

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection in English

REPORT

Ainm na scoile / School name	Clonkeen College
Seoladh na scoile / School address	Clonkeen Road Blackrock Co Dublin
Uimhir rolla / Roll number	60092U

Date of Inspection: 20-11-2019



**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 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.

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

Dates of inspection	19 and 20 November 2019
Inspection activities undertaken <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review of relevant documents• Discussion with principal and key staff• Interaction with students• Examination of students' work	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Observation of teaching and learning in seven lessons• Feedback to individual teachers• Feedback to principal, deputy principal and teachers of English

School context

Clonkeen College is a secondary school for boys in the trusteeship of the Edmund Rice Schools Trust. The school offers the Junior Cycle programme, a compulsory Transition Year programme, the established Leaving Certificate, and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme. Current enrolment is 575.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

Findings

- The overall quality of teaching was good; practice observed ranged from very good to satisfactory.
- Students were diligent and generally willing to contribute to class discussion, showing good levels of responsiveness and analysis.
- Progress in learning was observed in all lessons, but aspects of textbook use and of assessment practices merit review by the English teaching team.
- Timetable provision for English is good, and the subject is well supported.
- The basis on which some English class groups are formed and teaching resources are used for them is contrary to the provisions of the resource allocation model for supporting students with special educational needs.
- Collaborative subject planning for English is not satisfactory, especially with regard to the implementation of the junior cycle specification for English.

Recommendations

- The English teaching team should use junior cycle textbooks judiciously and critically, should not rely on them as the basis for junior cycle planning, and should devise learning activities and assessment tasks that are aligned to the learning outcomes of the junior cycle specification for English.
- Senior management should review current approaches to class formation and the deployment of the additional teaching resource for special educational needs, and make the changes necessary for full compliance with the resource allocation model.
- Collaborative subject planning that leads to a deep shared understanding of the principles underpinning junior cycle English should be undertaken by the English teaching team, with the support of senior management.

DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. TEACHING, LEARNING, AND ASSESSMENT

- Seven lessons were observed, four in junior cycle and three in senior cycle. A lesson in a module taken by some TY students involving the production of a newsletter was also visited. Overall the quality of teaching is good; the practice in the lessons observed ranged from very good to satisfactory.
- Overall lessons were well prepared and learning activities were well planned and sequenced. Very good practice in this area included the thoughtful selection of stimulus material related to a junior cycle novel, which elicited perceptive responses from the students; and teachers' careful selection of Leaving Certificate texts that they felt would engage and challenge their students.
- Generally, lessons contained a good balance of teacher and student voice, and teachers showed an encouraging interest in students' views and responses. The prevailing atmosphere in all lessons was pleasant and purposeful. Teachers knew the students well and interactions were friendly and respectful.
- No single pedagogical approach dominated. Teachers generally selected appropriate methods for the class group and the intended learning. In a few instances, a greater level of challenge would have been possible and desirable. For example, a junior cycle class group had the ability and interest to engage with figurative language at a more sophisticated level than that presented in the textbook used; and a senior cycle group should have been required to capture points arising from the good class discussion through note-making in the course of the lesson. Teachers were commendably open to these recommendations.
- Some very good questioning techniques were noted. Teachers enabled students to develop their responses through skilful use of probing or invitational questions, and also used questions to include all students in class discussion. To build on these good questioning practices, teachers should not only ask students to recall and explain material and give their views, but also to identify the key elements of a valid response.
- In almost all lessons, students showed interest in the texts selected for study. Very often, their responses were reflective and articulate, demonstrating genuine engagement. However, dialogue was almost entirely between student and teacher, and it would be worthwhile to encourage greater levels of student-to-student discussion through which students could explain and defend their views.
- Students' work in copybooks, workbooks and folders was reviewed. In most cases, a good volume of work has been completed, and some substantial assignments were noted, especially in the work of senior cycle classes. Development of students' ability to engage with and understand a range of text-based tasks through work on analytical skills and transferable skills merits increased focus.
- Some good formative assessment practice was evident especially in senior cycle, but written feedback on junior cycle work was not widely noted. Oral feedback on students' work was given in some junior cycle lessons. Assessment practices generally need to be reviewed so that written feedback is given consistently on all substantial assignments to support students to develop and improve. Specifically with regard to the improvement required in junior cycle assessment practices, teachers should devise learning activities and assessment tasks that are aligned to the learning outcomes of the junior cycle specification for English.

2. SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- Timetable provision for English is good overall both in the number of lessons allocated and in their distribution throughout the week. Distribution of English lessons in TY is less good, and three well-distributed lessons of core English should be aimed for. Valuable shorter modules are offered to TY students covering areas that extend their experience of English. These should complement the core English timetable.
- Junior cycle English is generally taught to students in their base class groups, which are mixed ability. A small ordinary level class has been created in third year, which is in effect a withdrawal group from one of the base classes. It was stated that this provision is for both English and learning support, and it emerged that resource hours are being used to provide it. The use of resource hours to create small withdrawal classes for mainstream subject provision is not permitted in the current resource allocation model. Circular 0044/2017 states that “the additional Teaching Resources which are being provided under this model cannot be used for mainstream class teaching”. The teaching resource may be deployed to provide in-class support for these students in English lessons, and to provide any additional support to meet the needs of these students through designated learning support lessons to provide targeted and time-specific interventions. Senior management should act quickly to address any incorrect use of resource hours.
- Good arrangements are in place to provide access to higher and ordinary level Leaving Certificate English.
- Although there has been some disruption owing to retirements and long-term leave, the general pattern is for teachers to remain with a class group for the duration of junior cycle or Leaving Certificate, and this is good practice.
- English is well resourced. The school has a fine library, most teachers have their own base rooms, and digital technology is available in classrooms. More flexible classroom layouts could be considered to make it easier for students to work together.

3. PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- Individual planning and some aspects of collaborative planning are good, but there is significant scope for improvement in many areas of subject planning for English, most especially in the planning necessary for meaningful implementation of the Junior Cycle English specification.
- The current subject plan presented during the evaluation contains the names of texts and some course materials for each year, and indicates in broad terms what will be studied, and when, in fifth and sixth year. Additional documents outlining year plans for first and second year were copies of plans from the publishers of the textbook the subject department has selected. During the inspection, some details in these plans were found to be inaccurate, and did not clearly align learning tasks and assessments with the learning outcomes given in the specification. Following such plans is poor practice, and will not develop the understanding of the English specification necessary to provide students with the rich learning opportunities it presents.
- In the light of these findings, it is essential that the English teaching team, with the support of senior management, develop collaborative subject planning practices that will foster a deep collective understanding of the principles underpinning junior cycle English.

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.

Appendix

SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

Submitted by the Board of Management

Part A Observations on the content of the inspection report

The board is pleased to receive the positive feedback on purposeful learning in the English classes including the statement *“Generally, lessons contained a good balance of teacher and student voice, and teachers showed an encouraging interest in students’ views and responses. The prevailing atmosphere in all lessons was pleasant and purposeful. Teachers knew the students well and interactions were friendly and respectful.”* The board also welcomes the inspection finding that *“Timetable provision for English is good, and the subject is well supported”*. The board feels that the inspection recommendations will be helpful for future development.

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

Recommendation 1: The English Department teachers do not simply follow the plan laid out in the textbook; they use the plan as a basic structure and amend and alter appropriately. The textbook also provides a wide variety of texts that have been chosen to specifically address aspects of the new curriculum and these will be used to devise learning activities and assessment tasks that are aligned to the learning outcomes of the junior cycle specification for English. An example of a learning activity aligned to the learning outcomes of the junior cycle specification for English is the major creative literacy initiative in the school: the ANTHOLOGY project. For the past 9 years we have produced and published a book of student writing. The students write, edit, lay out, price and sell the book. It is open to all students in the school and we have also collaborated with other schools in the area and included writing from students in other schools, nationwide. This project has also brought a variety of writers to the school, and facilitated pieces written by our students being published in the Irish Times. This year saw the launch of a Clonkeen College Press website (clonkeencollegepress.com), a website to promote student writing in all its forms. This will be reflected in the records of English Department planning.

Recommendation 2: Senior management will review current approaches to class formation and the deployment of the additional teaching resource for special educational needs in light of the resource allocation model.

Recommendation 3: Collaborative subject planning that leads to a deep shared understanding of the principles underpinning junior cycle English was immediately undertaken by the English teaching team following the inspection, including a review of formative and summative assessment. This development is fully supported by senior management who recognise the importance of such planning.

The board will keep the implementation of these recommendations under review. The recommendations have also been circulated to all other subject departments for their information and consideration.

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
Very Good	Very good 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 outstanding 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	Good 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	Satisfactory 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	Fair 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	Weak 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;