

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

Subject Inspection in English

REPORT

Ainm na scoile / School name	Castleknock College
Seoladh na scoile / School address	College Rd Castleknock Dublin 15
Uimhir rolla / Roll number	60100Q

Date of Inspection: 30-04-2019



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.

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	30-04-2019
Inspection activities undertaken <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review of relevant documents• Discussion with principal and key staff• Interaction with students	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Observation of teaching and learning during eight class periods• Examination of students' work• Feedback to principal and relevant staff

School context

Castleknock College is a boys' fee charging post-primary school under the trusteeship of the Vincentian order. The school has a current enrolment of 668 students and offers the Junior Cycle programme, a mandatory transition year (TY) and the Leaving Certificate programme.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

Findings

- The overall quality of teaching was good, with observed practice ranging from very good to fair; in the best lessons, the teacher and student voice was well balanced and student participation in the lesson was actively encouraged.
- The overall quality of learning was also good, ranging from very good to fair; optimal learning was evident when the teacher explicitly linked lesson topics with prior learning and with student experience and interests.
- In almost all cases, lessons were characterised by very good teacher-student relationships; in a few classrooms, student motivation, engagement and enjoyment in learning was enhanced by the development of interesting and stimulating learning spaces.
- While there was some evidence of differentiated teaching methodologies in a few lessons, this was not consistent across the lessons observed.
- Very good examples of formative feedback with regard to students' written work were a feature of some lessons while the quality of how students stored and presented their work varied considerably.
- A subject plan has been diligently prepared but there is significant scope for development regarding collaborative planning in the department and rotating the position of the co-ordinator.

Recommendations

- Teachers should share good practice with respect to the balance in lessons between teacher input and student participation by developing active and co-operative strategies to promote and develop the student voice.
- The English team should prioritise the development of differentiated teaching methodologies that offer students appropriate levels of challenge and support, particularly regarding extended writing tasks.
- An assessment policy, that outlines a consistent approach to formative feedback to students and a common strategy for how students store and present their work, should be developed at department level.
- The role of subject co-ordinator should rotate and the subject plan should be further developed, particularly in the area of yearly plans and planning for future improvement.

DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. TEACHING, LEARNING, AND ASSESSMENT

- The overall quality of teaching was good with practice ranging from fair to very good. The best lessons ensured that there was a balance between teacher exposition and purposeful student participation, particularly regarding the development of the student voice. This has particular relevance as the school moves to hour-long lessons in the next academic year. The sharing of good practice in this area is encouraged.
- The overall quality of learning was also good, ranging from fair to very good; the learning experience of students was best when the teacher explicitly linked lesson topics, such as character analysis or the application of poetic techniques, with prior learning and with their experience and interests.
- Very good teacher-student rapport characterised most lessons and positively supported respectful interactions. In addition, teachers own enthusiasm and enjoyment of their subject added an energy and vitality to lessons. A few teachers had used their classrooms to develop interesting learning spaces that encouraged student collaboration, promoted vocabulary development and celebrated student achievements. Extending these worthwhile practices to other classrooms would further support student engagement and enjoyment of the subject.
- Clarity with regard to the learning underway in lessons was evident in most lessons, supported by the sharing of learning intentions with students. In one lesson, the teacher used student-friendly language to describe the learning intentions, linked them to learning that the students had already done and took time to review them so that students learning was consolidated. Sharing of these good practices among the English team is encouraged.
- Teacher and student voice was well balanced in a number of lessons, but there was a general tendency for teacher talk to dominate. Teachers should be mindful that oral skills development, in both junior and senior cycle, requires opportunities for students to talk and listen to each other in a purposeful manner. English teachers should explore ways to empower students to contribute their opinions, to express their personal views and to engage in exploratory classroom discussion.
- Students were given opportunities to collaborate in all lessons observed. To further develop collaborative learning, teachers are encouraged to implement a co-operative approach to group-work with ample time allocated for student feedback, and to facilitate valuable opportunities for active student participation in the task. This could be achieved by facilitating students to draw on their own experience and prior knowledge and to give them ownership and independence in their learning. Again, this has particular relevance as the school moves to one-hour lessons in the next academic year.
- During the evaluation, teachers' differentiation practices largely focused on individual help given during group work and, in a few lessons, to differentiated questioning. In a few lessons teachers made very good use of colourful images to support students' engagement and understanding of poetry. However, there is scope to further develop differentiated strategies to challenge the better-able students while providing support for students who may be struggling.

- Some good progress has been made in the development of assessment practices to support further improvement in students' learning. This was evidenced in good use of targeted questions to assess understanding and, to a lesser extent, higher-order questioning that facilitated the students to engage critically with texts. In one lesson, very good use was made of feedback (FIT) worksheets, developed as part of the school self-evaluation (SSE) process, to encourage students to reflect on their own learning.
- Some very good examples of formative feedback were observed in some samples of students' written work, but not in all. There was significant variance in quality regarding the presentation of students' written work and how notes and homework tasks are stored. Consideration should be given to developing a collaborative strategy for written formative feedback, especially in supporting students' writing. This could incorporate a section on a consistent approach to how students store and present their work with a view to encouraging independent learning and supporting the development of organisational skills.

2. SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- There is good whole-school support and provision for English, most teachers are classroom based and have good access to digital technology to support teaching and learning.
- The impressive well-managed school library nurtures increasingly positive attitudes and skills in relation to reading for pleasure. The importance of fostering a love of English by encouraging learning outside the classroom is further supported by teachers in developing extra-curricular and co-curricular activities relating to the subject.

3. PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- While there are a number of strengths in collective planning and preparation, such as common schemes for all year groups, sharing of resources and ongoing informal meetings, action is required to improve the formal functioning of the subject department. In the first instance, the role of subject co-ordinator should rotate. Secondly, regular, whole-team formal meetings should prioritise discussions regarding teaching, learning and assessment.
- A learning-outcome, skills-based approach, with clear links to assessment practices and teaching methodologies, should characterise schemes of work; a thematic approach should be adopted at junior cycle. A developmental section of the subject plan should outline the departments' planning for future improvement.
- The team should develop an assessment policy for English which includes a shared approach to the provision of formative feedback on students' work. This policy could also include a common strategy for the storage and presentation of students' work.

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

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.

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	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;

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 Castleknock College welcomes the findings in the English Inspection Report. It is particularly satisfying to receive the report stating that “very good teacher-student rapport characterised most lessons and positively supported respectful interactions”. The Board also welcomes the observation that “teachers own enthusiasm and enjoyment of their subject added an energy and vitality to lessons”.

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

1. The introduction of one-hour classes next year will facilitate a “co-operative approach to group-work with ample time allocated for student feedback”.
2. We intend to build on our existing model of differentiated learning to “challenge the better-able student while providing support for students who may be struggling”.
3. Subject co-ordinator will rotate among a number of teachers over the coming years, a system already in practice in other subject areas in the school.