

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**  
**Department of Education and Skills**

**Subject Inspection in English**

**REPORT**

<b>Ainm na scoile / School name</b>	Oatlands College
<b>Seoladh na scoile / School address</b>	Mount Merrion Co Dublin
<b>Uimhir rolla / Roll number</b>	60050E

**Date of Inspection: 12-10-2018**



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An Roinn Oideachais  
agus Scileanna  
Department of  
Education and Skills

## **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 English 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 of the school was given an opportunity to comment on the findings and recommendations of the report; the board chose to accept the report without response.

## **CHILD PROTECTION**

During the inspection visit, the following checks in relation to the school's child protection procedures were conducted:

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.

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

## SUBJECT INSPECTION

### INSPECTION ACTIVITIES

<b>Dates of inspection</b>	11 and 12 October 2018
<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</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Observation of teaching and learning during eight lessons, including one double lesson</li><li>• Examination of students' work</li><li>• Feedback to principal and teachers of English</li></ul>

### School context

Oatlands College is a long-established school for boys, now under the trusteeship of the Edmund Rice Schools Trust. The school offers the Junior Cycle programme, an optional Transition Year programme with a very high uptake, the established Leaving Certificate, and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme. Current enrolment is 534.

### SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

#### Findings

- The quality of teaching was good overall; practice observed ranged from highly effective to fair.
- Highly effective practice was characterised by teachers' knowledge and love of English, careful preparation of learning resources and activities, and skilful linking of the studied texts with students' experiences.
- The overall quality of learning was good, and very good learning was observed in many instances.
- Effective and innovative assessment practices were noted, but not consistently.
- Provision and whole-school support for English is good overall; some aspects of provision merit further consideration.
- Considerable progress has been made in collaborative planning; greater co-operative practice is achievable and desirable.

#### Recommendations

- School management and the English department should regularly evaluate the basis for class formation and its impact on students' experiences and outcomes, and should work to achieve a more co-ordinated approach to supporting students with identified learning needs.
- Collaboration in the English department should be further developed to extend the highly effective practices observed, and to establish consistent and soundly-based approaches to formative assessment.

## DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### 1. TEACHING, LEARNING, AND ASSESSMENT

- Eight lessons, including a double lesson, were observed. All years and programmes except Transition Year were covered, and almost all teachers of English were included. The quality of teaching was good overall. Practice in the lessons observed ranged from highly effective to fair.
- Teachers generally displayed very good subject knowledge and drew on it with ease to create engaging and worthwhile learning opportunities for students, using a range of teaching approaches. A key ingredient of the highly effective lessons observed was the teachers' own commitment to the subject and their willingness to model for students what it means to engage deeply with language and literature. This high level of engagement with the subject itself paid dividends in lessons on poetry with junior cycle groups, and lessons focusing on writing skills with senior cycle students.
- Almost all lessons were well prepared. Lesson preparation of very high quality was characterised by the selection of stimulating and rich material and a carefully planned sequence of activities to achieve the intended learning. Where planning and preparation was less satisfactory, the purpose of lesson tasks was not sufficiently clear. Clarity is essential for students to find the task itself constructive and purposeful.
- All teachers saw the value of making connections between students' own experiences and themes or issues in the texts being studied. This worked best where teachers guided students towards a perception of differences as well as similarities, leading to a richer understanding of the world of the text.
- Overall, interactions between students and teachers, and among students, were lively yet respectful, and demonstrated genuine inquiry and interest. Teachers asked searching questions that steered students towards deeper levels of meaning in texts, and good use of follow-on questions gave students an opportunity to flesh out their responses. At times, questions drew a blank with students, and teachers should on these occasions supply the knowledge directly, and allow students to digest and respond to it.
- Lessons were pitched at an appropriate level of challenge for the most part. Very good practice was noted where teachers provided sufficient scaffolding to enable students to undertake reading and writing tasks independently. Exemplars of writing genres were used effectively as models for students to follow and learn from. Where this approach would have been useful but was not followed, students were not clear on the desired end product.
- Some excellent practice in integrating language and literature was observed with both junior and senior cycle groups. It was especially pleasing to see attention given not merely to naming certain poetic techniques but also to studying their purpose and effect. Careful attention to the development of critical and creative writing skills was noted in a number of lessons. These approaches should be shared and extended.
- The overall quality of learning was good, and very good learning was observed in many instances. Students applied themselves well in all lessons and, in the most effective lessons, sustained this level of engagement throughout. Oral and written work of very high quality was produced in a number of lessons.
- Assessment practices varied, and greater consistency regarding formative assessment is desirable. In-class assessment practices included teachers' helpful verbal commentary on students' work, and some innovative peer assessment practices were observed in a number of lessons. Homework is set regularly, and some very good developmental comment was

noted in copybooks and folders, but this practice was not widespread. Discussions with individual students about how to improve their work also take place.

## **2. SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT**

- Provision and whole-school support for English is good overall.
- Most teachers of English take both junior and senior cycle classes, enabling them to view the subject as a continuum of knowledge and skills development from first year to sixth.
- Timetable provision for English is good in all years and programmes. English is timetabled concurrently in all years except first year and Transition Year. The former practice of creating ability groups for English in junior cycle is being phased out, and mixed-ability class groups have been formed in first and second year. School management and the English department have shown commendable willingness to review and modify practice in this important aspect of subject provision, particularly in the light of the new Junior Cycle curriculum.
- A number of the students in classes designated as ordinary level also receive additional timetabled literacy support. In some cases, the teachers taking these students for English were not certain of the nature or focus of this additional support. The relevant school leaders should promote a more co-ordinated approach, and the teachers of English should ensure that they have as complete a picture as possible of students' learning needs and of the best teaching approaches to address these needs.
- Classrooms are assigned to teachers, and there has been considerable and commendable development of the English classrooms as good learning environments. Print and visual materials and students' work are displayed in many rooms, and digital resources are readily accessible. Although there is no school library, classroom libraries have been created, and a book club has been set up to encourage reading for pleasure, a very worthwhile initiative.

## **3. PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

- The work of the English department is facilitated by a voluntary co-ordinator who ably carries out the role, recording meetings, maintaining the subject department folder, and communicating with senior management.
- Current subject plans and year plans are in place, and their layout in tabular format is clear and helpful. The junior cycle learning outcomes have been incorporated into the relevant year plans; as experience and understanding of the new subject specification grow, the department should aim to further develop the links between outcomes, assessment, and teaching and learning activities. It would be good, for example, to decide on some common texts to underpin the agreed learning intentions.
- The department has made good progress in developing collaborative practice, and is encouraged to maintain momentum towards greater levels of co-operation, not only in organisational matters but also in the sharing of good practice, resources, ideas, and experiences. The aim should be to optimise the collective impact on students' learning experiences of the available expertise in the department.
- Embedding a shared understanding of effective formative assessment should be a priority for the department. The recent experience of subject learning and assessment review (SLAR) meetings has given teachers confidence that they can arrive at sound collective assessment of students' work, and this is a good foundation on which to build.

The draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation were discussed with the 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 of quality the school's provision of each area.

Level	Description	Example of descriptive terms
<b>Very Good</b>	<b>Very good</b> 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 <b>outstanding</b> 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
<b>Good</b>	<b>Good</b> 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
<b>Satisfactory</b>	<b>Satisfactory</b> 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
<b>Fair</b>	<b>Fair</b> 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
<b>Weak</b>	<b>Weak</b> 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;