

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

**Subject Inspection in English**

**REPORT**

|   |                                    |
|---|------------------------------------|
| <b>Ainm na scoile /<br/>School name</b>       | Mercy College                      |
| <b>Seoladh na scoile /<br/>School address</b> | Woodford<br>Loughrea<br>Co. Galway |
| <b>Uimhir rolla /<br/>Roll number</b>         | 63171I                             |

**Date of Inspection: 25-09-2019**



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**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

|  |   |
|--|---|
| <b>Date of inspection</b>  | 25-09-2019  |
| <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 four lessons</li><li>• Examination of students' work</li><li>• Feedback to principal and relevant staff</li></ul> |

### School context

Mercy College, Woodford is a co-educational post-primary school under the trusteeship of Catholic Education An Irish Schools' Trust (CEIST). The school's total enrolment is 146 students. In addition to the Junior Cycle programme and an optional Transition Year programme, the school offers the Leaving Certificate, the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme and the Leaving Certificate Applied.

### SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

#### Findings

- A strong sense of community and the school's understanding of the learning needs of individual students were evident throughout the inspection.
- The consistently high number of students sitting English at higher-level is a very significant achievement and reflects the school's high expectations regarding attainment.
- Teaching, learning and assessment were of a good standard overall; feedback and differentiation are areas for further development.
- Whole-school support and provision are very good, with whole-school strategies being used across departments to strengthen students' literacy.
- Class groups of mixed ability and levels are a contextual feature of both junior and senior cycle lessons.
- The standard of planning and preparation is very high.

#### Recommendations

- Differentiation should be developed further to include the fullest use of visual strategies to support content delivery, more effective planning for pairings and groupings within lessons, and the wider extension of tiered assignments.
- Teachers should develop and implement the assessment and feedback policies so as to ensure students reflect and act on feedback.

## DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### 1. TEACHING, LEARNING, AND ASSESSMENT

- The overall standard of teaching, learning and assessment was good. Positive and affirming relationships were consistently evident. Students were comfortable seeking help as needed and a strong sense of community was a characteristic of the school.
- Teachers work in a well-prepared manner and are committed to their subject. They have strong subject knowledge. The practice of linking language and literature within lessons is commendable. There was evidence that, increasingly, such an integrated approach was being collaboratively planned for in the scheme.
- In all lessons, clarity regarding the learning to be undertaken was achieved through the sharing of learning intentions. In many instances, these were revisited at the end of lessons through oral questioning supporting assessment and teacher-guided reflections.
- Questioning was used well by teachers to assess learning and to prompt students to reflect on their conceptual understandings. Very successful examples of students being asked to explain the reasons for their answers were also seen. Overall, the wider usage of increased wait-time, encouraging no hands up, and allowing for collaboration before answering would support activity and inclusion. Listening and speaking skills as well as subject learning could also be consolidated by encouraging students to follow-up on the answers of others.
- Very effective examples of digital learning technology supporting learning were seen including for example, teachers using display technology to sequentially add prepared annotations to texts and students using assistive technology. In some instances, however, the time students spent taking down presented notes would have been better spent in discovery learning. It is also particularly important that teachers' planning reflect that some students learn more successfully when visual strategies are fully employed. Overall, it would be beneficial to consider how display technology can augment as well as present textual content.
- Class-groups of mixed ability and levels are a contextual feature of the school and, at times, learning outcomes varied significantly between students. It was good that differentiation was part of lessons and teachers were well informed regarding student learning needs. Building on this, deliberate planning around pairings and grouping in both junior and senior cycle class-groups will best ensure equity of achievement for all students. Overall, to improve outcomes and enable all students to experience appropriate levels of challenge and success, it is recommended that teachers plan for a greater range of differentiated tasks, including extension tasks.
- Pair and group work was generally guided effectively by teachers. In one instance, groups of students shared the product of their work resulting in a highly effective plenary that improved understanding for all. At other times, teacher talk-dominated and consideration should be given to the further promotion of student responses with lessons. The examples of peer-learning seen were highly effective when the rotation of roles and tasks within groups effectively promoted accountability and collaboration. The wider usage of such activities is recommended.

- Very good work is being undertaken to familiarise students with assessment criteria for written work in English. Students' copies contained examples of peer and self-assessment that demonstrated their understanding of subject-specific features of quality.
- Examples of valuable formative feedback were seen in student copies. In many instances, however, the effectiveness was limited by the level of subsequent student action. It is recommended that teachers develop and implement the assessment and feedback policies to ensure all students reflect and act on feedback. The booklet *Focus on Learning: Formative Feedback* (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment) will provide support in the development of this policy.

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

- Whole-school support and provision are very good, particularly in the context of the school's size. Recent investment in digital learning technology is supportive of teaching and learning. Timetable provision for English is very good and teachers are provided with base classrooms that are well resourced. Classrooms display a selection of subject-specific material on the walls, much of which is student generated.
- A whole-school strategy has seen the introduction of a 'universal marking code' which is used across subject departments. Significant work has also been undertaken within the English department to develop student vocabulary awareness. Students cultivate individual dictionaries for English and, in doing so, develop key skills and language awareness.
- The school facilitates a broad a range of co-curricular and extra-curricular activities as possible. Personal reading is promoted and strong links with the local community are evident in the partnership with the local library, which is accessible to class groups on request.
- Management and staff have begun to plan for the replacement of in-house assessment with classroom-based assessments (CBAs) ensuring the manageability of assessment for students. It is noteworthy that a Guided Academic Attainment Programme (GAAP) has been developed to support students in self-directed learning and that the school is incorporating bespoke formative feedback within its reporting structures.
- The consistently high number of students sitting English at higher-level is a very significant achievement reflecting structures promoting the school's high expectations regarding its students.

## **3. PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

- Planning and preparation are of a very good standard. Teachers work well together, subject department meetings are held, and minutes detail significant organisation and planning of work. Records for SLAR meetings identify a consistent understanding regarding standards and key learnings. The informal sharing of practice is evident and there is close alignment between the schemes for individual teachers.
- It is notable that within the schemes of work for Junior Cycle, assessment tasks are associated with learning outcomes to ensure assessment that is valid and appropriate. The extension of this practice to other schemes is recommended. It is also recommended that the subject

department audit the scheme to ensure that the specific learning outcomes identified for its units of learning are the focus of assessment in all cases.

- Single class groups often consist of a mix of students who will sit the Leaving Certificate examination at higher and ordinary level. It is recommended that schemes plan to enable students to transition between levels and ensure that content and assessment tasks meet the curricular and assessment needs of such groupings.
- Commendably, the scheme for the delivery of the Junior Cycle programme contains a broad range of assessment modes including, for example, a presentation in First Year that can be delivered remotely or in person. Throughout the scheme, continuous assessment and project opportunities reflect an inclusive range; this is very good practice.

The draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation were discussed with the 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  |
|---------------------|---|---|
| <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 wholeschool 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;   |