

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection in English

REPORT

Ainm na scoile / School name	St Peter's Community School
Seoladh na scoile / School address	Passage West Co Cork
Uimhir rolla / Roll number	91391H

Date of Inspection: 18-05-2017



WHAT IS A 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. Learning, teaching 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.

Subject Inspection

INSPECTION ACTIVITIES DURING THIS INSPECTION

Date(s) of inspection	18-05-2017
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 5 class periods• Examination of students' work• Feedback to principal and relevant staff

SCHOOL CONTEXT

St Peter's Community School is a co-educational community school with a current enrolment of 353 students. The school offers the junior cycle, a Transition Year (TY) programme, and the established Leaving Certificate. The school operates under the joint trusteeship of the Sisters of Mercy and Cork Education and Training Board (ETB).

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

FINDINGS

- The standard of teaching, learning and assessment was very good or good in all lessons.
- A very good balance between teacher and student talk was achieved.
- The effective use of higher-order questions was a frequent feature in lessons.
- There is very good whole-school support for English.
- A very good junior cycle reading programme has been organised, although some adjustments are advised.
- Planning and preparation for English is very good, including planning for improvement, which presents as an area that might now be formally incorporated in the subject plan.
- The department is implementing the junior cycle English specification, although a number of items in the area of assessment still need to be undertaken.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- A number of adjustments to enhance the impact of the library reading programme should be enacted, alongside the incorporation of direct instruction as a key part of the study of a second novel in junior cycle.
- A brief developmental section should be created in the department plan.
- Teachers should implement all aspects of the junior cycle English specification including the awarding of descriptors and participation in Subject Learning and Assessment Review (SLAR) meetings.

DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. TEACHING, LEARNING AND ASSESSMENT

- The standard of teaching, learning and assessment was very good or good in all lessons observed during the evaluation. Clarity with regard to learning to be undertaken was provided in all lessons and this was frequently supported through the effective use of learning intentions. Lessons were well-prepared, clearly structured and, in almost all cases, well-paced. In the one instance where this was not the case, the distribution of areas to be covered over a greater number of lessons would be of benefit.

- Information and communications technology (ICT) was used effectively in lessons. It is suggested that the use of a visualiser might profitably be explored by English teachers, particularly as a means of explicitly teaching assessment to students, as well as facilitating teachers in modelling writing for their students.
- A particularly positive feature of lessons was the very good balance achieved between teacher talk and student talk. Group work was a ubiquitous element in lessons. This worked well in all cases and its impact was reflected in a number of cases where students provided clearly structured, extended responses when questioned by the inspector. As a means of maximising the impact of group work, in some instances, further exploration of the use of structured activities such as placemat and snowball, could be undertaken. The use of such structured approaches would ensure that key benefits of co-operative learning such as wait time, confidence and accountability could be fully grasped.
- Writing was regularly assigned, monitored, and corrected in English lessons. Formative feedback was provided in all cases and was of a very good standard. On occasion, the use of limited numbers of success criteria to focus students' and teachers' assessment practice with regard to key learning could be considered.
- The use of higher-order questions was a consistent feature in lessons, focusing students on the analysis and evaluation of different pieces of writing. Beyond this, in a number of instances, self-reflection activities formed a worthwhile part of teachers' practice.
- Classroom learning environments were well-developed overall, with examples of excellent practice, incorporating subject-specific displays and student work. The use of classroom environments to support learning also included a very worthwhile focus on the development of students' word-consciousness as part of their study of English.

2. SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- There is very good whole-school support for English. Provision for English on the school timetable is very good. In addition, the English department has engaged students in a wide range of extra-curricular and co-curricular activities relevant to the subject. Approaches to the organisation of class groups in junior cycle has varied over the last number of years, but a recent decision to use mixed-ability grouping in junior cycle is good practice. Classes in senior cycle are set in English according to ability. In this context, it is suggested that the possibility of adopting an approach which incorporates mixed-ability teaching within levels should be explored.
- A whole-school approach to literacy has been adopted through the school's self-evaluation (SSE) process. This includes a whole-school improvement plan which is reflected in the English department folder. As part of the plan, reading lessons have been incorporated in the English department's programmes for first, second and TY class groups. The approach to these lessons has been well planned and this is supported by the very good work which has been undertaken in the development of a well-organised school library.
- In order to maximise the impact of the reading lessons in junior cycle, it is recommended that they should be organised around particular motivational initiatives at set points in the school year and for defined periods of time. In addition, the use of the junior cycle text list to inform students' reading is worthwhile. However, it is recommended that the reading of students' second prescribed novel for junior cycle should move beyond the reading class to form a part of direct instruction in classrooms.

3. PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- Planning and preparation in English is very good. A comprehensive and professional subject plan has been developed which includes a plan for the TY programme in English. The English department has undertaken an analysis of results in the certificate examinations and this has fed into some considerations with regard to how to increase uptake levels. In addition, target-setting for students, based on their assessment results, has begun to be implemented which is very positive.
- The department is clearly reflective with regard to its practice and it is recommended that a brief section in the department plan should focus on this developmental aspect of its work. This would consolidate current good practice.
- Schemes of work for English in junior cycle are based on the new specification for junior cycle English and are of a high quality. The schemes focus on learning outcomes, are organised thematically, and include a first-year course focused on the bridging outcomes to the primary school curriculum. A possible area for the English department to include in the plan is the type of comprehension strategies which are to be taught in relation to the new junior cycle course. In addition, a minor audit of the outcomes could be worthwhile in order to ensure that learning highlighted can be accurately reflected in the assessments to be undertaken. A further worthwhile addition would be the highlighting of where particular written pieces are to be used in the student's collection of texts.
- In the case of all classes, the first Classroom-Based Assessment (CBA1), the oral communication task, has been undertaken and the second Classroom-Based Assessment (CBA2), the collection of student's texts, has been compiled. In addition, marks from students' work on their collections have featured as part of students' summative assessments. However, no SLAR meeting has taken place to date, although a number of teachers will engage in a SLAR in the near future. In all but one instance, descriptors of student achievement have not been awarded. The reason for this was reported to be industrial action. In order to ensure that students benefit from the full range of learning experiences as outlined in the English specification, it is recommended that teachers implement all aspects of the English specification including the awarding of descriptors for Classroom-Based Assessments. Furthermore, teachers should engage in SLAR meetings after the CBAs have been completed in order to build a common understanding of the quality of student learning, and to quality assure the assessment of students' work, as outlined in the Framework for Junior Cycle, 2015. Where applicable, professional time assigned for use in the implementation of the English junior cycle specification should be assigned in the new school year.

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 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;