

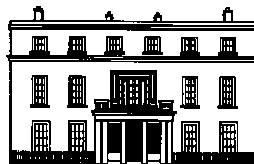
An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

**Subject Inspection of English
REPORT**

**Coláiste Chill Mhantáin
Wicklow, County Wicklow
Roll number: 76099B**

Date of inspection: 22 November 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

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

Dates of inspection	21 and 22 November 2011
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 ten class periods• Examination of students' work• Feedback to principal and teachers

MAIN FINDINGS

- The quality of teaching observed was generally good; while exemplary practice was seen in a number of lessons, some weaknesses in practice were also noted.
- Students generally displayed a good level of engagement and interest in their learning across the range of years and ability levels observed.
- The timetable makes very good provision for English overall, and has been well managed in the context of the recent amalgamation.
- The school has very good facilities to support the teaching and learning of English, including a fine library and excellent information and communication technology (ICT) resources.
- Subject planning has addressed organisational issues arising from amalgamation, and school management has a clear focus on developmental planning.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- Teachers should ensure that all substantial writing assignments help students to develop a sense of the purpose and appropriate style of various kinds of writing.
 - Subject planning should seek increasingly to use the ICT resources and the library to provide opportunities for active and independent learning.
 - Teachers should engage in a greater level of collaborative planning to agree on specific learning outcomes for each year and to share effective methods and materials to help students achieve these outcomes.
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INTRODUCTION

Coláiste Chill Mhantáin is a new school in Wicklow town, which opened in September 2011 following the amalgamation of a local boys' voluntary secondary school and a co-educational community college. The school is maintained by County Wicklow Vocational Education Committee (VEC) which is a joint trustee with the Archdiocese of Dublin. 2011/12 enrolment is 694. The school offers a wide range of programmes, including a Transition Year (TY) which is currently compulsory for students intending to progress to the Leaving Certificate.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- Ten lessons were observed during the evaluation, covering all years, levels and programmes, and involving seven of the nine teachers of English. A variety of methods including both traditional and innovative practice was noted. Two lessons were held in the library and involved co-operation between the teacher and the school's qualified librarian.
- The quality of teaching observed was generally good. Some exemplary practice was noted where lessons were purposeful, engaging and carefully structured to optimise learning opportunities. Where scope for development was noted, in general there was openness to suggestions for improvement.
- Successful lessons were characterised by clear, authoritative delivery of information and concepts; very well-managed whole-class discussion, giving students an opportunity to participate in purposeful talk with an appropriate level of challenge; well-prepared classroom assignments supporting meaningful individual and group work; very good use of resources; and approaches that engaged students and built on their prior learning.
- Some areas for development in teaching and learning practices were identified. At times, greater clarity was required as to the purpose of a task and the kind of skills it was intended to develop. This applies to aspects of style and genre in both comprehending and composing tasks. While worksheets were used well generally, they should be closely linked to learning outcomes so that they have a clear purpose in the cumulative development of students' skills.
- Students were able to recall and develop prior learning. They were appreciative of the support given to them, and were confident in asking questions and seeking assistance. Students were generally willing to express views and these were accepted, often with a skilful use of questioning to prompt students towards fuller or more thoughtful responses.
- In most lessons, there was an atmosphere of co-operation and purposeful work. Students were generally engaged in the learning activities and often showed enjoyment. A positive finding was the extent to which less able students were facilitated to have a meaningful experience of learning. One instance of poor behaviour took place and was calmly dealt with. It would be useful at a whole-school level to consider strategies to encourage in all students, especially those in the senior cycle, a sense of responsibility for their own learning.
- A review of students' copybooks and folders indicated that work is set regularly. The most worthwhile student assignments were contextualised and substantial, and had a clear purpose in reinforcing and developing knowledge and skills. In these instances, helpful feedback pointed out areas for improvement, ensuring that assessment contributed to learning. Students should be made aware of the distinction between drill-type exercises that help reinforce good language structure and mechanics, and more creative or opinion-

