

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

**Subject Inspection in English**

**REPORT**

<b>Ainm na scoile / School name</b>	Laurel Hill Secondary School FCJ
<b>Seoladh na scoile / School address</b>	Laurel Hill Secondary School FCJ South Circular Road Limerick
<b>Uimhir rolla / Roll number</b>	64260M

**Date of Inspection: 19-09-2019**



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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

<b>Dates of inspection</b>	18-19 September 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 eight lessons</li><li>• Examination of students' work</li><li>• Feedback to principal and relevant staff</li></ul>

### School context

Laurel Hill Secondary School FCJ is a voluntary secondary school for girls with an enrolment of 626 students, under Le Chéile trusteeship. The school provides the Junior Cycle Programme, the Leaving Certificate and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programmes, and a compulsory Transition Year (TY) programme.

### SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

#### Findings

- Positive relationships and an atmosphere conducive to writing, reflection and creativity were recurring features of lessons within the school.
- The uptake of English at higher-level in the certificate examinations is very good.
- The teaching and learning observed were of a high standard overall.
- Assessment practices are good although there is scope to widen the range and modes of assessment while reducing the quantity of summative assessment.
- Whole-school support and provision are good; the school library and the employment of a librarian is highly commendable.
- The overall quality of individual teacher planning and preparation was good; collaborative planning at senior cycle and assessment at junior cycle are areas for development.

#### Recommendations

- To build on the good practices in place, teachers of English should share and extend the use of technology as a learning tool, and should prioritise questioning and student talk as areas for development.
- An assessment and feedback policy should be developed by the subject department.
- Teachers should plan collaboratively regarding the text selections and teaching methodologies for the Leaving Certificate curriculum; the junior cycle English subject plan should be adjusted with a focus on the key intended learning and its modes of assessment.

## DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### 1. TEACHING, LEARNING, AND ASSESSMENT

- Positive relationships and an atmosphere conducive to writing, reflection and creativity were recurring features of lessons within the school.
- Teaching and learning of a high standard were observed. Teachers work in a well-prepared manner, are dedicated to the subject, and have strong subject knowledge. Students were generally comfortable asking questions and pupil-teacher interactions were dialogic in the most effective instances. Student enjoyment of lessons was frequently in evidence.
- Student responses and outcomes attested to the effectiveness of learning with others. However, developed opportunities for exploratory talk amongst students were seen in a minority of lessons while in other instances, the sequencing of tasks within the lesson meant that potentially rich discussions were cut short by time constraints. Learner experiences would benefit from increased opportunities for collaboration, student talk and plenary discussion.
- A number of effective and inclusive supports for learning were observed, such as supporting student learning through the dual coding of visuals and text. Some good examples of differentiation by task were seen and this should be extended as part of wider departmental practice.
- Questioning was used effectively by teachers to evaluate students' work and comprehension. In some instances, longer wait-time and asking students to comment on the responses of others would have enhanced the effectiveness of questioning as a means of assessing all students. Where questioning was most effective, teachers engaged all students through strategies such as think-pair-share or by posing questions that required students to think critically. In these incidences it was noticeable that both the number of student responses and the number of student questions increased.
- Digital learning technology was used in some lessons and could have further supported learning in others. In the most effective examples, the appropriate usage promoted student engagement and reinforced learning. The subject department's self-evaluation has identified the use of digital learning technology as an area for growth and teachers should plan for a sharing of practice to complement the sharing of digital resources that has already begun.
- Assessment practices were generally of a high standard. Self-and peer assessment were features of lessons supporting student ownership of learning. It was positive that some student copies contained effective examples of formative feedback where teachers identified specific steps for improvement. Such practice should be adopted by all teachers. This will ensure that valuable student and teacher reflections are optimised as a support for student writing.
- The English department should also place more responsibility for assessment and reflection on students, particularly with regard to taking action on the basis of feedback. An assessment and feedback policy should be developed to include homework, extended written assignments, oral presentations, and formative assessment strategies. The English department's collective assessment practices should also incorporate the co-creation of success criteria by teachers and students, and teachers' modes of assessment should be broadened.

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

- There is good provision and whole-school support for English. Teachers are provided with well-resourced base classrooms where displays support subject-specific learning. A wide-range of co-curricular and extra-curricular effectively supports the development of subject specific interests and dispositions.
- The school is engaged in on-going investment in digital learning technology and a programme of CPD by internal and external leaders has begun.
- The consistently high number of students sitting English at higher-level is a very significant strength reflecting the school's high expectations for its students.
- The school is beginning to review its assessment policy. To guard against over-assessment, Circular 55/2019 states that schools should examine their own assessment policies and must plan for the replacement of in-house examinations with Classroom-Based Assessments for students, where relevant (section 2.13). In progressing this, it would be appropriate for the school to also consider the possibilities for broadening the modes and range of assessment generally in operation.
- The school library is a space that positively supports personal reading. The employment of a school librarian, the commitment to student access, and the respect given to the room by the many students who use it is highly commended

## **3. PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

- Overall planning and preparation are good. Subject department meetings are held and minutes maintained. The roles of joint subject co-ordinators reflect a capacity for collaboration as does the recent development of an online platform to share resources.
- It is highly commendable that the subject department has engaged in self-evaluation as a means of identifying what is working well and where to focus improvement. In alignment with this process, it is recommended that teaching and learning be prioritised at department meetings through the formalised sharing of good practices and methodologies among teachers; this should be documented within the subject plan.
- Commendably, the scheme of work for junior cycle is indicative of progressive planning for curriculum delivery. However, significant variation exists in detail and the common schemes for the delivery of Leaving Certificate schemes are insufficient in their current form. Given the very significant capacity within the subject department, greater collaboration on senior cycle planning has the potential to impact positively on teacher workload and student learning. Hence, it is recommended that a common senior cycle scheme of work and assessment be prioritised and developed collaboratively. As part of that work, teachers should plan collaboratively around texts to facilitate the movement of students between levels or class-groups and to enable teacher substitution, should that be necessary.
- The junior cycle English subject plan should be adjusted and refined with a focus on the key learning to be achieved and the assessment of this learning. Incrementally, and over time, units of learning and the associated learning outcomes should be linked with both formative and summative assessment tasks. Opportunities for extended writing tasks should be identified and included in the scheme to position the collection of the student's texts as a key summative

assessment tool in planning units of learning for each year group. For all year groups, the range of assessment modes should be broadened.

The draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation were discussed with the principal, deputy principal and subject co-ordinators 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 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;