

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

**Subject Inspection in English**

**REPORT**

<b>Ainm na scoile / School name</b>	St. Brigid's College
<b>Seoladh na scoile / School address</b>	Loughrea County Galway
<b>Uimhir rolla / Roll number</b>	71280J

**Date of Inspection: 11-03-2020**



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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 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.

## INSPECTION ACTIVITIES

<b>Dates of inspection</b>	10-11 March 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 seven lessons</li><li>• Examination of students' work</li><li>• Feedback to principal and department staff</li></ul>

### School context

St. Brigid's College, Loughrea is a co-educational school operated under the auspices of the Galway Roscommon Education and Training Board (GRETB). It has a current enrolment of 622 students. As well as the Junior Cycle and Leaving Certificate programmes, the school has an optional Transition Year (TY) programme and offers the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP).

### SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

#### Findings

- The standard of teaching was high, with instances of very good practice observed.
- Learner outcomes were good while opportunities exist to improve learner experiences.
- Whole-school provision and support of English are commendable.
- A large schedule of school-based summative assessment has developed over time that now merits adjustment.
- Teachers and management provide excellent supports for literacy and creative writing.
- Overall planning and preparation are of a high standard; opportunities exist to develop the subject department's schemes of work.

#### Recommendations

- To improve learner experiences, the school must revise its practice of forming some smaller English classes and ensure accordance with Circular 14/2017 while teachers should plan for wider opportunities for students to engage in learning activities, and to subsequently explain the process and outcome.
- An Assessment and Feedback Policy should be developed encompassing written formative feedback and the substitution of Classroom-Based Assessments (CBAs) for in-house assessments.
- Schemes of work should link learning outcomes with common formative and summative assessment tasks, and with specific agreed opportunities for extended writing.

## DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### 1. TEACHING, LEARNING, AND ASSESSMENT

- The overall standard of teaching was high, with instances of very good practice observed. Teachers were well prepared for their lessons and demonstrated rich subject knowledge. Classroom interactions frequently illustrated the degree to which students valued teacher guidance and instruction.
- Good clarity regarding the learning to be undertaken was achieved in all lessons. This helped students to focus on what they were learning and understand the reason for tasks. In the most effective instances, a simple and unrestricted learning intention was shared that allowed for student attainment at a range of levels. Such practice offers the flexibility for teachers to adjust in response to student learning and should be extended.
- In several lessons, formative assessment allowed both student and teacher to assess learning and progress, offering opportunities for responsive teaching.
- Overall, teachers used questioning effectively as a means of evaluating student understanding. Some very good uses of questioning for the purpose of assessing learning were observed. At its most effective, questioning was used to promote higher-order thinking and to consolidate learning.
- Copybooks contained an appropriate range of work that was frequently addressed by effective written teacher feedback. However, in most instances, subsequent student engagement and reflection was not evident. The impact of such feedback should now be evaluated and an assessment and feedback policy should be developed.
- Digital learning technology was used well in an English as Additional Language (EAL) lesson while graphic organisers were used frequently to scaffold students' understanding of studied texts. At other times, an excess of resources and hand-outs unnecessarily complicated clear lesson focuses, and the more judicious selection of student resources is recommended.
- Overall, teachers used visual supports well to guide the development of students' writing skills. Teachers should now plan for greater modelling of writing and the further annotation of studied texts. The proposed use of visualisers has the potential to significantly support this process.
- Learner outcomes were generally good while opportunities exist to improve learner experiences. Learning of a high quality was seen when students engaged in co-operative and individual learning with clear support and instruction from the teacher. One very effective example included senior-cycle students peer-analysing the sound patterns in their favourite song lyrics. At other times, learning would have been improved by wider opportunities for students to take responsibility for their own learning or to engage in tasks that explicitly developed the key learning intention.
- The English department should plan for greater opportunities to students to engage in meaningful learning activities. A key focus should be students presenting and explaining the process and outcome of learning activities. Such a focus on learner experiences will also support oral language development and should include planning for exploratory and presentational talk as well as plenary discussions. Consideration should also be given to how

homework can serve as a pre-teaching exercise allowing lessons to move more quickly into rich and challenging learning opportunities.

- The prolonged deployment of a special education teacher as teacher of a separate class of English is not in accordance with Circular 14/2017 and should be reviewed. Such groupings can constrict learning experiences and the subject specification's expectation that the English classroom is a place of 'classroom talk' where students have a wide and varied experience of texts that engage, inspire and challenge them. The school should explore alternative approaches, such as team teaching.

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

- Whole-school provision and support of English are commendable.
- The school provides excellent support for literacy and creative writing. A wide range of extra and co-curricular supports fosters subject-related interests and dispositions. Writing workshops, partnerships with poets and general teacher encouragement nurture an awareness and appreciation of English language and literature.
- Overall, timetable provision for English is good, both in the number of lessons allocated and their distribution across the week.
- In general, deployment of teachers is consolidated by teachers teaching of both junior and senior-cycle class groups. This pattern supports the view of English as a continuum of knowledge and skills development from first to sixth year and is worthy of further development by planning to ensure that all teachers experience teaching all levels.
- Teachers are classroom-based and have ensured that a wide range of visual subject supports effectively frames the student classroom experience.
- A large schedule of school-based summative assessment has developed over time. The school must review its assessment practices and policy to guard against over-assessment, as per Circular 55/2019. In planning for the replacement of in-house examinations with CBAs for students, it would be appropriate for the school to also consider the possibilities for broadening the modes and range of assessment generally in operation. This change supports the manageability of assessment for teachers and avoids over-assessment of students.

## **3. PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

- Planning and preparation are of a high standard.
- Subject department meetings are held regularly and are minuted. Teaching and learning is a standing item on the agenda of such meetings and teachers spoke positively of the value of this professional engagement. The role of the co-ordinator has rotated recently; this is good practice and should be continued.
- Good work has been undertaken in developing schemes of work. It is recommended that some adjustments to the current plans be undertaken. A greater focus on the key learning outcomes to be addressed in each unit of work will guide lessons more effectively. Common assessments should be aligned with the learning identified and greater specificity regarding the tasks to be undertaken should be enunciated in the plan. Further collaborative development is also recommended to ensure consistency and clarity of detail in the schemes for the TY English modules.

- A section dealing with the English department's approach to the CBAs should be included within the plan. To support the department's broadening of its range of assessment, a shared approach to the development of the student's collection of texts in Junior Cycle should be outlined.
- The department's commitment to reflection and progression is evidenced in the analysis of state exams and the formation of an action plan. Building on this, the department should include the subject learning and review (SLAR) report within its documentation and its data while there should be an explicit focus on subject-specific as well as whole-school teaching and learning practices.
- SLAR meetings are held, contributing to the collaborative understanding of standards and practices. High levels of teacher collaboration are evident in the department's development of a shared booklet of unstudied texts.

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

The Board of Management welcomes the findings and recommendations of the Subject Inspection of English that was conducted in March 2020.

The board also welcomes the inspection findings of very good practice observed in the teaching of English and the excellent supports for literacy and creative writing across the department provided by teachers and school management plus the whole-school provision and support of English.

The report reaffirms all the positive evolving work that is constantly occurring in a dynamic department. 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.**

- The school has revised its practice to comply with Circular 14/2017 in the current school year.
- An Assessment and Feedback Policy is being developed with the phasing out of in-house assessments and being replaced by Classroom- Based Assessments.
- All schemes of work are being revised to link learning outcomes with common formative and summative assessment tasks, and with specific agreed opportunities for extended writing.

## 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;