An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection of English

REPORT

Salesian Secondary College
Pallaskenry, County Limerick
Roll number: 64180O

Date of inspection: 6 April 2011
REPORT ON THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN ENGLISH

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

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<th>5 and 6 April 2011</th>
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<td>• Discussion with principal and teachers</td>
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MAIN FINDINGS

- Teaching was very good in the majority of lessons observed. Learning ranged from adequate to good in the lessons observed.
- There is good whole-school support for the subject in relation to timetable provision, arrangements for student access to levels, and resource provision.
- The varied co-curricular and extracurricular English-related activities that are organised annually support students’ learning and school life.
- The school has identified that the number of students with English as an Additional Language (EAL) and with learning support and resource support needs has been growing in recent years. Lessons observed showed that there is scope for greater use of differentiation in teaching and learning to support such students. There is also scope for the expansion of existing whole-school supports for the literacy development of such students.
- The quality of subject department planning for English is good.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- In-class support for students with additional educational needs should be improved by the creation of more varied active learning opportunities for students, by the utilisation of more varied learning resources, and by the department planning and implementing a consistent programme to incrementally develop the components of students’ reading, writing, and organisational skills.
- Senior management should put in place additional whole-school supports for the literacy development of students with additional educational needs such as a whole-school literacy committee and team-teaching supports for particular cohorts.
- Subject department planning for English would be enhanced by greater systematic teacher sharing of effective practices and by the development of departmental assessment for learning (AfL) practices.
INTRODUCTION
Salesian Secondary College is a co-educational school with an enrolment of 452. The school offers the following programmes: the Junior Certificate, Transition Year (TY), the established Leaving Certificate and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP).

TEACHING AND LEARNING
• Teaching was very good in the majority of lessons observed. In those lessons which were very good, teachers shared learning outcomes with students at the outset and provided varied co-operative learning opportunities for students. They also linked new learning with current events or with students’ prior experience, directed students to apply their learning of literature to specific language tasks, and used a variety of resources to support their teaching.

• Learning ranged from adequate to good in the lessons observed. Weaknesses were observed where teacher-talk predominated and where little differentiation to support students with additional educational needs was apparent. To support differentiation, the department should acquire resources such as Readalong packs and graphic and abridged versions of texts and compile booklets to support students’ study of lengthy texts. In addition, the department needs to develop common practices on how students should present their written work and store handouts provided to them, and should consistently expect and communicate such routines to students.

• In general, good interpersonal relations existed between teachers and students, with very positive teacher affirmation of students in some classes. While discipline was maintained in all lessons, some passive and disengaged students were observed in a few lessons.

• Students’ literacy skills were supported by the pre-teaching of keywords in texts; the development of print-rich environments; by teachers’ use of voice variations, moderate speaking pace, and appropriate hand gestures to communicate meaning. These practices should be implemented consistently across the department.

• Students’ writing skills would be enhanced by the department planning and implementing a consistent programme to incrementally develop students’ vocabulary banks, spelling strategies, and process approach to writing. Greater use of information and communication technology (ICT) to practice the skills of drafting, editing, and proofing work should be an essential element of this work.

• It is commended that teachers are seeking to strengthen students’ interest in personal reading through a Learning School Project, Phase 2. Students’ reading skills should be further developed by the department planning and implementing a consistent programme to teach effective dictionary use, explicit comprehension strategies, and to incorporate greater use of graphic organisers into lessons.

• Homework was being set and monitored and written comments of varying depth were being given in the sample of copies reviewed. The valuable practice of sharing criteria for the assessment of substantial pieces of writing with senior cycle students should be extended to junior cycle students. Also, teachers should engage in ongoing diagnostic assessments of students’ learning. Analysing and recording the recurring errors in students’ work would guide teachers in planning lessons to remediate students’ most common language errors.
SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- Whole-school supports for English include good timetable provision, mixed-ability class formation in first year, teacher-based classrooms, a storage room for English resources, and an updated library stock. It is also commended that senior management has prioritised the future employment of another teacher qualified to teach English to Leaving Certificate honours level, to meet the needs of the school’s growing population.

- English-related activities that are organised annually support the development of students’ interests in performance, in reading, and in creative writing.

- The school reports that the number of students with additional educational needs has been growing in recent years. It is recommended that a whole-school literacy committee be formed, where teachers of different subjects would take an action-planning approach to the development of literacy skills across the curriculum. Team teaching should also be included as one element of support for particular class groups.

- A number of the teachers of English are actively involved in continuing professional development (CPD). Discussions of the main methodological and assessment innovations contained in the Leaving Certificate English syllabus should be organised by the department to enrich the pedagogical repertoires of all those teaching English, and particularly those who only teach to Junior Certificate level.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- The quality of subject department planning for English is good. Strengths of that planning include shared teacher preparation of common examinations for some year groups, evidence of the department self-evaluating and reporting its needs to school management, and the production of detailed termly schemes of work for each year and level of study.

- At the beginning of each subject department meeting, time should be specifically allocated for a “show and tell” input, where individuals would be asked to present a resource or strategy they use in their practice or have gained from CPD or from further study. A shared network drive should be developed to facilitate electronic sharing of teacher resources.

- Existing termly schemes of work should be reshaped after discussions are held on the key learning outcomes and skills to be developed in each year of study and on how effective the texts selected for study are in meeting the interests and needs of students.

- The department should award some marks towards end-of-term results for tasks linked to the agreed learning outcomes for different year groups. Tasks could include a cumulative average for composition work, folder-maintenance, quotation tests, oral presentations, and project-work. A comparison of students’ certificate examination results in English with national norms for the uptake of levels and for the spread of grades should also be discussed at subject department meetings, as an aid to collective self-evaluation and planning.

- Teachers had engaged in planning in all lessons visited. Some detailed folders of resources had also been prepared by individual teachers.

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 of
the school was given an opportunity to comment on the findings and recommendations of the report; the board chose to accept the report without response.