Subject Inspection of English
REPORT

Coláiste na hInse
Bettystown, County Meath
Roll number: 76103M

Date of inspection: 24 February 2012
REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN ENGLISH

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

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MAIN FINDINGS

- The quality of teaching and learning ranged from fair to very good in the lessons observed and the majority were good.
- Methods used were generally well considered, skills development was a positive focus in many lessons but there is a need to implement differentiated approaches in all.
- There was an emphasis on higher-order thinking in some lessons, and expectations were high in almost all.
- Classroom management was very good and a positive atmosphere for learning was noted in all lessons.
- Assessment for learning (AfL) practices were implemented in lessons.
- Whole-school support is good; access to and uptake of higher level is very good and all students in the junior cycle and Transition Year are organised in mixed-ability settings.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- Building on good practice, the team should refine the learning outcomes to be achieved in each lesson.
- Clear differentiation should be central to all lessons.
- The plan for English should demonstrate the integration of the three literacies and four skills as defined in the Junior Certificate syllabus.
- Given the department’s established commitment to renewal, the range and level of challenge in junior cycle texts should be reviewed with the aim of improving both.
INTRODUCTION

Coláiste na hInse was established in 2008 and caters for a diverse student intake. It is anticipated that the school will move to a new building in the latter part of 2012. English is compulsory in the Junior Certificate (JC), the optional Transition Year (TY) and Leaving Certificate (LC). The first cohort underwent the JC examination in 2011.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- The quality of teaching and learning ranged from fair to very good in the lessons observed. A majority of lessons were good.
- Individual teacher preparation was good. It is very commendable that all lessons communicated the learning intention to students at the outset. Building on this good practice, learning outcomes should be refined to ensure that they are specific. These can then be revisited at the end of the lesson to establish if learning has been achieved.
- Methods used were generally well considered. Collaborative learning strategies such as group and pair work were observed in some lessons. The potential of such strategies could be developed further.
- