

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

**Subject Inspection in English**

**REPORT**

<b>Ainm na scoile / School name</b>	Catholic University School
<b>Seoladh na scoile / School address</b>	89 Lower Leeson Street Dublin 2
<b>Uimhir rolla / Roll number</b>	60540V

**Date of Inspection: 30-11-2017**



**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 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.

## SUBJECT INSPECTION

### INSPECTION ACTIVITIES

<b>Dates of inspection</b>	30-11-2017
<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</li><li>• Examination of students' work</li><li>• Feedback to principal, deputy principal and relevant staff</li></ul>

### School context

Catholic University School is a fee-charging school for boys in Dublin city centre, in the trusteeship of the Marist Education Authority. Current enrolment stands at 503, and the school offers Junior Cycle, a compulsory Transition Year (TY), and the established Leaving Certificate programme. The current principal was appointed in 2017.

### SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

#### Findings

- The overall quality of teaching observed was good, with instances of excellent practice.
- Good-quality learning was observed, and many students demonstrated very good writing and oral communication skills.
- In some instances, teaching and learning approaches did not sufficiently engage the full range of students.
- Some very good assessment practices were noted, but not consistently.
- Aspects of timetabling and teacher deployment are not satisfactory but measures to address them are in train.
- Subject department planning is good, with scope to further develop collaborative planning.

#### Recommendations

- To build on the successful teaching and learning approaches observed, teachers should vary and extend their practices to ensure that all students are appropriately challenged and supported.
- Teachers should collaborate to identify and implement assessment practices that will enable students to improve their work and increasingly take ownership of their learning.
- To the greatest extent possible, actions to address timetabling and deployment should be implemented in the next school year.

## DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### 1. TEACHING, LEARNING, AND ASSESSMENT

- The eight lessons observed covered all years, levels, and programmes offered, and involved all teachers of English. The overall quality of teaching in the lessons observed was good. Excellent and deeply engaging teaching was noted in a number of lessons.
- Teachers were very open to suggestions about extending and developing existing practice. Areas discussed included approaches to engage, challenge and support the full range of students; and approaches to increase students' sense of ownership of and responsibility for their learning.
- Lesson preparation was very good overall. Stimulating and challenging material was chosen and used well to develop students' understanding and skills. Teachers modelled close reading, paying careful attention to the words on the page. To develop this approach further and to make texts as accessible as possible, teachers should give due weight to concrete details that will help students visualise and grasp what is being described.
- Teachers displayed a very good level of subject knowledge, which they drew on to present, explain, and lead discussion on various topics. Teacher-led discussion worked very well where students had the capacity to listen actively and join in confidently. Teachers also planned and oversaw productive classroom activities and tasks using a more student-led approach. In selecting possible approaches, teachers should consider what is most likely to engage students, challenge them, and help them take ownership of their learning.
- Teachers used a range of questioning techniques, both to test recall and comprehension and to extend students' ability to sustain an argument and justify a point of view. This is highly commendable practice, but it was not universal. At times, the approaches used led students towards prepared responses or 'notes', rather than forming and defending their own views of the texts. The intention to support Leaving Certificate students who might find the prescribed texts challenging is laudable, but teachers should reconsider this approach, as it does not support the development of a mature and critical literacy, a key aim of the syllabus.
- The quality of learning in the lessons observed was good. Many students were articulate speakers and skilled writers. Most approached work seriously and contributed constructively to lessons. Students' responses and questions to teachers generally demonstrated very good recall and understanding, and the ability in many cases to engage confidently with the topic. Teacher/student interactions predominated; teachers should consider ways of increasing purposeful interactions between students.
- Junior cycle students' engagement with a process approach to writing to support them in creating their Collections of Texts was highly creditable. Their awareness and understanding of the process of drafting and critiquing was very evident in a third-year lesson observed, where students constructively assessed their own and others' work.
- Homework was assigned in good time in lessons, and was in most cases well designed to consolidate learning arising from classwork. Where a written assignment requires a creative intervention, for example a letter or diary entry by a character in a play or novel, teachers should ensure the appropriateness of the task to the specific learning intention.
- Students' folders contained substantial assignments, offering very good scope for developing creative and critical writing skills. Work was often of a very high standard. In many cases, teachers gave affirming and developmental written feedback, but practice in this area was not consistent. Where practice was optimal, teachers made clear and incisive evaluative comments, identifying strengths and areas requiring improvement, and using criteria that had been shared with the students. All substantial assignments merit this approach.

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

- An inspection of English in 2009 identified weaknesses in aspects of timetable provision and deployment of teachers. Many of these remain to be addressed but have been prioritised in current strategic planning.
- Each junior cycle year has five lessons but distribution is poor. This is to be addressed in next year's timetable. TY provision for English is good. Six lessons are timetabled concurrently in fifth and sixth year; this is very generous provision.
- English is taught to base class groups in junior cycle. All classes follow the higher level course, and most students sit the higher level examination. Outcomes indicate that these arrangements are appropriate, but it is worth reviewing them annually to ensure they are supporting all students in the year group.
- In fifth and sixth year, a number of higher level classes and an ordinary level class are formed. The practice of creating ranked higher level classes based on junior cycle results and TY assessments is longstanding. It has been modified to some extent but 'strong' and 'weak' higher level grouping continues. The rationale for this practice should be examined, particularly as regards the impact on students' motivation and expectations.
- Teachers are generally deployed in both junior and senior cycle, and this good practice allows the subject to be taught as a continuum of knowledge and skills development from first to sixth year. Strategic planning regarding teacher deployment has been lacking. For example, the practice whereby the same teachers always teach the same Leaving Certificate levels does not extend professional experience and build capacity, and merits reconsideration.
- English is generally well provided for, and very good technology is available to support teaching and learning. The notable exception is the absence of a library. Plans to reintroduce this valuable resource are in place and should be expedited.

## **3. PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

- The quality of planning is good, with scope to strengthen collaborative planning. A substantial subject plan for 2017/18 has been developed. A voluntary subject co-ordinator acts as a very committed advocate for the subject.
- Junior cycle plans refer to the learning outcomes in the junior cycle English specification. Teachers have not attended in-service for the new specification to date, but have accessed curriculum and support service websites for information and guidance. While they did not hold subject learning and assessment review (SLAR) meetings in 2017, they will do so in the current year, and are willing to include SLARs in their practice at an early date.
- Current changes in the junior cycle curriculum and their implications for senior cycle English provide a very good opportunity for the teachers of English to look afresh at teaching, learning and assessment practices in the subject. Meaningful participation in SLAR meetings will contribute much to the process of developing a robust common basis for assessing students' work. Regular subject department meetings will provide a forum to discuss and share teaching and learning practices that will best attain the aims of junior and senior 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. The board of management was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the report; a response was not received from the board.

## 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;