Subject Inspection: Computer Science and Digital Subjects REPORT

Ainm na scoile/School name	Blackrock College
Seoladh na scoile/School address	Blackrock College Rock Road Co. Dublin
Uimhir rolla/Roll number	60030V
Dáta na cigireachta/ Date of evaluation	08/05/2025
Dáta eisiúna na tuairisce/Date of issue of report	03/10/2025

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 Computer Science and Digital Subjects 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:	
Child Protection	*Anti-bullying*
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 *Anti-Bullying Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools (2013)* or *Bí Cineálta* (2024) 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.

During the inspection visit, the following checks in relation to the boarding facilities' child protection procedures were conducted:	
Child Protection	
1. The name of the DLP and the Child Safeguarding Statement are prominently displayed near the main entrance to the boarding facility.	2. The Child Safeguarding Statement has been ratified by the management authority and includes an annual review and risk assessment.

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

Subject inspection.

Date of inspection	07/05/2025 and 08/05/2025
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 three lessons • Examination of students' work • Feedback to principal and relevant staff

School context

Blackrock College is a fee-charging, day and boarding post-primary school under the trusteeship of the Spiritan Education Trust. The school has a current enrolment of 1050 boys and caters for students from second year to sixth year. Students complete first year in Willow Park Senior School which is located on the same campus. The school offers the following programmes: Junior Cycle (JC), a compulsory Transition Year (TY) and the established Leaving Certificate (LC).

Summary of main findings and recommendations:

Findings

- The overall quality of teaching and learning in lessons was very good with some areas of improvement required.
- Students were motivated to learn and demonstrated high levels of interest in progressing fostered by a positive classroom atmosphere that supported productive learning.
- Lessons in Computer Science fostered high quality learning experiences where students' demonstrated very good levels of knowledge and learning.
- Assessment practices were highly effective: teachers regularly supported and provided students with individual constructive verbal feedback on their work.
- Subject provision and whole-school support was of a high quality; students could participate in digital subjects at both junior and senior cycle, supported by a very good infrastructure of computer rooms and digital devices.
- Subject preparation and planning was excellent overall; schemes of work for digital subjects were detailed and clear and carefully planned individual engaging lessons stimulated the learners.

Recommendations

- Senior management should explore options to enhance specialist computer science expertise given the increased number of students wishing to study Computer Science.
- To enhance assessment of students' progress, all teachers should frame learning intentions in terms of the outcomes acquired in the lesson, and allow time to revisit these planned intentions.
- To promote student engagement and higher order thinking, teachers should ensure that questions are well-distributed, student-centred, varied and appropriately challenge students in all lessons.

Detailed findings and recommendations

1. Teaching, learning and assessment

- The overall quality of teaching and learning in lessons was very good with some areas of improvement required.
- In all lessons observed, teachers set high expectations for students to achieve the learning intentions. Each lesson was supported by well-planned and thoughtfully prepared resources, complemented by purposeful, active-learning tasks and activities. A variety of teaching approaches kept students engaged.
- Learning intentions were effectively communicated to students at the beginning of all lessons, either orally or displayed on slides. In a minority of cases, these intentions could be framed more effectively to include the specific knowledge, skills, and understanding students should acquire by the end of the lesson. In the most effective lessons, teachers also allowed time for students to reflect on their learning and assigned meaningful homework. To consolidate deeper learning, teachers should communicate learning intentions appropriately and allow adequate time for reflection and the allocation of homework.
- Classroom management was very good in all lessons. Students expressed a keen interest in their lesson tasks and it was evident that they placed value on what they were learning. A positive, productive atmosphere of mutual respect and wellbeing was evident in all lessons, characterised by high-quality relationships between teachers and students.
- Students were progressing well in Computer Science and their interactions during lessons demonstrated a deep understanding of the learning outcomes aligning with the specification in computing technology. In all lessons they demonstrated the ability to communicate confidently, and reflectively on their own work using subject specific language.
- The majority of lessons teachers included very good use of questioning. In these lessons, questioning was well dispersed among students, with appropriate wait time, provided. Questions ranged in levels of difficulty so that all students had opportunities to contribute to the lessons and were appropriately challenged. Teachers should ensure that questions are well-distributed, student-centred, varied and appropriately challenge students in all lessons.
- In the focus group, students studying Computer Science appreciated the subjects' unique combination of coding, digital citizenship and technology content together with the regular opportunities provided to them to collaborate in lessons. Students were proud of the great progress they had made completing practical projects and coding tasks. Through their practical work, the students reported consolidating their prior learning; furthermore they gained key skills in programming, time management and teamwork.
- Verbal formative assessment practices greatly progressed learning during lessons. Supportive and purposeful teacher-student interactions were observed; with teachers providing very good individual oral feedback. Targeted interventions were effectively used to encourage any students needing additional support. Overall, these high-quality practices contributed to improved learner outcomes.
- Students submitted their work through a school-wide digital platform, which supported both learning and study. Samples of students' work reviewed indicated that teachers had provided effective written feedback electronically, offering clear, constructive, and encouraging comments that guided student progress and suggested improvements. Students themselves mentioned that this approach had significantly supported their own learning and study.