based writing assignments. It would be useful for the English department to discuss and agree criteria of assessment as part of more detailed subject planning, and these criteria should be shared with students.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- Overall, the timetable makes very good provision for English and reflects a commitment to the subject and its importance in literacy development. Most class groups have a lesson per day; six lessons per week are provided in sixth year. Some poor distribution of lessons in second year has arisen from pre-amalgamation arrangements, and the aim is to rectify this for next year.
- Different systems of class formation and student placement existed in the previous schools. There is a commitment to mixed-ability class formation in the new school, although some interim measures are currently in place, including discrete Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP) class groupings. The move away from streaming should help to raise expectation and attainment, if accompanied by appropriate differentiation practices. Concurrent timetabling of English in third year could be considered, to facilitate the creation of higher and ordinary level class groups if desired.
- The school's developing assessment practices and monitoring and reporting systems are being informed by the principles of assessment for learning.
- The new school building offers excellent ICT facilities and a JCSP Demonstration Library with a full time librarian. The productive use of these resources and others has been a focus of the senior management team's development of a whole-school literacy strategy. The library supports paired reading and read-along initiatives and all first-year students complete the JCSP library statements.
- The school facilitates teacher continuing professional development, including an ongoing project on instructional leadership supported by County Wicklow VEC.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- The permanent section of the English subject plan is quite complete in its statements of the rationale, aims and objectives of the school's English curriculum. Its links to the whole-school long-term literacy plan could be stated more explicitly.
- The planning folder contains plans for each year, helpfully set out in a grid format that links topics, learning outcomes and forms of assessment. In further developing these plans, the department should collaborate in identifying specific learning outcomes for each year, which are most clearly expressed as 'can do' statements. This would give a focus to the sharing of effective methods and materials. Differentiated outcomes can then be expressed as what students must, should and could know and be able to do.
- Good work has been done in analysing student outcomes in the Leaving Certificate. It would be useful to extend this work to the Junior Certificate, and for the subject department to consider how the analysis might inform teaching and learning practices.

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 November 2012.

Appendix

School response to the report

Submitted by the Board of Management

Area 1: Observations on the content of the inspection report

It was most reassuring that the inspectorate highlighted the very good provision made for English in our school and acknowledged how well it has been managed in the context of the recent amalgamation. We were delighted that the inspectorate witnessed exemplary practice while visiting our English classes and we are committed through subject department planning and self-evaluation to focus on developmental areas over the coming years. Our ICT facilities are excellent and we are fortunate to have a library with the support of a full time librarian. These positive learning resources continue to enhance teaching and learning in our school particularly now, a year since the amalgamation, and transfer into our new school building. The inspectorate highlighted the good level of engagement of our students and they remain front and central to our planning in Coláiste Chill Mhantáin; we are very proud of how they have managed the change of school and their induction into Coláiste Chill Mhantáin.

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

With the stabilisation of the school network and the completion of the ICT suite in the school our teaching team now engage the students to a greater extent with ICT resources in this subject area.

The library continues to be integrated into the timetable with more class groups timetabled for library activities. All First and Second Year classes now have a library activities' class integrated into their English timetable. The librarian and members of the English department are continuing to work on creative initiatives to improve students' reading and appreciation of literature in general. Transition Year too, has a reading class timetabled, and as part of our Literacy policy, reading for pleasure continues to be supported throughout the school.

The English Department continues to work on the creation of “Can do” statements in light of the findings of the report, however these statements originate from the subject planning model we have developed within our school where learning outcomes are clearly identified to assist with meaningful classroom planning.

Our English department, as with other school departments, have a schedule of meetings throughout the school year whereby the opportunity to share resources, classroom experiences of teaching and learning and engage in collaborative planning is facilitated by a subject convenor. This practice continues to evolve as it did last year. This evolution is set within the context of many planning activities the teaching team have committed to in light of making this amalgamation a successful process for the students and teachers of Coláiste Chill Mhantáin.