically applied effective questioning and activities to inform the lesson. It is recommended that mathematics teachers review the effectiveness of their approaches to formative assessment during lessons.
- In all lessons observed, teachers encouraged students to raise queries concerning the content and actively circulated the classroom to monitor students' progress as they worked on assigned tasks, providing one-to-one guidance where necessary. This is very good practice.

2. Subject provision and whole-school support

- The quality of subject provision and whole-school support in Mathematics was very good overall.
- There was very good communication between the special educational needs (SEN) team, the mathematics department and the senior management team to co-ordinate and support engagement with Mathematics for students with additional needs. Several effective strategies were in place including team-teaching. Team-teaching partnerships featured either two mathematics teachers or a mathematics teacher and a SEN teacher.
- Appropriate time was allocated to Mathematics at both junior and senior cycles, in line with curriculum specifications. However, regular contact with the subject varied as the one-hour lessons were not necessarily evenly spread across the school timetable.
- Concurrent timetabling allowed for the placement of students into level-specific classes best suited to their abilities from the beginning of second year at junior cycle and the beginning of fifth year at senior cycle.
- It was a very significant strength of the mathematics department that all students were encouraged to pursue higher level for as long as possible and the uptake of higher level at both junior cycle and senior cycle was very good.
- Provision of resources for teaching and learning was very good. All classrooms were equipped with data projectors. In addition, two dedicated computer classrooms and two laptop trollies were available to teachers. Both students and teachers had access to the school's digital platform and all teachers were provided with laptops.
- The mathematics department had a strong tradition of participation in professional learning initiatives and the senior management team continued to support teacher professional learning including participation in Access Maths and Erasmus.

3. Planning and preparation

- Overall, the quality of planning and preparation in the mathematics department was very good.
- A subject co-ordinator was appointed and rotation was encouraged within the mathematics team. It is good practice to rotate this role between teachers, as this allows for the development of organisational and leadership capacities within the department.
- Teachers' engagement in shared professional learning and their collaborative approach to planning and practice was a significant strength of the mathematics department. Teachers met frequently to discuss and co-ordinate aspects of teaching, learning and assessment. Resources and common assessments were co-developed and shared using the school's digital platform and minutes of meetings were also available.
- Very commendably, the mathematics department had created schemes of work at junior cycle as units of learning that supported learners' connection-making between topics and included an appropriate focus on task-based approaches. Additionally, space had been allocated for teachers to reflect on these units of learning but this feature was

under-developed. The mathematics teachers should record and use their individual reflections on the schemes of work to inform collaborative planning and practice.

- Schemes of work at senior cycle were not as effective in communicating mathematics planning and practice. It is recommended that the mathematics department builds on the very good work at junior cycle to furnish greater detail within the senior cycle schemes of work that includes an appropriate focus on methodologies and formative assessment approaches. In as much as possible, ordinary and higher-level schemes should be aligned to facilitate movement of students between levels with minimal loss in content.
- There was a substantial focus on leaving certificate syllabi within the TY scheme of work and this should be addressed to ensure learning experiences explore alternative material. This review is timely given the introduction of the Transition Year Programme Statement in the new academic year.
- It is highly commendable that the mathematics teachers had developed an action plan for their subject aligned to the school's engagement in the process of school self-evaluation. The mathematics department also conducted an annual analysis of certificate examination attainment. This analysis should also contribute to the subject action plan and be used to set targets that can be monitored, measured and reviewed.

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



An Roinn Oideachais
Department of Education

**For the students of Firhouse
Community College about their
learning in Mathematics**

Date of inspection:

13/05/2025

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 Mathematics.

What were the main findings of the inspection?



- Teaching and learning in classes were mostly good or very good, and the way teachers checked students' work was also very good.
- Teachers worked as a team and had a very good knowledge of their students' learning needs.
- In most mathematics lessons, students worked on tasks and activities.

What did the inspector recommend to make teaching and learning better in Mathematics?



- Teachers should make better use of ways to find out how learners are progressing during lessons.
- Teachers need to plan their senior cycle work better.
- Teachers should think about what is working well and what could be improved, and talk about it with each other to improve their teaching.

**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
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

Appendix

SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

Submitted by the Board of Management

Area 1 Observations on the content of the inspection report

The Board of Management of Firhouse Community College welcomes the Mathematics Subject Inspection report.

It acknowledges the positive findings of the report, in particular, the recognition of the quality of teaching and learning taking place, the recognition of teachers having a 'thorough understanding' of students who require AEN support and the use of appropriate differentiation strategies to meet the needs of these students. Also the finding that the quality of assessment was very good and that the quality of subject provision and whole school support for Mathematics was very good. Likewise, the recognition of the good quality of planning and preparation happening in the mathematics department and the endorsement of the proactive and collaborative work of the mathematic teachers.

In addition, the Board notes the positive finding that classroom environments were welcoming and encouraging and that student work is celebrated in visual displays. Also that learning intentions are shared with students at the start of class and revisited at the end of classes. The Board is happy to learn that students reflected positively on their experience of mathematics in the school and that they felt supported and encouraged by their teachers.

Area 2 Follow-up actions planned or undertaken since the completion of the inspection activity to implement the findings and recommendations of the inspection.

The Board of Management along with the senior management team will support the mathematics department in implementing the recommendations.

The mathematics teachers will continue to review and develop the effectiveness of formative assessment practice and will pay serious attention to aligning the ordinary and higher levels in senior cycle schemes of work. The TY scheme of work has now been updated for this school year with Department of Education guidelines and these recommendations in mind and will be reviewed at the end of this school year.

The recommendation that the mathematics teachers should record and use their individual reflections on their schemes of work to inform planning and practice has been taken on board.