

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**

**Department of Education and Skills**

**Subject Inspection of English  
REPORT**

**Fingal Community College  
Swords, County Dublin  
Roll number: 70121H**

**Date of inspection: 26 October 2011**



**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>	25, 26 October 2011
<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 eight class periods</li><li>• Examination of students' work</li><li>• Feedback to principal and teachers</li><li>• Discussion with co-ordinators</li></ul>

**MAIN FINDINGS**

- The quality of teaching and learning was good in a majority of lessons.
- Good practice in relation to the development of skills was observed in some lessons but there is scope for development in most.
- Assessment practice was good in some lessons but in a minority, the quality of feedback did not meaningfully direct learning.
- Whole-school support is good, particularly timetabling allocation and provision of information and communication technology (ICT). However, a majority of teachers do not have significant contact with the subject.
- Uptake of higher-level English is below national norms. Context is a factor: a significant minority have special educational or language needs.
- Subject department planning is good on the whole.

**MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Teachers of English should have a substantial timetable commitment to the subject in order to broaden and deepen expertise and experience.
  - Methodologies that take the needs of diverse learners into consideration should be used in all English lessons. The repertoire of co-operative learning strategies should be broadened.
  - The subject department should set targets to improve uptake of higher-level English and should be supported at whole-school level.
  - Teacher feedback should direct learning.
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## **INTRODUCTION**

Fingal Community College is a co-educational second-level school in the County Dublin Vocational Education Committee (VEC) scheme. English is provided in the Junior Certificate (JC) and all three Leaving Certificate programmes. A significant minority of students are in receipt of learning and language support. The school currently has an enrolment of 550 students.

## **TEACHING AND LEARNING**

- The quality of teaching and learning was good in a majority of lessons but there is scope for the use of a greater range of methodologies to meet the learning needs of a diverse student intake in some.
- Planning was evident in those lessons where careful thought was given to choice of resources and the range of planned learning activities was designed to reinforce skills and concept development. Such thorough preparation is commended.
- In a minority of lessons, poor planning for learning resulted in inappropriate use of resources and fruitless activities that were ill-adapted to the diversity of need in the classroom and did not promote deep learning.
- In some lessons, the learning intention was explicitly communicated to students, thus giving purpose to the lesson. This practice is commended. Learning intentions should be phrased in positive statements of the individual student's personal achievement, for example, "by the end of the lesson, I will be able to identify quotations that deepen my understanding of a character in the novel". The closing phase of all lessons should be used to assess progress made in the achievement of learning outcomes.
- In the best lessons observed, students actively engaged in learning. In a senior cycle lesson, thorough preparation was evidenced in a well-designed handout to frame collaborative activity. In another lesson, role play reinforced learning. It is recommended that opportunities for collaborative learning be provided in all lessons.
- The repertoire of co-operative learning strategies should be broadened to accommodate a variety of learning styles, to support differentiation and to develop all four syllabus skills, that is reading, writing, listening and speaking. Such strategies would also support language development for those whose first language is not English.
- Questioning strategies were very good in some lessons. Particularly commended is the effort made to engage all students in learning and to promote thoughtful answering in some lessons. In a lesson observed, teacher questioning encouraged students to formulate responses collaboratively and promoted evidence-based independent thinking. There is considerable scope for the development of higher-order thinking skills in the majority of lessons.
- Strategies such as organisational charts were taught in some lessons and this is commended. There should be more reinforcement of the concept of genre, for example, the correct use of the diary format, as there was evidence of poor understanding in some copybooks examined.
- Assessment for learning underpinned classroom practice in the best lessons. For example, students read homework aloud, affording opportunities for peer assessment. In copybooks examined, teacher feedback directed learning in the best samples. In others, there was little teacher commentary to direct learning and this should be addressed. Senior

examination students should be familiarised with the discrete marking criteria in order to target their learning

- The learning atmosphere was good in many lessons. Monitoring of student learning was good in most lessons. Classroom management was generally good. There was a good rapport between teachers and students in all lessons.
- Some good practice in relation to the development of skills was observed but there is scope for development in most. In all lessons, strategies to improve spelling and syntax should be taught. In one lesson, targeted vocabulary enrichment equipped senior cycle students with words and phrases that assisted them in making accurate comparative statements and this practice is highly commended. Word banks and key words should be used in all cases to develop expressive vocabulary in speech and in writing. There should be clear evidence of planning for the focused development of all four skills in all lessons.

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

- Timetabling for English is very good in all programmes.
- Deployment is an area for development. The majority of teachers do not have sufficient contact with English. To broaden and deepen the level of expertise and experience within the subject department, teachers should have a substantial timetable commitment to the subject.
- Teachers have engaged in a good range of professional development events at whole-school level. Teachers of English are supported in their membership of teacher professional networks.
- The school does not have a library but reading is encouraged in a number of ways.
- More concordance in relation to homework practice and procedures should be promoted to ensure consistency as currently, much appears to be left to the discretion of individual teachers according to the subject department plan.

#### **PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

- Subject department planning is good on the whole. There is commendable referencing of the three junior cycle literacies. The plan emphasises development of higher-order skills.
- While there was evidence of good individual teacher planning in some lessons and written lesson plans were presented to the inspector in a few, all teacher planning should reinforce the subject plan's appropriate foci. Although the subject plan refers to dictionary use, implementation was not observed during the evaluation, even in lessons where there were students whose first language was not English.
- Resources had been made ready in advance and were deployed appropriately in most cases.
- There is a good level of interaction between the learning-support and English department. The learning-support co-ordinator also coordinates English.
- The department's assessment policy is good in some respects but it should place a clearer emphasis on practice designed to improve basic literacy skills.

- The subject department should set targets to increase the number of students taking higher-level English as currently, the numbers are below national norms. Context is a factor and a significant minority have either special educational or language needs.

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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, and the response of the board will be found in the appendix of this report.

*Published March 2012*

# **Appendix**

**SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT**

**Submitted by the Board of Management**

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

1. “The uptake of higher level English is below national norms. Context is a factor: a significant minority have special educational or language needs.”

“The subject department should set targets to improve uptake of higher level English and should be supported at whole school level”.

Response:

The uptake of Higher Level English for Junior Certificate 2012 in Fingal Community College is higher than the national average for Junior Certificate 2011:

*75% Fingal Community College*

*70% National Average*

The uptake of Higher Level English for Leaving Certificate 2012 is higher than in previous years:

*52% Fingal Community College*

*63% National Average*

This increase in uptake is as a result of management driven focussed target setting with students and more robust strategies regarding students moving from Higher Level to Ordinary Level.

2. “Teachers of English should have a substantial timetable commitment to the subject in order to broaden and deepen expertise and experience.”

Response:

We understand that teachers of all subjects benefit from substantial exposure to the teaching of that subject. Given that all teachers in Fingal Community College qualified to teach English are also qualified to teach another subject it is important that they are afforded the opportunity to teach both subjects *in order to deepen expertise and experience*. It is the belief of management and staff that such double exposure assists in good practice across all subject areas.

Furthermore, efficient timetabling demands that all teachers are timetabled to the maximum number of their contracted hours and this impacts annually on the allocation of teachers to subject teaching.

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