

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection of English
REPORT

Donabate Community College
Donabate, County Dublin
Roll number: 761040

Date of inspection: 29 March 2012



AN ROINN | DEPARTMENT OF
OIDEACHAIS | EDUCATION
AGUS SCILEANNA | AND SKILLS

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

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

Date of inspection	29 March 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 five class periods• Examination of students' work• Feedback to principal and teachers• Meeting with co-ordinator

MAIN FINDINGS

- The quality of teaching and learning was good in lessons observed.
- High expectations are set and uptake of higher-level English is very good in the junior cycle.
- A good range of assessment modes is used to improve learning.
- Subject planning is good but there are some areas for development.
- Whole-school support is good.
- Information and communication technology (ICT) is set to improve further in line with school planning.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- Writing as process should be embedded across all year groups.
 - There is scope for the development of explicit differentiated practices in methods and assessment.
 - To build on good planning practice, the department should develop the Transition Year (TY) plan further and bring the junior cycle plan within the framework of the three literacies and four skill sets documented in the syllabus.
 - A reading policy should be formulated.
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INTRODUCTION

Donabate Community College was established in 2008. The new school building opened in 2012 and facilities are very good. The school caters for a diverse student population. English is a compulsory subject in the Leaving Certificate, TY and Junior Certificate programmes. The TY programme is optional and the entire cohort is currently enrolled in it.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- The quality of teaching and learning is very good.
- In all lessons, the learning intention was made explicit at the start of the lesson. Commendably, an outcomes framework guided learning in one case; in another, the learning intention was reviewed at the end to assess learning.
- The board and text were the resources most frequently used. In some lessons, a greater variety of resources was used to stimulate interest and support learning. In one case, very good use was made of ICT. Scaffolding through the provision of a worksheet was noted in another. There is scope for the use of more varied resources in a minority.
- Methods used were generally appropriate. A range of strategies was used to reinforce learning. Good teacher explanation and instruction were noted. Active learning strategies such as group and pair work provided opportunities for collaborative learning. Drama techniques were deployed in a couple of lessons, specifically hot-seating and role play using props. To build on this good practice, students should be required to make specific textual reference while in role, and care should also be taken to make the exercise time-bound to maximise use of lesson time.
- Questioning was used for a variety of purposes. Both targeted and general questioning were appropriately used and commendably, higher-order questioning elicited some very good answering.
- Good learning techniques were taught. Graphic organisers and the device of storyboarding assisted students in categorising and organising information. Students were given a useful framework for analysis (Opinion, Reason, Explain) in one case.
- Literacy and oracy were targeted through speaking activities, reading and writing. Vocabulary extension was taught through a keyword focus. In all cases, a range of spelling strategies needs to be explicitly taught. Concepts of narrative form and technique need further reinforcement and more attention needs to be paid to the cultural context of texts in the junior cycle.
- Students wrote in a variety of genres in some lessons. Evidence of sustained writing for an audience was noted in a couple of cases and this is good practice. In one instance, students were imaginatively challenged by a writing task. Writing as process from planning to drafting should be learned. Students should keep portfolios of their work at different stages to show developmental learning.
- It is positive that in some lessons, language and literature were explicitly integrated.
- The quality of teacher-student interaction was good in all lessons. A very good level of student engagement was observed during the evaluation. Expectations of achievement are high.

- Class routines such as entering homework in journals were noted and journals examined indicate that homework is set regularly.
- A good variety of assessment methods is used, including peer assessment. Quality teacher feedback in copybooks helped to direct student learning in many cases. In a minority, there was little evidence of good quality developmental feedback.
- Differentiation was evident in methods and assessment in some instances but is an area for development in all and it is suggested that subject department meetings be used to document and share practice.
- The learning atmosphere was very good. Displays of students' work were a stimulus to further effort and affirmed effort. Extracurricular and co-curricular activities support classroom-based learning.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- Timetabling provision is good for English.
- Access to and uptake of higher-level English is good. All junior cycle classes are taught in mixed-ability groups. This is underpinned by a conviction that students should be encouraged and facilitated to achieve their full potential. It is important that this principle is reflected in departmental policy on access to higher-level English in the Leaving Certificate programme when it is implemented in the 2012/13 academic year. A range of criteria should be taken into consideration including participation in TY. The language of all departmental policies should be audited to ensure the school's core values are reflected in them.
- Assessment policy is good and standard reporting mechanisms are in operation.
- The school has developed a library and an adjacent room provides storage facilities for the department. While many classrooms have good ICT facilities, more than half of the classrooms visited still remain to be equipped. It is reported that this matter is currently in hand and that alternative arrangements can be made in the interim. The complete roll-out of the ICT plan should ensure that all teachers of English have immediate access to a range of subject-appropriate resources designed to enhance teaching and learning.
- Teachers have engaged positively in continuing professional development events.
- Whole-school engagement in the promotion of curricular areas is highly commended. Each subject is a focus for whole-school activities during designated periods of the school year. The evaluation took place during "English Week" and a number of events were planned.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- A team of enthusiastic and committed teachers has developed a collaborative plan for the subject and there is a very commendable focus on action planning. To build on this good work, the junior cycle plan should be drafted within the framework of the three literacies and four skill sets documented in the syllabus, with a focus on learning outcomes.
- Individual schemes of work and lessons plans indicate a thoughtful and conscientious approach to planning.

- To complement the department's activities in relation to promoting reading, a reading policy should be developed. This should document procedures and strategies that are fully integrated into planning for English, and are consistently implemented by all teachers. The policy should take account of the school's literacy strategy.
- The TY plan has some very positive elements. It is important that the plan is reflected in classroom practice. Approaches and texts common to the Leaving Certificate should not be used in TY. The TY plan should be revisited to ensure that it is consistent with the principles of the programme; implementation should be monitored to ensure consistency.
- Record keeping is very good.

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.