Subject Inspection of English
REPORT

Coláiste Eoin
Stillorgan Road, County Dublin
Roll number: 60041D

Date of inspection: 18 October 2012
REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN ENGLISH

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dates of inspection</th>
<th>16 and 18 October 2013</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Inspection activities undertaken</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Review of relevant documents</td>
<td>• Observation of teaching and learning during eight class periods</td>
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<td>• Discussion with principal and teachers</td>
<td>• Examination of students’ work</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Interaction with students</td>
<td>• Feedback to principal and teachers</td>
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</tbody>
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MAIN FINDINGS

- The teaching observed, while mostly traditional, was authoritative and effective, with instances of exemplary practice.
- The quality of learning in all lessons observed was good or very good, and students’ work was often very impressive.
- Timetable provision is very good and the subject is generally well resourced, although there are no dedicated English classrooms.
- Subject planning is at present more organisational than developmental in nature.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- The English department should make use of a greater range of methods and approaches that allow students to work independently and co-operatively.
- A whole-school discussion on classroom layout and designation would be worthwhile.
- A more outcomes-focused approach to subject planning should be taken, to foster collaboration and to facilitate differentiation.
INTRODUCTION
Coláiste Eoin is an Irish-medium voluntary secondary school for boys. Current enrolment is 490. The school offers the Junior Certificate, a compulsory Transition Year (TY) programme, and the Leaving Certificate.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- Eight lessons were observed, covering all years and programmes offered, and involving all four members of the English department. The teaching observed, while mostly traditional, was authoritative and effective, with a high level of teacher preparedness, and instances of exemplary practice. Teachers were very open to any developmental recommendations made.

- The quality of learning in all lessons was good or very good. Students applied themselves to their work with remarkable diligence and interest, and a purposeful and productive atmosphere prevailed in the lessons observed.

- All lessons had a clear structure that assisted the consolidation and progression of learning. In some instances, the lesson plan was explicitly stated at the outset and learning was briefly reviewed at lesson end. These practices are worth extending.

- Resources to support learning were very well planned and prepared, and included some excellent and challenging material. Genre-appropriate resources and approaches, such as audio recordings of plays and classroom performance, could be more widely used.

- Where necessary, teachers gave useful background information on texts and writers to help students develop a deeper understanding of the material. Students’ ability and willingness to source such information themselves could be further exploited, in the interests of developing increased student self-reliance.

- Teachers consistently communicated to students a sense of the value and importance of the subject, acting as exemplars of the engaged reader in their commentary on texts. At times however, a too technical approach was taken to the text, and students were directed to identify techniques before they had developed and articulated a personal response. This tendency could be addressed by giving greater weight to the affective and emotional resonance of language, especially in poetry, and by giving more lesson time to students’ explorations and responses.

- Very impressive levels of learning were noted in all lessons. Students’ participation showed genuine interest and engagement. The written work they read out in class was often strikingly perceptive and well expressed. Students showed a capacity to listen actively, and participated well in lesson activities. In this context, a focus on methods and approaches that encourage students to work and learn with increasing independence from teacher instruction is recommended. Greater use of co-operative and discovery learning practices should be considered.

- Questioning of varying kinds was well used to assess students’ recall and understanding. A ‘hands-up’ drill was generally observed in junior cycle lessons. While this is useful in avoiding chorus responses, appropriate wait time should be given where questions require a thoughtful response rather than a factual answer. A ‘hands down’ policy could work better in these instances.
A large volume of good-quality work was evident in the sample of students’ copybooks and folders inspected. Students’ work was well organised to reflect coverage of different sections of the syllabus. Helpful developmental feedback was noted on all substantial assignments. A more explicit use of the evaluation criteria applied to Leaving Certificate work is suggested.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- Timetable provision for English is very good, and provision in fifth and sixth year is especially generous. The high level of instructional time available would permit the greater use of teaching and learning approaches that require students to work in an exploratory and co-operative manner. This would expand and build on the good practice observed.
- Students are taught throughout in mixed-ability class groups. Almost all students take higher level English in the certificate examinations. Outcomes are generally very good. A comparative year-on-year analysis of student outcomes would be useful and could be incorporated into the school self-evaluation process.
- The subject is generally well resourced. The school library is an excellent resource, and is the hub of a number of successful initiatives to foster the habit of reading for pleasure. Information and communication technology (ICT) is available in classrooms and is used by all members of the English department.
- Classrooms are student-based, so there are no English classrooms as such. This reduces the extent to which classrooms can be developed as stimulating learning environments for English, although some classrooms had attractive visual and print displays. The conventional seating arrangements in place are worth reviewing, as they limit the possibilities for co-operative and active learning. A whole-school discussion on classroom layout and designation would be worthwhile.
- Teachers are deployed to the subject in a way that supports consistency of delivery and the building of capacity.
- While the school supports teachers’ professional development, the English department has had limited contact with the subject association. Greater contact would be desirable, as the teachers have much to offer to any discussion of good practice, and the reforms at junior cycle will require fresh thinking and the sharing of expertise.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- The subject is co-ordinated on a voluntary basis by the longest-serving member of the English department. Termly meetings are held; the minutes reflect more organisational than developmental aspects of subject planning. A greater focus on discussing and agreeing the desired learning outcomes for students in each year is recommended as the best way to channel the undoubted commitment of all members of the department to their students.
- The present subject plan records the course content and timeframes for work in each year. It reads as somewhat textbook-dependent in the junior cycle, although students are clearly exposed to a wide range of material. A more outcomes-centred approach to planning, as recommended above, would identify helpful links between the outcomes themselves, the
materials and approaches most likely to achieve them, and the forms of assessment that would best assist students to develop and consolidate key skills. This approach would also facilitate differentiation, allowing the needs of less able students to be planned for and met.

- The TY English programme is planned and delivered in modules, and the written plan is substantial and challenging. However, programme content should avoid material likely to form part of Leaving Certificate work.

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; a response was not received from the board.

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