An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection of English
REPORT

Breifne College
Cavan, Co. Cavan
Roll number: 70380I

Date of inspection: 6 March 2014
REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN ENGLISH

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

<table>
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<th>Dates of inspection</th>
<th>5, 6 March 2014</th>
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| **Inspection activities undertaken** | • Observation of teaching and learning during eight class periods
• Examination of students’ work
• Meeting with the special needs co-ordinator
• Feedback to principal, deputy principal and teachers

• Review of relevant documents
• Meeting with subject co-ordinator
• Discussion with principal and teachers
• Interaction with students

MAIN FINDINGS

- The quality of teaching and learning observed in all lessons was good, with excellent practice observed in some lessons.
- Oral skills were developed in all lessons.
- Curricular provision for English is good.
- The English department comprises a committed and hardworking team.
- The subject plan reflects a very well established department.
- Individual teachers’ plans and schemes of work show evidence of reflective practice and a deep engagement with the planning process.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- The practice of revisiting learning outcomes at the end of lessons to assess student learning should be extended to all lessons.
- Teachers should develop agreed practices for giving regular developmental feedback to students.
INTRODUCTION
Breifne College operates under the Cavan and Monaghan Education and Training Board and has a current enrolment of 299 girls and 361 boys. The school participates in the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) initiative and provides the Junior Certificate, Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP), an optional Transition Year (TY), the Leaving Certificate, the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) and the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programmes.

TEACHING AND LEARNING
- The quality of teaching and learning observed in all lessons was good, with excellent practice observed in some lessons.
- Lessons objectives were shared with students in all lessons. Best practice was seen where these were expressed as learning outcomes and were revisited at the end of the lesson to assess the extent to which the proposed learning had been achieved. This practice should be extended to all lessons.
- Teachers used a range of active learning methodologies. Very effective pair and group work was seen where well-defined tasks with specific success criteria and challenging time limits were assigned.
- Oral skills were developed in all lessons. In one lesson, students presented research findings to their classmates. In another lesson, students were encouraged to use subject specific words in their responses to questions. These very good practices build students’ confidence and promote oral literacy.
- In some lessons, students were encouraged to reflect on their learning by exploring the reasons for undertaking particular tasks.
- Resources including video clips, presentations, worksheets and whiteboards were used to support teaching and learning. Best practice was seen where resources catered for a variety of learning styles.
- Many fine examples of student work were seen in classrooms. Teachers are commended for affirming their students’ work in this way.
- Classroom management was very good in the lessons observed. Students were cooperative and contributed willingly to class discussions. Interactions between teachers and students were mutually respectful and good inter-personal relationships were evident.
- Questioning was the main method of in-class assessment. A range of lower-order and higher-order questions was used to assess understanding and encourage student participation. This was particularly effective where students were asked to develop answers and extend their understanding by making connections between the topic being studied and other areas of learning and knowledge.
- Teachers assign homework and monitor its completion regularly. Students could be encouraged to take more responsibility for their own work by maintaining their own records of homework completed and grades achieved. There is scope for teachers to develop agreed practices for giving regular developmental feedback to students.
- A whole-school literacy strategy has been developed and aspects of it are implemented in English lessons. Very good practice was seen where the teacher asked the students to investigate and explain the terminology used in examination questions.
• Numeracy is also being developed by the English teachers. The subject folder contains examples of strategies to enhance student numeracy that are linked with DEIS plans and targets. This is highly commended.

**SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT**

• Curricular provision and timetabling for English is good.

• Learning support is provided through withdrawal from Irish for those students who have exemptions, and through withdrawal from non-examination subjects for other students. The school makes every effort to ensure that withdrawal does not adversely impact on the student’s whole-school learning experience.

• First-year students are banded and streamed based on inputs from feeder primary schools and the results of aptitude tests that are carried out prior to the start of the school year. JCSP students are banded into one or more class groups. The school should consider ways of increasing the number of class groups that are inclusive of all students.

• Results of first-year tests and teachers’ professional judgement may lead to movement between the bands and streams that were formed in first year.

• Students are encouraged to study the subject at the highest appropriate level. In line with DEIS targets, the number of students taking the foundation-level course at junior cycle has decreased while the higher-level uptake at both junior and senior cycle has increased with good levels of student attainment. This is highly commended.

• A range of co-curricular and extra-curricular activities enhance and extend the learning experience for students. Teachers’ involvement in facilitating these activities is highly commended.

• The school library is a well-used resource and is stocked with a range of books to appeal to all levels and interests. Each English class group is timetabled to use the library for one period each week. This complements the whole school literacy strategy and the DEIS literacy targets.

• Teachers have access to a wide range of resources and very good sharing practices have been established. All English teaching resources are listed on the school server and e-mail is used to keep colleagues informed about new acquisitions and other relevant information.

• Summative assessments are carried out twice each year for all class groups while exam classes sit “mock” exams in spring. Reports are sent home twice each year. Parent-teacher meetings are held annually for each year group, and twice yearly for exam classes.

**PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

• The English department comprises a committed and hardworking team. A core set of teachers with subject-specific qualifications have significant exposure to the subject at both junior and senior cycle and rotate between higher-level and ordinary-level classes.

• Teachers’ plans, work schemes and notes are shared on the school server and discussed at subject department meetings. This very good approach could be extended to include the
sharing of best practices related to methodologies, classroom techniques, record keeping and assessment.

- The subject plan reflects a very well established department. Minutes from meetings provide evidence of continuing development and collaborative effort. It would be worthwhile including student feedback when recording the assessment of subject department initiatives.
- Individual teachers’ plans and schemes of work show evidence of reflective practice and a deep engagement with the planning process. This is highly commended.
- Very good learning programmes for TY and junior and senior cycles were seen. Further development should link specific assessment strategies with each learning outcome.
- Some excellent examples of teachers’ homework records were seen.

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; a response was not received from the board.