

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

**Subject Inspection of English
REPORT**

Saint Joseph's Christian Brothers School

Fairview, Dublin 3

Roll number: 60390F

Date of inspection: 14 May 2015



**AN ROINN | DEPARTMENT OF
OIDEACHAIS | EDUCATION
AGUS SCILEANNA | AND SKILLS**

**REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN ENGLISH**

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

Dates of inspection	12, 14 May 2015
Inspection activities undertaken <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review of relevant documents• Discussion with principal and teachers• Interaction with students	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Observation of teaching and learning during seven class periods• Examination of students' work• Feedback to principal, deputy principal and teachers

MAIN FINDINGS

- The quality of teaching and learning in the majority of lessons observed was good or very good; however, in a significant minority of lessons there was a need for improvement.
- The newly formed team of English teachers demonstrated high levels of subject-specific knowledge and used well-prepared teaching resources in the lessons observed.
- Students responded well in instances where tasks were challenging and teachers' expectations were high.
- Interpersonal relationships in the classroom were very good and students were cooperative and polite in all lessons observed.
- Teachers share resources both formally and informally and work collaboratively in areas such as common assessment, target setting for students and resource development.
- Students who have studied English at ordinary level in junior cycle have the opportunity to progress to higher level for the Leaving Certificate.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- The good practice of clearly defining, sharing and assessing learning outcomes should be extended to all lessons.
 - A range of teaching methodologies should be used to encourage student initiative, creativity and active participation.
 - A consistent approach to the recording, assignment and monitoring of homework should be agreed and implemented.
 - The Transition Year (TY) programme should provide for remediation, development and assessment of the subject-specific skills that will enable all students to achieve their potential in the Leaving Certificate.
-

INTRODUCTION

Saint Joseph's Christian Brothers School is an all-boys voluntary secondary school that has a current enrolment of 314 students. The Junior Certificate, Leaving Certificate and a compulsory TY programme are provided. The school participates in the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) initiative.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- The quality of teaching and learning in the majority of lessons observed was good or very good; however, in a significant minority of lessons there was a need for improvement.
- The newly formed team of English teachers demonstrated high levels of subject-specific knowledge and used well-prepared teaching resources in the lessons observed.
- Learning outcomes were shared and their attainment was assessed in the majority of lessons. However, in some lessons, the planned learning was not communicated to the students and was not assessed. The good practice of clearly defining, sharing and assessing learning outcomes should be extended to all lessons.
- In some lessons, active and independent learning opportunities were supported through a wide range of methodologies and students responded well when tasks were challenging and expectations were high. In a significant minority of lessons, however, teacher-talk dominated and students were largely passive. A range of teaching methodologies should be used to encourage student initiative, creativity and active participation.
- Differentiation was achieved in some lessons through directed questioning, additional resources and individual support. In other lessons, opportunities to support the learning and achievement of all students could have been further developed. Specific differentiation strategies for all class groups should be planned and implemented.
- Interpersonal relationships in the classroom were very good and students were cooperative and polite in all lessons observed.
- Questioning was used in many lessons to assess learning. In a few lessons, skilful higher-order questioning encouraged students to reflect on a topic and increase their understanding. The good practice of using questions to promote deep thinking and to develop students' critical thinking skills should be extended to all lessons.
- Formative commentary was observed in some students' copybooks. However, it was not always evident that students had engaged with the advice given for improvement. Formative assessment strategies should be adopted by all teachers and practices should be established to support students' engagement with formative feedback.
- Homework was assigned in most of the lessons observed. However, the recording of homework observed in some students' journals did not indicate consistent practice. A consistent approach to the recording, assignment and monitoring of homework should be agreed and implemented.
- Literacy development is supported through a number of strategies including the use of keyword notebooks to record subject-specific vocabulary. It was reported that the reading initiative for first-year students has been successful in improving literacy skills.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- Provision is good across all years and programmes. Junior cycle and Leaving Certificate students have five lessons each week while TY students have three lessons. It would be worthwhile reviewing the spread of lessons across the week with a view to providing daily contact with the subject for as many students as possible.
- Some examples of students' work and subject-specific materials were displayed in classrooms. Opportunities to further develop learning environments that celebrate student achievement, promote students' interest in the subject and support a range of teaching and learning methodologies should be explored.
- Junior-cycle students are divided into higher-level and ordinary-level class groups at the start of second year. It is positive that one of the school's DEIS targets is to increase the number of students taking higher-level papers and that concurrent timetabling supports the possibility of movement between levels. In the best interest of supporting student progress and attainment, and in keeping with the objectives of the new junior cycle English programme, teachers should now consider maintaining mixed-ability classes throughout the junior cycle where practicable.
- It is positive that students who have studied English at ordinary level in junior cycle are given the opportunity to progress to higher level for the Leaving Certificate. However, admission to the higher-level class is determined by the assessment of a single written assignment at the end of TY. This selection method should be reviewed: clearly defined criteria that address the broad range of skills required for higher-level English should be shared with students; the TY programme should have a focus on skills development; and ongoing assessments should be used to allow students and teachers evaluate progress.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- Subject department planning is facilitated by senior management and timetabled meetings are documented.
- Teachers share resources both formally and informally and work collaboratively in areas such as common assessment, target setting for students and resource development. Action planning for practices such as peer observation and teacher self-evaluation should be considered.
- The subject plan has been developed over a number of years. Current schemes of work refer to topics, content and resources for each term and year. Learning outcomes, assessment strategies and teaching methodologies were also referred to in previous schemes. Further development should focus on integrating the two approaches.
- The TY programme is currently being revised. It should provide for remediation, development and assessment of the subject-specific skills that will enable all students to achieve their potential in the Leaving Certificate.
- State examination results are reviewed annually. Commendably, only a very small number of students sit the foundation-level Junior Certificate exam. The analysis of outcomes in state examinations together with analysis of school assessments should be used to support progress tracking and target setting for individual students.

- A comprehensive learning-support programme is in place and there is a designated unit for students with autistic spectrum disorders. Provision includes individual and small-group withdrawal. The school should consider including team teaching in its range of supports in line with DES circular 0070/2014.
-

The draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation were discussed with the principal, deputy 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, and the response of the board will be found in the appendix of this report.

Appendix

SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

Submitted by the Board of Management

Area 1: Observations on the content of the inspection report

We wholeheartedly welcome this report and see it as an affirmation of the excellent work carried out by a committed team.

We appreciate the recognition of the high levels of subject-specific knowledge as demonstrated by the teachers, the collaborative work that takes place within the English department, the very good interpersonal relationships in the classroom, the excellent behaviour of the students in all lessons observed, and the opportunities afforded to all students to have the opportunity to progress to Higher level at Leaving Certificate.

Area 2: Follow-up actions planned or undertaken since the completion of the inspection activity to implement the findings and recommendations of the inspection

We acknowledge the recommendations in the report and we look forward to addressing and implementing them.