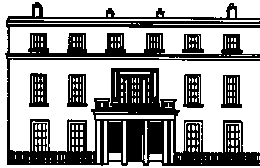


An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection of English
REPORT

Gaelcholáiste na Mara
Arklow, County Wicklow
Roll number: 76106S

Date of inspection: 11 May 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	11 May 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 five class periods• Examination of students' work• Feedback to principal and teachers

MAIN FINDINGS

- A good quality of teaching was observed, with instances of excellent practice, and openness to suggestions for development.
- Students engaged with their learning in a purposeful and supportive atmosphere.
- Very good assessment practices that encouraged students to improve and reflect on their work were noted.
- School management is supportive of the subject and facilitates student participation in many co-curricular activities.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- Teachers should build on existing good practice to consolidate students' understanding of key concepts and their awareness of genre.
 - The possibility of providing five lessons per week in first year should be investigated.
 - Further development of the subject plan centred on agreed and specific learning outcomes should be undertaken.
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INTRODUCTION

Gaelcholáiste na Mara was established in 2007 under the patronage of County Wicklow VEC. It is a co-educational, Irish-medium school with a current enrolment of 156. The school has an optional Transition Year (TY) programme, and will present its first candidates for the Leaving Certificate examination in 2013.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- Five lessons were observed during the evaluation, covering all years and programmes offered and involving all members of the English department. The quality of teaching in the lessons observed was good overall, with instances of excellent practice. Teachers were open to advice and willing to reflect on their practice.
- A good variety of teaching approaches was observed, ranging from the didactic to the student-centred. In most instances, they were very well chosen to suit the topic and the class profile. Appropriately for the time of year, consolidation and revision featured in many lessons. Lessons were well planned, with good sequencing of learning activities.
- Materials and resources were well chosen to develop students' critical skills. A productive comparison exercise required a junior cycle class to find thematic links between their studied novel and a popular film. The students enjoyed finding points of comparison and in doing so consolidated their understanding of the novel. Methods that encourage students to collaborate when analysing texts should be used regularly from the beginning of junior cycle, as they help to establish good peer learning practices.
- All the lessons observed involved the study of specific texts: poem, novel, drama, film. In a senior cycle class, the teacher's authoritative and animated exposition of a complex poem provided students with a very good model of text response that combined the analytical and the personal. A TY group worked collaboratively to tease out layers of meaning in a poem, with the teacher acting as facilitator. Both approaches were effective, enabling students to achieve a deeper understanding.
- Revision work was most effective where it went beyond recall of information and assisted students to consolidate their grasp of key concepts. Mind maps and visuals were used to explore topics such as character development in drama, and metaphor in poetry.
- While students generally showed good levels of recall and comprehension, in some instances the grasp of underlying concepts was less certain. In these instances, teachers should ensure that class discussion and activity is firmly rooted in the text itself, so that the concepts emerge from the text, rather than being imposed on it. An awareness of genre should also be developed at an early stage, for example in the context of junior cycle drama.
- In all lessons observed, a purposeful and supportive learning atmosphere was established. Students engaged with learning activities, asked questions, and offered and defended their own views.
- Students' copybooks and folders contained a substantial volume of work, and showed progress and development of creative and critical writing skills. Very good developmental feedback in the form of detailed teacher comment was noted. Assessment-for-learning practices, including comment without grading, are in place, focusing on affirmation and improvement and encouraging students to reflect on their work.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- Optimal provision of an English lesson per day is in place in second year, with four lessons per week in first and third year. The possibility of providing a fifth lesson in first year should be investigated. The three lessons provided in TY are augmented through modules in related areas such as drama. Fifth-year English has very generous provision, including a double lesson.
- English is taught in mixed-ability and mixed-level class groups in all years. Almost all students took Junior Certificate English at higher level in the past two years, and a high uptake of higher level in the Leaving Certificate is expected and encouraged.
- The English department currently comprises four teachers; two of these are subject specialists, one of whom is the main teacher of English. Senior management intends to increase the number of English specialists as school enrolment increases, and this support for the subject is commended.
- The school assessment policy allows for a wide variety of assessment models, including portfolio and continuous assessment.
- Students have been supported in engaging very successfully in a wide range of co-curricular activities including drama, debating and reading challenges.
- School management is supportive of the subject and aware of its resource needs in the context of an Irish-medium school. While all classrooms are well equipped, there is at present no dedicated English room, and some English lessons take place in classrooms designed for other subjects. The possibility of creating a print-rich and adaptable English classroom, which English classes could use in turn, could be investigated.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- A voluntary co-ordinator for the subject is in place and formal meetings take place each term. A good level of informal collaboration and collegial support was also evident. While a system of rotating co-ordinator is envisaged, the involvement of the available subject specialists in creating and developing the subject plan is commended.
- The subject plan is based clearly on the syllabus objectives and programmes of work for each year have been derived from it. The subject department is very open to further development of the subject plan to reflect best practice.
- In order to ensure that planning is a real and reflective activity, the subject department should discuss and agree learning outcomes for each year, expressed in terms of what students must, should and could know and be able to do. Appropriate materials, methods and forms of assessment can then be linked to these outcomes.
- A high level of individual planning and preparation was noted. Teachers maintain very good records of students' progress and attainment.

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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