

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**

**Department of Education and Skills**

**Subject Inspection of English  
REPORT**

**Our Lady of Mercy Secondary School  
Waterford  
Roll number: 64971W**

**Date of inspection: 24 October 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**

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**INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION**

<b>Dates of inspection</b>	23 and 24 October 2012
<b>Inspection activities undertaken</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Review of relevant documents</li><li>• Discussion with principal and teachers</li><li>• Interaction with students</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Observation of teaching and learning during fourteen class periods</li><li>• Examination of students' work</li><li>• Feedback to principal and teachers</li></ul>

**MAIN FINDINGS**

- The overall quality of teaching observed was good, with some exemplary practice noted, and teachers were open to suggestions for development and improvement.
- Teachers enabled and encouraged students to discover the relevance of the literature and language they were studying to their own lives.
- Active learning was facilitated in the supportive classroom environments created, and a high level of student engagement and co-operation was evident.
- Timetable provision for English is generally good and the subject is well resourced, although there are no dedicated English classrooms.
- There is very good planning for English, both individually and collectively.

**MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Co-operative and collaborative learning experiences should be further developed through enabling students to question and learn from each other, with the teacher in the role of facilitator.
  - The school literacy strategy should build on the rich and varied vocabulary that is evident throughout the English department; common procedures and standards for the presentation of written work in copybooks and folders should also be established.
  - In the interest of raising student expectations generally, the English department should defer the formation of level-specific class groups in the junior cycle.
  - The provision of some dedicated classrooms for the teaching and learning of English is recommended.
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## **INTRODUCTION**

Our Lady of Mercy Secondary School, Waterford, is a long-established secondary school for girls, with a current enrolment of 561. The school offers the Junior Certificate, Leaving Certificate, and an optional Transition Year (TY) programme.

## **TEACHING AND LEARNING**

- Fourteen lessons, selected from junior and senior cycle programmes, were observed during the evaluation, involving all nine teachers of English. TY students were on work experience and therefore no TY lessons were observed. The quality of teaching was good overall with some excellent practice noted; in a few instances, there was scope for development. Teachers were open and positive in response to advice and suggestions.
- The environment in this school is one in which English clearly matters. The study of literature, together with its themes and ideas, is made relevant to the lives of the students. Teachers ensured that lessons were productive and purposeful. An enabling approach was evident in the lessons observed where the teachers encouraged the contribution of ideas and opinions. Students asked questions and interacted easily with the teachers.
- Learning was evident in all lessons observed, along with a high level of student engagement and co-operation. Peer interactions and learning activities were facilitated through appropriate pairings. Commendably, students learning English as an additional language (EAL) were enabled to support each other through peer tuition using their first language.
- Some very effective resources were prepared and used across junior and senior cycles. In an exemplary junior cycle lesson, the theme of dramatic conflict was explored, with the use of seamlessly integrated electronic resources. In another lesson, the teacher gave a powerful and dramatic initial reading of a well-known poem. In both cases, the students' responses were affective and enthusiastic. Teachers are already sharing resources and could consider using peer observation to extend their collaborative practices.
- Very effective mixed-ability teaching was observed in first-year lessons in particular, which facilitated all students to participate through easily mediated and differentiated resources and tasks. In one instance, a skilfully constructed shared writing exercise reinforced the declared learning outcome, while also encouraging student creativity and collaboration.
- Group work was observed across senior and junior cycle lessons and was generally productive. The potential of group work could be maximised through increasingly co-operative and collaborative learning experiences. Students should be encouraged to question, discuss, and learn from the points made by other groups, with the teacher in the role of facilitator. Instructions and expected outcomes for group tasks should always be given clearly in advance.
- Rich and varied vocabulary, amplified by teachers and assimilated by students, was evident in the lessons observed. This strength should be built on to inform the whole-school literacy strategy through the display of contextualised key words in classrooms and a whole-school 'word of the day'. In addition, agreed procedures and standards for presentation of written work across all subjects, and particularly in English, would contribute to the school's literacy strategy.

- Students' copybooks and folders were reviewed during the evaluation. Very good and diligent assessment practices were noted. Teachers are providing a good level of formative and affirming feedback. Further development of this strategy could include defining and sharing assessment criteria, including those for the Leaving Certificate examination, with students.

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

- Timetabling is optimal for most years with one English lesson per day for each class group. TY students are timetabled for two English lessons on Wednesday and two on Friday; more regular contact with the subject would be beneficial.
- The mixed-ability English classes in first year are reorganised into higher and ordinary level class groups from second year onwards. In the interest of raising student expectations generally, it would be beneficial to defer the formation of level-specific classes until the beginning of third year and to extend the very good mixed-ability teaching practices observed in first year into second year. Such an approach would provide stimulus and support to less confident students and to EAL students.
- Students with special educational needs are supported through additional lessons and the deployment of special needs assistants. The English department could also consider team-teaching as a response to these students' requirements and as a means of further developing professional collaboration. In the case of some students for whom a shorter school day has been arranged, class contact with English may be reduced. Means of supporting these students while ensuring they have adequate instruction time to develop key language skills should be investigated.
- The school library is an accessible and well-used resource. Classrooms are assigned to class groups rather than teachers, and some of these contained very attractive displays, including samples of students' work. Practical subjects and some general subjects have dedicated rooms in the school. The provision of some dedicated classrooms for the teaching and learning of English is recommended.

#### **PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

- There is a tradition of a voluntary role of convenor of the English department. It includes convening meetings and disseminating information relevant to the subject, as well as liaising with school management. The English department could consider agreeing an additional role related to subject development, which could rotate annually. Its focus should be the sharing and development of methodologies and best practice, and both roles could be described in the subject plan.
- There is evidence of very good planning both individually and collectively. The detailed subject plans reflect hard work and dedication. The schemes of work for each year provide students with a wide range of reading and writing experience, and integrate the study of language and literature through attention to the development of key skills. To progress the good practice noted, the English department could base year plans more specifically on stated learning outcomes that are linked with specific methodologies, resources and assessment strategies.

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.

*Published April 2013.*

# **Appendix**

## **School response to the report**

### **Submitted by the Board of Management**

#### **Area 1: Observations on the content of the inspection report**

The Board of Management acknowledges the value of this inspection report and is conscious of the recommendations contained in it. This school is committed to the promotion and development of excellence in the provision of English. The Board welcomes the main findings in the report which confirm that the quality of teaching is good with some exemplary practice, active learning is facilitated in supportive classrooms, the subject is well resourced and there is very good planning for English.

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

The school management is considering the recommendation to provide some dedicated classrooms for the teaching & learning of English.

The English Department, as part of its on-going planning practices, will consider the various recommendations made.