

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection in English

REPORT

Ainm na scoile / School name	St Marys College
Seoladh na scoile / School address	73-79 Lower Rathmines Road Dublin 6
Uimhir rolla / Roll number	60560E

Date of Inspection: 23-01-2019



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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 was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the report; a response was not received from the board.

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	22 and 23 January 2019
Inspection activities undertaken <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review of relevant documents• Discussion with principal and subject co-ordinator• Interaction with students	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Observation of teaching and learning during seven class periods• Examination of students' work• Individual feedback to teachers• Feedback to principal, deputy principal and the English department

School context

St Mary's College is a long-established fee-charging school for boys, under the patronage of the Spiritan Education Trust. The school offers the Junior Cycle programme, a compulsory Transition Year programme and the established Leaving Certificate. Enrolment in 2018/19 is 438.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

Findings

- The teaching observed was effective and competent, with instances of highly effective practice.
- The quality of students' learning was good, and often very good.
- Students were generally very perceptive and articulate, although when engaging with texts they tended towards more objective than personal responses.
- The subject is very well provided for and supported.
- Subject planning practices are developing well; Transition Year English is overly dependent on Leaving Certificate material.

Recommendations

- To encourage greater student personal engagement with texts, teachers should explicitly elicit personal and affective responses where appropriate, while continuing to build students' capacity to produce well-structured and evidence-based critical writing.
- The English department should revise its Transition Year plans to build on the skills fostered in the Junior Cycle programme and to avoid an over-reliance on Leaving Certificate material.

DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. TEACHING, LEARNING, AND ASSESSMENT

- Seven lessons were observed, covering all years and programmes and involving all members of the English department. Teaching practices in these lessons were effective and competent overall, with some instances of highly effective practice. Where scope to further develop teaching approaches was identified, teachers were very open to considering new practices.
- Teachers possess very good subject knowledge, and drew on it authoritatively when supplying information to students and when commenting on texts and their contexts. Teachers' assured use of this knowledge made for some very thought-provoking linkages between texts, which provided rich learning opportunities.
- Teachers also demonstrated enthusiasm for and advocacy of the subject. They made it clear that English mattered and was worthy of time and effort, thereby fulfilling a significant aspect of the role of the English teacher. There is merit in communicating this enthusiasm in a personal as well as an academic sense, so that students see English as part of learning for life and not simply learning for examinations.
- Lessons were well planned, and were consistent with the planned work for the year. They were also well prepared with good and sometimes very good resources to enhance students' learning experience.
- Highly effective practice was noted where teachers created opportunities for students to make connections between the studied text and their own experience in a way that deepened their understanding and engagement. This approach was used both in junior and senior cycle, and is worth adopting more widely as a means of encouraging students to see the value of personal insight and response.
- Most lessons were well paced to ensure substantial coverage and progress. In some instances, pace was slowed by teachers' tendency to over-focus on textual details at too early a stage in the reading, thus requiring students to go beyond the available evidence when making observations or judgements. In general, a swift first reading of the text is recommended, so that students can enjoy the forward momentum and have a grasp of the whole text before critiquing it.
- Teachers had a good rapport with students, creating an environment that nicely balanced challenge and support. It was good to see that while students' responses were listened to with respect, teachers also asked students to reconsider a response where it was not supported by the text. The concept of valid response is central to the development of critical literacy, and explicit attention to it is recommended.
- The quality of students' learning was good and often very good in the lessons observed. Overall, students were very well-disposed towards the work, with no time-wasting and very good application to lesson tasks.
- Although teachers commented that students were perhaps more reticent than usual, they readily responded to questions and were sufficiently engaged and confident to ask questions themselves. Perceptive questions and comments from students were a consistent feature of lessons.
- While students were generally very attentive and articulate, it was noteworthy that their dominant approach to questions on texts was objective and analytical rather than personal. The development of good analytical skills is a key aim of English, but the unique perspective of the individual reader is also valuable and worth developing. It is therefore recommended

that teachers continue to build students' capacity to produce well-structured and evidence-based critical writing, while also explicitly emphasising personal and affective responses where appropriate.

- The volume of work in students' folders and copybooks is commendable. The assignments set were varied, substantial and challenging, and students clearly applied themselves diligently to completing them.
- The practice of giving students developmental feedback on their work is generally well established, with a good and encouraging focus on progress and improvement. Practice in this area continues to evolve, and it is pleasing to see that junior cycle assessment approaches are increasingly informing teachers' practice.

2. SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- Timetable provision for English is good both in the number of lessons and their distribution throughout the week. A very generous time allocation is given to English in the senior cycle.
- English in junior cycle is taught in base class groups, which are of mixed ability. Almost all students take English at higher level; students taking ordinary level receive additional support as necessary, and the school applies the continuum of support when allocating additional resources to students. In fifth and sixth year, an additional small class group may be formed for students taking ordinary level or requiring more intensive support at higher level.
- Good structures have been developed to identify and support students with specific literacy needs, and to ensure effective communication between the English and special educational needs departments.
- A very wide range of extra-curricular and co-curricular activities is in place to extend and enrich students' experience of English, and the inclusion of drama in the junior cycle wellbeing programme is particularly noteworthy.
- Almost all teachers of English are deployed to the subject for all or most of their teaching hours. This concentrated deployment allows teachers to develop their approach to English as a continuum of knowledge and skills development from first to sixth year.
- English is very well resourced. The school has a fine library and very good digital infrastructure. The use of technology to support teaching and learning is an area for development, and the very good practices noted in some lessons should be extended.

3. PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- Subject planning has developed to include the practices required by curriculum reform at junior cycle, and shows evidence of a growing understanding of the English specification and its potential to provide students with stimulating and challenging learning experiences.
- The subject co-ordinator for English ably carries out several organisational responsibilities, and also has a role in supporting the development and sharing of good practice.
- Junior cycle year plans include the relevant learning outcomes, linked to appropriate materials and activities. As teachers become more familiar with implementing the specification, they should aim to minimise dependence on textbooks, for example through collaboratively developing thematic units that integrate oral communication, reading and writing skills.

- Current Transition Year (TY) English plans are substantial but over-dependent on Leaving Certificate material. It is recommended that the department address this by refocusing the plans on the learning students bring from junior cycle into TY. This would allow English in TY to provide a bridge between junior cycle and Leaving Certificate, and would reinforce students' experience of the subject as a cumulative building of skills and knowledge.

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 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;