2. Subject provision and whole-school support

- Subject provision for Computer Science and Digital Subjects was excellent, with a wide range of subjects being offered across all year groups. All junior cycle students studied a bespoke Computing course which focused on coding, digital literacy, and office software. LC Computer Science was a popular optional subject, with growing student demand each year. It was very good that all TY students were offered a short computer science taster module that informed senior cycle choices.

- Whole-school support for the Digital Subjects was of a high quality in terms of curricular access, timetable allocation and staff deployment. It was commendable that there were five teachers involved in digital subject provision, with a core team of three computer science teachers.

- Teacher collegiality and collaborative practices were key strengths of the subject department and they demonstrated a strong commitment to continuous improvement. Given the current momentum of student engagement with digital subjects, senior management should prioritise the development of the teaching capacity within the team to effectively meet anticipated future demand. Opportunities to enhance specialist expertise in Computer Science through collaborative team teaching and peer observation should be explored.

- Senior leaders provided highly effective support for teachers' professional learning in computer education by promoting subject upskilling to improve teaching and learning. Commendably, three teachers had already participated in computer science in-service training through Oide, the support service for teachers and school leaders. Management also provided dedicated time for peer-led sessions, enabling the subject team to share expertise and practical teaching strategies for implementing the specification.

- The school was very well equipped for the teaching of digital subjects, and featured two computer rooms, including a dedicated computer science lab. This specialist space provided a vibrant and engaging learning environment, enhanced by visual displays linked to the specification. Additionally, every student in the school had access to a personal digital device to support their daily learning.

- Teachers were commended for offering a rich variety of extra-curricular activities that promoted subject interest. Bespoke school initiatives included the Coding and Robotics Club and the highly effective 'Student Digital Leaders' team, who played an active role in shaping the digital learning environment through student led projects such as organising a Garda-led online safety session and advising senior management on student device selection.

3. Planning and preparation

- Preparation and planning were excellent overall. All observed lessons were very carefully prepared, and featured engaging digital resources such as slides, videos, quizzes, and interactive activities that enriched the learning experience. These materials were also made easily accessible to students on the school's digital platform for further study.

- Overall, the digital subject plans were excellent, comprehensive, well-structured, and clearly aligned with the Computer Science specification. The plans detailed precise learning outcomes, appropriate timelines, varied activities, teaching methodologies, and assessment strategies at the lesson level. These dynamic, reflective plans served as an effective, reusable resources for any teacher delivering the subject.

- The school's digital learning plan was thorough and reinforced the well-established whole-school strategy to embed digital technologies into teaching and learning in all subjects. In digital subjects this platform provided a point for teachers to deliver the lesson by providing incremental learning tasks and activities that accompanied the lesson.

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 agus Óige
Department of Education and Youth

For the students of Blackrock College about their learning in Computer Science and Digital Subjects
Date of inspection: 07/05 & 08/05/2025

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 Computer Science and Digital Subjects.

What were the main findings of the inspection?

- Overall the quality of teaching and learning in lessons was very good with some areas of improvement required.
- In all lessons the classroom atmosphere was positive and the students showed high levels of interest in making progress.
- During lessons in Computer Science the students' demonstrated very good levels of knowledge and learning.

What did the inspector recommend to make teaching and learning better in Computer Science and Digital Subjects?

- Since many students are choosing Computer Science, school management should grow specialist computer science expertise by developing the teachers' capacity to teach the subject.
- Teachers should make the learning intentions very clear so that students will know, and understand what to do by the end of the lesson.
- To help students to be more engaged with their learning, teachers should create different types of questions that are student-friendly and help build up every students' knowledge

Thank you for taking the time to read this page.
Special thanks to the students who participated in the focus group.

Appendix

SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

Submitted by the Board of Management

Part A Observations on the content of the inspection report

The Board of Management of Blackrock College welcomes the findings of the recent subject inspection report. We are pleased to note the recognition of the high standards of teaching and learning observed during the inspection, and we appreciate the constructive feedback provided.

We wish to express our sincere gratitude to the teaching staff involved in the inspection. Their dedication, professionalism, and passion for their subject were clearly evident and are a source of great pride to the entire school community. The commitment shown by our teachers to fostering a positive and engaging learning environment is deeply valued and reflects the ethos of our school.

Once again, we thank the inspectors for their thorough and respectful engagement with our school, and we commend our teachers for their continued excellence and enthusiasm in delivering a rich and meaningful educational experience.

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

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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