

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection in English

REPORT

Ainm na scoile / School name	St. Joseph's Secondary School
Seoladh na scoile / School address	Spanish Point Miltown Malbay County Clare
Uimhir rolla / Roll number	62010C

Date of Inspection: 04-12-2019



**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	3 and 4 December 2019
Inspection activities undertaken <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review of relevant documents• Discussion with senior management and key staff• Interaction with students	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Observation of teaching and learning during six lessons• Examination of students' work• Feedback to senior management and relevant staff

School context

St. Joseph's Secondary School is a co-educational voluntary secondary school with an enrolment of 326 students. The school operates under the trusteeship of CEIST (Catholic Education An Irish Schools' Trust). The programmes available on the school curriculum are Junior Cycle, an optional Transition Year programme, and all three senior cycle programmes. Part of the school's supports for students is a special class for students with autistic spectrum disorders (ASD) sanctioned by the National Council for Special Education (NCSE).

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

Findings

- The overall quality of teaching and learning is good, with evidence of very good practices in some lessons and satisfactory practices in a small number of lessons.
- Good support for the development of students' writing was noted across classes; the consistent provision of effective formative feedback is an area for improvement.
- Overall provision and whole-school support for the subject are good, and the introduction of productive team teaching is a highly commended support to students' learning.
- The English department has embraced a significant amount of change since autumn 2018, including availing of a considerable amount of continuing professional development (CPD) and developing shared resources and thematic units of learning for junior cycle year groups.
- Collective subject department practices are satisfactory currently; aspects of collective planning and assessment now need to be developed.

Recommendations

- Teachers should share approaches to formative feedback practices they use currently with each other; a system for requiring students to record oral feedback provided to them by their teachers on assignments is needed, and the usage of success criteria to anchor peer, self and teacher feedback should be developed.
- The teachers of English should collectively review state examination papers, marking schemes, and chief examiner's reports to study assessment trends, and use them to guide their planning for in-class, homework, and house examination tasks.
- Subject department practices need to be established in three areas: collaborative planning for movement between examination levels with regard to text choices; integrated teaching of language and literature needs as a core planning principle; and revision of the TY programme.

DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. TEACHING, LEARNING, AND ASSESSMENT

- The overall quality of teaching and learning is good, with evidence of very good practices in some lessons and also satisfactory practices in a small number of lessons.
- Student learning was supported by teachers' integration of opportunities for collaborative learning in all lessons. Good levels of subject knowledge were evident among all teachers. Vibrant learning environments had been created in some classrooms, supporting student engagement and motivation.
- Good teacher preparation, the sharing of learning intentions with students, and the use of digital clips enhanced the learning experience in a number of lessons. The practice by one teacher of seeking a student helper to support the use of digital technology in lessons is a good strategy that harnesses student skills to support learning for all.
- Some good literacy support practices were noted during the evaluation. For example, as part of their assigned reading of a chapter for homework, students in one lesson were directed to identify and research the meanings of unfamiliar words/phrases and to identify passages that were well crafted. It was evident from discussions that took place based on those homework assignments that students were taking responsibility for their learning and engaging in critical thinking. Literacy support practices that needed to be further developed in some lessons included the pre-teaching of keywords, explicit teaching of comprehension strategies, use of word walls to support vocabulary extension, and more extensive use of writing frames.
- In one lesson, where choral student reading and student performance of a dramatic scene were facilitated, students' engagement, comprehension skills, critical thinking and attention to stagecraft were all enhanced.
- Good differentiation support was generally provided to students through guided use of graphic organisers, teacher support during task phases, and team-teaching provision. In a few instances, clear communication of instructions for in-class or homework tasks needed to be improved. To support understanding, it is recommended that students be asked to verbalise a task before commencing it, that success criteria for the task be co-constructed, and that technology be used to model the activity in advance, depending on the needs of the learners in the class group. Also, more consistent usage of assessment-for-learning practices need to be developed across the department, to ensure that teachers check understanding of concepts students have mastered and those that they need additional support with.
- Good use of digital technology to support the development of students' writing was noted across the department. All teachers are encouraging a draft/redraft approach to writing, encouraging students to submit drafts of assignments, to receive feedback and to store texts toward classroom-based assessments using the school's online shared platform. Very good practice was observed where students were planning and then drafting texts on digital devices, having co-created success criteria for the task through pair discussions based on exemplars of standard of an informal letter. To further support the development of students' writing, teachers should model the writing process explicitly using technology from time to time, in collaboration with their students.
- While examples of good written feedback were noted on student texts, overall formative feedback practice is an area for development. Two areas in particular need improvement. First, the department needs to agree a system for requiring students to record oral feedback

being provided to them by their teachers on assignments. Second, students need to be provided with formative feedback on substantial assignments that identifies their strengths and also specific areas where they need to improve. It is advised that the Focus on Learning resource and the annotated exemplars of standard provided by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) be utilised as an in-house support to departmental discussions on this area.

2. SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- Whole-school support and provision for the subject are good. It is very good practice that a member of senior management is sharing subject-specific resources and planning approaches with the department.
- Timetable provision for senior cycle and Transition Year is good. Current provision for junior cycle English meets the specification requirement and the provision of an additional class period for first-year English this year is welcome. Productive team teaching also supports a combined Leaving Certificate Applied years 1 and 2 class.
- It is appropriate that senior management created an opportunity for less experienced teachers to become familiar with the teaching of senior cycle English this year, to strengthen long-term departmental capacity.
- Students are retained in mixed-ability groupings until the end of Transition Year. A first-ever senior-cycle team teaching pilot is taking place this year in one of the Leaving Certificate fifth-year classes. A review of student outcomes and of student feedback should inform class formation for sixth year, to determine whether a separate ordinary level class needs to be formed or if the team-teaching arrangement is most effectively supporting student needs.
- Teachers have participated in a number of relevant continuing professional development (CPD) inputs to support their teaching of English in recent years. They also, commendably, organise a number of co-curricular activities that strengthen the development of students' English-related skills, knowledge and attitudes.

3. PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- Collective subject department practices are currently satisfactory; aspects of collective planning and assessment now need to be developed.
- Practices in relation to the planning and assessment of English were generally individualised in the school until the initiation of collective subject department planning in autumn 2018. Over the past year, a formal, rotating subject department co-ordinator role has been established, subject plans and resources have been uploaded to a shared online drive and half-termly, thematic units of learning for junior cycle have been developed. As part of that evolving work, common assessments should be prepared, based on the common units of learning. Also, the department should engage in ongoing formal reflection on aspects of the plan that have and have not worked well, to support revision for future planning.
- Subject Learning and Assessment Review (SLAR) meeting minutes indicate good-quality discussions on the standards and also some reflective discussions on areas of learning to incorporate into forward planning for the department. It is commended that, as a result of discussions arising from reviewing samples of work produced for classroom-based assessments, teachers are trialling new teaching approaches.
- To further develop collective assignment task design, it is advised that the department collectively review state examination papers, marking schemes, and chief examiner's

reports, to study assessment trends, and use them to guide their own assessment planning for in-class, homework, and house examinations. Formal assessments should be planned collaboratively and archived in the subject department online folder.

- Subject department practices need to be established in three areas. First, there needs to be collaborative planning for movement between examination levels with regard to text choices. Second, the integrated teaching of language and literature needs to be established as a core planning principle. Third, the TY English plan needs to be reviewed so that it can be delivered within the actual class contact time available, outlines key assignments for each term which offer choice to support the range of abilities in the group, and explicitly builds on students' Junior Cycle English knowledge, skills and assessment experiences.

The draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation were discussed with the senior management and the 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 of Management welcomes the findings and recommendations of the Subject Inspection of English. It is very encouraging to see that good use of digital technology to support the development of students' writing was noted across the department. Given the emphasis that St. Joseph's Secondary School places on technology-enabled learning, we are delighted to see that digital learning technology was observed as very good practice where students were planning and then drafting texts on digital devices, having co-created success criteria as a formative assessment tool.

In addition to this, we welcome the recognition that the department, commendably, organise a number of co-curricular activities that strengthen the development of students' English-related skills, knowledge and attitudes.

It's equally encouraging to see the school's introduction to team teaching as a highly commendable support to students' learning.

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.

Senior Management conducted a detailed analysis of the report with the English department following the inspection. An action plan was devised with the department and the recommendations have also been circulated to all other subject departments for their information and consideration.

Collaborative subject planning continues for the integrated teaching of language and literature as a core planning principle by the department, including further development of formative and summative assessment practices, for oral and written feedback. A full review of the TY English programme was also undertaken.

English subject department meetings are now more focussed on the teaching, learning and assessment needs of students to provide more clarity and to keep improving standards. 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 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;