

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

**Subject Inspection in English**

**REPORT**

<b>Ainm na scoile / School name</b>	St Mary's Secondary School
<b>Seoladh na scoile / School address</b>	St. Mary's Secondary School Holy Faith Convent Glasnevin
<b>Uimhir rolla / Roll number</b>	60770P

**Date of Inspection: 06-02-2020**



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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, 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

<b>Dates of inspection</b>	3, 5 and 6 February 2020
<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 six lessons</li><li>• Examination of students' work</li><li>• Feedback to principal and relevant staff</li></ul>

### School context

St Mary's Holy Faith Secondary School is a long-established voluntary secondary school for girls under the patronage of Le Chéile Schools Trust. The school offers the Junior Cycle programme, an optional Transition Year, the established Leaving Certificate and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme. Enrolment currently stands at 797.

### SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

#### Findings

- The overall quality of the teaching of English is very good; practice in the lessons observed was very good or good in almost all respects.
- Students were co-operative and engaged well with their learning in all lessons, and many instances of high-quality learning were noted.
- Very good assessment practices are in place, but their sustainability is a concern going into the future.
- English is well supported through good timetable provision and a range of resources, but aspects of teacher deployment are not optimal.
- The quality of subject department planning and of individual planning is very good.

#### Recommendations

- To further develop effective teaching and learning practices, the English department should work with students to embed the concept of valid response, and to develop greater student ownership of their work.
- Deployment of the English teaching resource should aim to maximise opportunities for active learning and sustainable assessment practices.

## DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### 1. TEACHING, LEARNING, AND ASSESSMENT

- Six lessons were observed, covering first, second and fifth year class groups. Other years were sitting mock examinations or were on work experience.
- The overall quality of the teaching of English is very good. Practice in the six lessons observed was very good or good in almost all respects, and where areas for development or improvement were identified, teachers were open to ideas and clearly interested in extending their practice.
- Teaching approaches were varied and engaging. The prevailing atmosphere was respectful, positive and affirming. Teachers acted as very good models of interested and engaged readers of texts, and encouraged genuine responses from students.
- Lessons were very well planned, not only with regard to content but also the sequencing of learning activities, which led students towards a clearer and deeper understanding of and engagement with concepts and texts. On occasion, time ran out before all the planned work had been completed, so it is worth ensuring that lesson plans allow sufficient time for students to explore and respond.
- Materials and resources used were well chosen to stimulate interest and to support learning. These included visuals, examples of genre writing for creative modelling and, as lessons progressed, material such as worksheets for purposeful and productive tasks. Where worksheets and resources such as post-its are used, it is worth considering how students can maintain these to embed learning and for future reference. Good classroom routines, including note-making are also worth instilling so that students can capture learning arising from class discussion and the contributions of their peers.
- Students were co-operative and diligent, and generally showed high levels of enjoyment and motivation. Learning of a high quality was noted where students took the opportunities presented to exercise their analytical skills and to express and explain their views and responses. In further developing these practices, it is recommended that teachers explicitly discuss with students the concept of valid and invalid responses. The aim should be to encourage a range of views and opinions which students can support and defend.
- Teachers paid very good attention to student voice and maintained a good balance between teacher and student talk. To further develop student voice in the classroom, greater use of peer discussion, where the teacher organises but does not lead, could be considered. It is also worth giving thought to some basics, for example how best to encourage students to speak out so that the whole group can hear and be engaged, especially in classrooms with traditional seating in rows facing the front.
- Classrooms are of varying sizes and layouts, with a number providing student seating in clusters, which worked very well for group activities. The potential to create very stimulating learning environments has been used very well in many cases. In some cases, the displays of students' work could be further developed as these provide both learning points and opportunities for students to produce work to publication standard.
- Students' copybooks contained regularly set and substantial assignments, mostly related to texts but with some good examples of personal and genre writing. An integrated approach to language and literature was evident. The quality of student work varied but many examples of very good and perceptive writing were noted. Work was overall very well maintained and organised.
- Assessment practices are very good. Feedback to students is formative and developmental, and demonstrates the effectiveness of developing and sharing success criteria with students. It is worth considering how this input from the teacher can be optimised by the student, so that students can take more responsibility for improving their own work, once they know

their strengths and areas for development. The students' evident understanding of the concept of success criteria provides a very good basis on which they can build their self-evaluation skills.

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

- Timetable provision for English is good both in the number and distribution of lessons. One double lesson is timetabled for most year groups; this is valued by the teachers and planned for well.
- Teachers generally teach English both in junior and senior cycle, and most have substantial English teaching timetables. This good practice assists capacity building and extends teachers' experience and expertise, as does the practice of rotating the teaching of higher and ordinary level groups.
- The current co-teaching arrangements in third year are a commendably flexible and responsive use of the teaching resource. However, deployment of teachers and formation of class groups needs to be reconsidered in the light of the school's growing numbers: for example, there are six teachers and class groups for English in sixth year, and the same number of teachers and class groups in fifth year, although the cohort is almost fifty percent larger. While teaching resources must be used prudently, it is desirable to work towards a class size for English that would support an active learning environment and sustainable formative assessment practices.
- The subject is very well resourced. Teachers have their own base classrooms, with good technology available. The school has a fine library and the English department runs a number of initiatives to encourage students to read for pleasure, and to experience English through a wide range of cultural activities.
- The school offers appropriate teaching experience and support to student teachers working towards their professional teaching qualifications.

## **3. PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

- Subject department planning has been developed to a highly effective level. A comprehensive English department plan has been drawn up, and plans for each year group are created annually. Plans reflect a sound and shared understanding of the principles underpinning all programmes: Junior Cycle, Transition Year, and Leaving Certificate.
- English department documents, including records of department meetings, show that collaborative and reflective planning practices are firmly embedded. The level of collective commitment to high-quality teaching and learning of English is commendable.

The draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation were discussed with the principal, deputy principals 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**

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

The Board of Management of St Mary's Secondary School is happy with the inspection report. We are grateful for the recognition of the high quality of teaching and learning taking place in the school.

## 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;