

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection of English
REPORT

St Mary's Secondary School
Mallow, County Cork
Roll number: 62350D

Date of inspection: 30 April 2012



A N R O I N N | D E P A R T M E N T O F
O I D E A C H A I S | E D U C A T I O N
A G U S S C I L E A N N A | A N D S K I L L S

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

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

Dates of inspection	26, 27 & 30 April 2012
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 eleven class periods• Examination of students' work• Feedback to principal and teachers

MAIN FINDINGS

- Overall, teaching and learning is of a very high standard.
- The relationship between teachers and students is very good.
- Student copybooks frequently incorporated an integrated approach to the language and literature elements of the syllabuses.
- A strong commitment to continuing professional development is evident.
- A wide range of co-curricular, cross-curricular and extracurricular activities is organised to enrich students' experience of English.
- There is an impressive Transition Year (TY) English programme.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- An incremental approach to the continued development of English learning environments should be undertaken as a means of further extending good practice currently in evidence.
 - It is recommended that current approaches whereby the subject department regularly reviews, adjusts and improves its practice should now be formalised through incorporating a self-evaluation element in the subject-planning process.
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INTRODUCTION

St Mary's Secondary School, Mallow, has a current enrolment of 600 students. It is an all-girls voluntary secondary school. The school offers the following programmes: the Junior Certificate, the established Leaving Certificate, the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme and the Leaving Certificate Applied Programme. An optional TY programme is also available in senior cycle.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- Overall, teaching and learning was of a very high standard. The relationship between students and teachers was very good. Learning objectives were clear in all lessons. Lessons had been diligently prepared in all cases.
- A range of resources was used to support teaching and learning. Teachers' use of information and communication technology (ICT) was consistently observed. Beyond this, there were a number of instances where students engaged directly with ICT in making their own presentations. ICT has also been incorporated into the area of planning with an electronic English resource centre being developed. As a means of linking into students' own life experiences, an area on the school website for student work in English has been proposed. Teachers have grasped the possibilities of these new resources and are seeking to extend their professional skills and student learning by utilising them.
- The balance of talk between teachers and students was appropriate in almost all cases. The effective use of group work and pair work contributed to this significantly. It is in this context that it is suggested that further discussion within the English department regarding the use of co-operative learning strategies might be useful as a means of further extending an already strong area of the department's practice. The relevance of co-operative learning in supporting the development of students' literacy skills should be noted in the context of this strategy.
- Students worked diligently in lessons and student learning was evident in all cases. Particularly noteworthy elements of the department's practice are the high expectations placed on students and the active approach to learning which is evident.
- Student copybooks frequently incorporated an integrated approach to the language and literature elements of the syllabuses. In the context of the very good written work currently undertaken by students, an increased focus through the subject department plan on the appropriate setting of specific language rubrics when assigning written work could be worthwhile. Such an approach could be particularly useful in supporting students' self-assessment and peer-assessment.
- Where reading activities were undertaken, they were well-managed, incorporating an appropriate focus on students' affective as well as on their cognitive responses. As a further addition to the good practice observed, the English department could explore adoption of the explicit teaching of comprehension strategies in junior cycle classes where students are experiencing difficulties in literacy development.
- Learning environments in classrooms were frequently of a good standard, while the school corridors also incorporate elements which will encourage engagement with print on the part of students. In this context, it is recommended that an incremental approach towards the further development of English learning environments should be undertaken to support and consolidate this worthwhile element of school culture.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- Generally, there is very good support for English on the school timetable. The allocated number of English lessons for first-year students is four per week, which is adequate. Timetabled allocation in all other year groups is good or very good. In this context, it is suggested that the possibility of investigating an increase in the number of English lessons assigned for first-year classes could be considered. However, this point must be made with an acknowledgement of the inevitable limitations of any timetabling process and within the constraints of available resources.
- Classes are of mixed ability in first year, followed by assignment to set classes in second year which are timetabled concurrently. The English department is encouraged to regularly evaluate the manner in which classes are assigned as an element in its overall formal self-evaluation process. The accessing of student voice through focus groups or surveys could prove to be valuable as an element in this process.
- There is a school library. The library incorporates a range of texts including recent young adult fiction and includes material relevant to other subjects. It is open twice per week and has also been used to facilitate visits from authors. Links have been established with the local library service. All of this is positive.
- The school has begun to move towards the development of a whole-school literacy policy. This is worthwhile and considerations in the development of the policy could, ultimately, be used as a foundation for school self-evaluation activities and action plans in this area.
- There are very good induction processes in place for teachers new to the English department, incorporating mentoring arrangements, classroom observation and access to resources and to English departmental meetings.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- A subject co-ordinator has been appointed and minutes of English department meetings are recorded. It is suggested that current practice regarding the role of co-ordinator should now be acknowledged by formally recognising the role as one that rotates within the English department. A subject department plan has been created which incorporates time-linked yearly plans with learning goals. Good work has been undertaken in the creation of the plan and the department is encouraged to view the plan as a means of ensuring current good practice is maintained and consolidated. In this respect, some further consideration and expansion of the learning goals outlined could be worthwhile.
- There is a strong commitment to participation in continuing professional development. A wide range of co-curricular, cross-curricular and extracurricular activities is organised for students to enrich their experience of the subject. There is a culture of review and improvement in the department, with regular analysis of results in the certificate examinations. It is recommended that this good practice should now be formalised and developed through including a self-evaluation element in the subject-planning process.
- There is an impressive TY English programme. Of particular note is the manner in which students have been encouraged to grasp the opportunity to engage with significant writing activities during the year through their journals. Students have responded to this invitation with notable enthusiasm. It is suggested that the English department could

further strengthen current practice by highlighting a number of key genres to be included by students in their journals during the year which could form an explicit element in their overall assessment.

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 of the school was given an opportunity to comment on the findings and recommendations of the report; the board chose to accept the report without response.