An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection of English
REPORT

Coláiste Pobail Mhichíl
Cappamore, County Limerick
Roll number: 71810M

Date of inspection: 2 December 2011
REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN ENGLISH

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

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MAIN FINDINGS

• Overall, teaching was good, with examples of excellent practice seen in some classes. Learning ranged from fair to very good in the lessons observed.

• Good interpersonal relations exist between teachers and students.

• The school is commended for its flexible approach to supporting students with additional educational needs.

• Students’ literacy skills are supported by good whole-school provision, by ongoing whole-school improvement planning, and by the employment of keyword and comprehension-focused approaches by teachers. However, a specific focus on developing students’ writing is now needed.

• While some progress has been made in subject department planning, this is an area where there is still scope for development.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

• Students’ literacy skills would be enhanced by more explicit and sustained development of students’ process approach to writing, by greater integration of current-affairs focused comprehension work, and by the utilisation of specific literacy interventions for struggling students.

• Junior cycle schemes of work need to be revised to support more explicit, incremental development of students’ language skills, and to link more closely with Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) and Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP) targets and initiatives.

• Time should be explicitly built into subject department meetings for discussions on practices that teachers find effective in supporting learning.
INTRODUCTION

Coláiste Pobail Mhichíl is a co-educational vocational school serving a rural community. Current enrolment is 98. The school participates in DEIS, the Department’s action plan for educational inclusion. It offers the following programmes: the JCSP, the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP), and Post-Leaving Certificate (PLC) courses. The school is due to amalgamate with two neighbouring schools in the near future.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- Overall, teaching was good, with examples of excellent practice observed in some classes.
- Learning ranged from fair to very good in the lessons visited. Weaknesses were observed where an over-emphasis was placed on teacher explanation and notes provision, where students’ capacity to engage in higher-order thinking and in personal response was not being adequately developed, and where differentiated tasks for more able students were not being set.
- Good interpersonal relations exist between teachers and students, with very positive teacher affirmation of students in some classes.
- The school is commended for its flexible approach to supporting students with additional needs. Good progress has also been made in preparing a special educational needs plan.
- Students’ literacy skills were being supported by a keyword approach, by the integration of language tasks with literary study, and by the use of some graphic organisers to help students organise key information. Teachers’ use of information and communication technology (ICT) was also raising student engagement.
- To further strengthen students’ literacy skills, teachers should engage in explicit modelling of drafting, editing, and rewriting skills using ICT and should incorporate comprehension activities related to current affairs into all schemes of work. Also, specific interventions for students seriously underachieving in literacy should be utilised, such as those recommended by the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS).
- Homework was being set and monitored and written comments of varying depth were being given in the sample of copies reviewed. Very good formative feedback was being provided on written work in some classes. This approach should be extended across all classes.
**SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT**

- Whole-school supports for English include good timetable provision, ICT equipment in classrooms, a developing school library, a homework club, and the awarding of an agreed percentage for homework completion toward end-of-term reports.

- Focused engagement with DEIS planning has achieved good baseline literacy data gathering and the implementation of certain measures aimed at improving students’ literacy levels. Progress achieved and teacher skills developed through this work will be a valuable aid to school improvement planning for the future amalgamated school.

- Activities organised within the school such as a storyteller visit and trips to dramatic productions commendably foster students’ skills and interest in English.

- While the teachers of English are separately involved in professional development that is relevant to the subject, two other supports are now recommended. First, the department is advised to deepen its understanding of the prior knowledge and skills students should have developed by the end of their primary schooling, to aid planning for first-year English. Second, it is advised that the teachers of English formally review the teacher guidelines associated with the Leaving Certificate syllabus, to support those members who were not able to avail of in-service when the course was first introduced.

**PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

- Teachers had engaged in planning for all lessons visited. All folders of teaching resources were also presented for inspection.

- Strong leadership has been provided by the new principal in the development of whole-school planning practices and in the organisation of relevant training for staff.

- While progress has been made in subject department planning, this is an area where there is scope for development.

- While acknowledging that informal discussions of teaching methods are taking place, such discussions now need to be formalised. 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 an effective resource or strategy they use in their practice or have gained from further study.

- Junior cycle schemes of work should be revised to ensure that they plan for incremental development of students’ language skills from first to third year. They should also prepare for and link with JCSP and DEIS targets and initiatives to a greater extent. Finally, greater use of thematic units to aid student learning is advised in those schemes.

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.

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