

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection in English

REPORT

Ainm na scoile / School name	St. Brendan's College
Seoladh na scoile / School address	Belmullet County Mayo
Uimhir rolla / Roll number	72050U

Date of Inspection: 10-04-2019



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	9 -10 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 six class periods• Examination of students' work• Feedback to principal and relevant staff

School context

St. Brendan's College is a co-educational post-primary school which operates under the auspices of the Mayo, Sligo and Leitrim Education and Training Board (MSLETB). The school participates in Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS), the action plan of the Department of Education and Skills for educational inclusion. Enrolment stands currently at 383 students and has grown significantly in recent years. The school offers the Junior Cycle programme, the Junior Certificate Schools Programme, the Leaving Certificate, and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme. An optional Transition Year (TY) programme has significant student interest and uptake.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

Findings

- The overall standard of teaching was good; teachers prepare well and a strong sense of community was evident from their interactions with students.
- Learning outcomes are of a good standard; in some instances the learner experience was limited by too much teacher input, leaving insufficient opportunities for students to develop personal responses or engage purposefully in learning activities.
- Teachers provide effective written formative feedback to support student learning.
- Good support for literacy is provided through extra and co-curricular supports and through teachers' explicit focus on developing students' word consciousness.
- Whole-school support and subject provision are good, with learning supported by well-resourced classrooms and good timetable provision.
- The standard of planning and preparation is good; very good subject department planning structures have been developed.

Recommendations

- As a means to improving learning experiences, teachers should explore how success criteria and exploratory talk can support student writing and plan for the integration of oral language, reading and writing in lessons.
- To develop existing good practices, the subject department should prioritise student action in response to written formative feedback.
- The English department should further develop the subject plan.

DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. TEACHING, LEARNING, AND ASSESSMENT

- Six lessons were observed during the course of the inspection encompassing all teachers and levels. The quality of teaching was good. Overall, teachers were well prepared for their lessons, and demonstrated strong commitment to the school. They reported a strong sense of school community and this was evident from their interactions with students.
- Classroom management was consistently effective and supportive of learning. Teachers used questioning effectively to assess individual student understanding. In the most effective instances, the use of strategies such as Think-Pair-Share supported greater learner confidence and inclusion.
- Clarity was achieved regarding the intended learning in all lessons. Learning intentions were revisited regularly at the end of lessons, offering valuable opportunities for students and teachers to reflect on the learning. In one effective instance, 'exit tickets' enabled the teacher to gather individual information regarding student progress and supported responsive, developmental lesson planning.
- Exploratory talk was a feature of the most effective lessons. In a minority of lessons, there was an imbalance between teacher and student voice which constrained the learning opportunities. Purposeful dialogue extends student thinking and the department is advised to consider how the instigation of a cycle of talk before, or after, personal writing can further improve learning in general, and personal responses in particular. It is recommended that teachers plan for a greater integration of oral language with reading and writing.
- Very good support for literacy is provided through approaches such as the identification of key words, the explicit deconstruction of meaning, and the practice of asking students to use a dictionary to find the meaning of newly encountered words. An annual Literacy Week is well established and includes debates, poetry recitations, spelling bees, and short story competitions.
- At times, student learning would have been richer if the teacher-designed formative assessment task aligned more closely to the intended learning for the lesson. In such instances, the use of success criteria would have supported such alignment and clarified whether students had met the learning intentions. Teachers need to plan for a wider development and negotiation of success criteria so as to improve students' understanding of what is expected of them, to scaffold differentiated extension exercises, and to support formative assessment by teacher and student.
- There were some good examples of students working effectively in groups. These examples included a class group analysing comparative texts collaboratively before an effective teacher-led plenary discussion. Where observed, co-operative learning tasks were structured effectively and guided by teachers. Students consistently expressed an appreciation for such inclusive learning opportunities.
- A broad sample of copybooks contained significant written teacher feedback on student writing. It was good to see detailed and clear guidance on how to improve work undertaken by students. However, in many instances, there was imbalance between the quality of teacher feedback and the student response to that feedback. It is recommended that teachers place more responsibility for assessment and reflection on students. It would be worthwhile to consider how lesson time can be allocated to ensure all students engage with

feedback, and how students may best be guided to use what they learn from feedback to improve the next piece of writing they will undertake.

- The use of digital learning technology supported learning effectively in many lessons. The selective use of video of theatrical performance was an appropriate resource for the study of drama and also supported poetry revision tasks. It was reported by teachers that technology is also used to model the process of annotating and analysing texts. The visualisation of teacher modelling of writing is worthwhile. Such uses can provide significant supports to students and it would be beneficial to explore how the wider use of technology to model the analysis or creation of texts can further support student learning.

2. SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- Whole-school support and subject provision are good. Teachers have opportunities to work across different year-groups and levels, a useful practice which supports professional development and collaboration.
- Timetable provision is good and teachers are provided with well-resourced base classrooms. The layout in one room, in particular, provided very good support for co-operative learning. Teachers have ensured that classrooms have rich visual supports for learning in the form of posters and keywords.
- A wide range of co-curricular activities supports the development of subject-related knowledge and dispositions. Teachers organise in-house public speaking competitions, library and theatre visits, and writing workshops. Commendably, a reading initiative has seen transition-year students work with students in the local primary school.

3. PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- The standard of planning and preparation is good; very good subject department planning structures have been developed. Senior management has arranged relevant and appropriate workshops for staff in subject department planning. The adoption of a whole-school approach to subject department planning now supports teacher collaboration, interdepartmental planning and DEIS planning to significant effect.
- There has been very good progress in subject department planning for English in recent years. The detailed junior and senior-cycle subject plans reflect the work undertaken by subject teachers. The teachers' use of an online platform to support the sharing of resources is commended. The embedding of hyper-links to strategies and resources within the scheme reflects the subject department's intention to create a scheme of work that is dynamic in design and supportive of collaborative and reflective practice.
- As a means of further developing existing good practice, it would be worthwhile to review the planning template to consider how layout can support a greater foregrounding and aligning of learning and assessment. Incrementally, and over time, the scheme for English should be developed to summarise the agreed key learning to be pursued for each unit; to align specific summative and formative assessments with these key outcomes in each unit; and to develop agreed common success criteria for summative assessments.

The draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation were discussed with the principal, deputy principal and all 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;