

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection in English

REPORT

Ainm na scoile / School name	St Columba's College
Seoladh na scoile / School address	Stranorlar Co. Donegal
Uimhir rolla / Roll number	62861F

Date of Inspection: 05-04-2019



**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 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	4, 5 April 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, deputy principals and relevant staff

School context

St Columba's College is a voluntary secondary school with an enrolment of 854 students, operating under the patronage of Catholic Education an Irish Schools' Trust (CEIST). The school provides the Junior Cycle including the Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP), an optional Transition Year (TY), the Leaving Certificate, the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme and the Leaving Certificate Applied programme.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

Findings

- The quality of teaching and learning was good overall with very good practice observed in many lessons; in a small number of lessons, active student engagement was an area for development.
- The quality of assessment was very good overall, with some very good individual approaches to developing students' Collections of Texts noted.
- There is very good overall whole-school support for the subject; however, the practice of setting some students into ordinary-level class groups from first year onward needs to be reviewed.
- The quality of planning and preparation is good; subject plans have been developed for each year and junior cycle schemes of work refer to Junior Cycle English learning outcomes.
- Teachers undertake extensive analysis of state examination results and reflective commentary demonstrates a strong desire to seek out areas for improvement; good uptake of higher level and good overall learner outcomes were noted in both junior and senior cycle certificate examinations of English.

Recommendations

- All lessons should be planned to include opportunities for students to actively engage in their own learning.
- The school should carefully review and adjust its practice of setting some students into ordinary-level class groups from first year onwards with a view to encouraging all students to have the highest realistic expectations.
- Schemes of work should be further enhanced by linking units of learning and the associated learning outcomes with specific methodologies, formative and summative assessment tasks and resources and to provide space for reflective commentary.
- Teachers should develop an agreed approach for the students' Collection of Texts with a view to including a comprehensive range of genres and formats as outlined in the Junior Cycle English specification.

DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. TEACHING, LEARNING, AND ASSESSMENT

- The quality of teaching and learning was good overall, with very good practice observed in many lessons.
- In the best lessons, students engaged purposefully with planned learning activities and benefited from collaboration with their peers. In a small number of lessons, active student engagement was an area for development. All lessons should be planned to include opportunities for students to actively engage in their own learning.
- Teachers used a range of methodologies and resources to enhance students' learning experiences. In one junior cycle lesson, the teacher used students' prior learning and a relevant video clip as prompts to provide the required scaffolding for a creative writing task. This approach resulted in purposeful engagement from the outset, with students starting a short creative writing task during the lesson for completion as homework.
- A very good instance of team teaching was observed where two teachers skilfully progressed students' learning. It was evident that detailed planning had taken place to enable the students to succeed and enjoy the lesson.
- The quality of assessment was very good overall. Good quality questioning that elicited and supported students' understanding was observed in many lessons. Students were asked to make a note of their learning at the end of some lessons and teachers reported that they use this information to support future lesson planning. This is very good practice.
- Written formative feedback was seen on students' work and, commendably, students reported that they use teachers' feedback to help them improve. However, the application of advice for improvement was not always evident in students' work. It may be useful for teachers to adopt specific strategies to ensure that students engage systematically with feedback.
- Vibrant and creative displays of students' work in classrooms affirmed the very good levels of student engagement with assigned tasks and enhanced the learning environment for students. Some classrooms were arranged to enable and support collaborative learning.
- Reports from subject learning and assessment reviews (SLARS) indicate good engagement with the process.
- In TY, assessment is based on a number of pieces of work, including extended writing tasks, throughout the year. It would be worthwhile ensuring that TY provides opportunities for students to identify and work on areas for improvement and subject-specific skills development.

2. SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- There is very good whole-school support for the subject and classrooms are well equipped.
- The time allocated for English lessons at both junior and senior cycle exceeds the minimum required allocation. This is highly commended.
- TY classes are mixed ability. In fifth year, higher-level and ordinary-level class group formation is based on TY and junior cycle achievement, teachers' professional judgement and student preference and this is appropriate. However, class formation at junior cycle is in need of review, particularly in relation to the practice of setting some students into ordinary

level class groups from first year onwards. It is recommended that the school review and adjust this practice with a view to encouraging all students to have the highest realistic expectations.

- There is evidence of the whole-school literacy and numeracy strategies throughout the school building. For example, to encourage reading, newspaper articles of interest to students are displayed on the walls of the canteen. This is an imaginative initiative that could be expanded into other areas.
- School management is highly supportive of teachers' continuing professional development.
- Teachers show great commitment and enthusiasm for extending students' experience of English through a range of extra-curricular activities including debating, a reading club, theatre trips, library visits, the JCSP Make-a-book initiative and involvement in local journalism. High levels of student participation were reported.

3. PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- The quality of planning and preparation is good.
- Junior cycle plans refer to learning outcomes in line with the Junior Cycle English specification and subject plans for each year provide time-bound breakdown of topics to be covered and learning to be achieved. It is now timely to plan to further enhance schemes of work by linking units of learning and the associated learning outcomes with specific methodologies, formative and summative assessment tasks and resources and to provide space for reflective commentary to assist with future planning.
- Teachers undertake extensive analysis of state examination results and reflective commentary demonstrates a strong desire to seek out areas for improvement. Good uptake of higher level and good overall learner outcomes were noted in both junior and senior cycle certificate examinations of English.
- There is a variety of approaches to the development of the Collection of Texts among teachers, including some very good practices. It would be worthwhile adopting a common approach that comprises a comprehensive range of genres and formats including extended pieces of writing as outlined in the Junior Cycle English specification. Including a contents page would allow students to track the completion dates and genres of their work. This approach would provide students with a very clear understanding that their junior cycle achievement is based on a continuum of learning and skills development.
- Teachers work together in a collegial and collaborative manner and have many formal and informal discussions about teaching and learning. Minutes of recent department meetings were examined during the inspection. It would be very useful to include teaching and learning as an agenda item at department meetings to help share the very good in-house expertise noted during the inspection.

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.

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;