

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

**Subject Inspection in English**

**REPORT**

<b>Ainm na scoile / School name</b>	Blakestown Community School
<b>Seoladh na scoile / School address</b>	Blanchardstown Dublin 15
<b>Uimhir rolla / Roll number</b>	91316Q

**Date of Inspection: 17-09-2019**



---

**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.

## **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>	17-09-2019
<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 six lessons</li><li>• Examination of students' work</li><li>• Feedback to principal and relevant staff</li></ul>

### School context

Blakestown Community School is a co-educational post-primary school operating under the trusteeship of Le Chéile Schools Trust and Dublin and Dún Laoghaire Education and Training Board. The school is located in Dublin 15 and has a current enrolment of 425 students. The school offers the Junior Cycle, an optional Transition Year (TY), the established Leaving Certificate and the Leaving Certificate Applied programme. The school participates in the Delivery Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) action plan.

### SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

#### Findings

- The quality of teaching and learning ranged from fair to good; instances of very good practices were evident in most lessons observed.
- Clarity with regard to the learning underway, underpinned by the sharing of learning intentions, was evident in most lessons
- Positive classroom interactions and a very good student-teacher rapport is indicative of the commitment and dedication to student care and welfare in this school.
- Teachers used a range of methodologies including video clips, props and some pair work but there was scope to increase opportunities for students to be active and independent in their learning.
- In some lessons, students were not adequately challenged by the tasks and activities of the lesson.
- Significant work is already underway in the improvement of the subject plan; some areas for development relating to schemes of work remain.

#### Recommendations

- Teachers should engage with and implement a range of approaches to differentiation so that all students receive appropriate levels of challenge and support to enhance learner outcomes.
- The use of carefully structured co-operative and active learning activities to promote and extend students' personal engagement with texts and encourage exploratory discussion should be pursued and incorporated in the English department's practice.
- Schemes of work should clearly link learning outcomes with relevant assessment modes and teaching methodologies; and the school's DEIS actions for improvement should be reflected in the schemes.

## DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### 1. TEACHING, LEARNING, AND ASSESSMENT

- The quality of teaching and learning in the lessons observed ranged from fair to good. Instances of very good practice were in evidence in most lessons, specifically when students were facilitated to be active and collaborative in their learning.
- Clarity with regard to the learning underway in lessons was, in most cases, underpinned by the sharing learning intentions. This practice could be further extended by describing the intended learning of the lesson in student-friendly language, and explicitly linking to prior learning.
- Interactions between teachers and students were respectful and classroom management was generally very good and built on a foundation of good relationships with students. The dedication of English teachers to the welfare and care of their students was in evidence throughout the evaluation and is commendable.
- Many teachers have gone to lengths to create learning spaces in their classrooms that promote English and celebrate students' achievements. The print-rich environments they have created are attractive, interesting and conducive to positive learning. In some classrooms, desks are arranged in a way that encourages student collaboration and the extension of this to all English classrooms should be considered.
- In some lessons, teachers' enthusiasm and interest in the subject was palpable, especially when teachers utilised props to help students engage more closely with texts, or used a *spoken word* poetry video clip to support students in their understanding of poetic tone and theme. In one lesson, explicit links were made between the text and students' experiences and interests; greater use of this approach which encouraged students to empathise and engage with characters and themes, would benefit students.
- In general there was an imbalance between teacher input and purposeful student activity and participation. To encourage explorative discussion and oral language development, it is recommended that teachers explore ways to support students in how they respond to texts. For example, making clear links with students' own life experiences and learning outside the classroom is a valuable way of facilitating responsiveness to lesson topics and supporting student confidence in learning through talking. This could also be achieved by facilitating carefully constructed co-operative group activities, thereby empowering students to contribute opinions and experiences and boosting their confidence as learners.
- Reactive differentiation, where individual support was given to students, was in evidence in many lessons observed. However, in some lessons, students were not adequately challenged by the tasks and activities of the lesson. Therefore, teachers should plan for a greater level of differentiation and facilitate more variation in the levels of challenge in assignments or tasks. The long-term goal of improving learner outcomes in summative examinations should underpin the development of differentiated strategies.
- There is an evident commitment in the English department to support students whose first language is not English; and a worthwhile *English as an Additional Language* (EAL) programme is currently being developed. In-class support for these students is an area for development, specifically around the development of school-wide strategies such as a subject-specific key word focus and the use of visuals to support learning.

- Good use of lower-order questions to assess understanding and to support student improvement was in evidence in most lessons. A few teachers demonstrated good oral formative feedback practices and this strategy would merit greater use across the department.
- Some good examples of developmental, formative feedback with regard to student's written work were also in evidence but in general this is an area for development. The English team should consider the development of an assessment policy to incorporate appropriate, significant writing activities for assessment and the modes and frequency of feedback to be employed across all year groups.
- The use of Information and communications technology (ICT) was adequate: while some creative use of ICT was observed, it was mainly used to support student learning through stationary presentations. More widespread application of a creative approach to ICT would further support students' independent and active learning.

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

- Provision for the teaching of English is well supported by the school and this can be seen in the timetabling arrangements, the provision of teacher-based rooms, and installation of data projectors in all classrooms.
- It is good practice that provision for EAL students has been identified as an area for development and that provision of relevant continuous professional development for teachers is being pursued.
- It is commendable that, in the interest of promoting reading for pleasure, every year group is assigned one reading period a week in the school library. Also, the school has established good links with the local library. To build on this good work, scaffolds to support and develop students as fluent readers should be developed, at team level, and these should be included in the English department plan. Developments in literacy should be informed by school-wide identified DEIS targets for improvement.

## **3. PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

- The co-ordination of English is carried out conscientiously and the collaborative nature of the team is evident in the frequency of formal and informal meetings, the sharing of resources and the collegiality among the team members themselves.
- A comprehensive plan is currently being diligently prepared and reflects the hard work of the team. As an extension of the good work already underway, schemes of work should clearly link learning outcomes with relevant assessment modes, and teaching methodologies. The school's DEIS actions for improvement should also be explicitly reflected in the subject plan.
- The TY programme reflects a good understanding of the continuum of learning from junior to senior cycle in English and planning for improvement already underway.

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 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.

## 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 quality of 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;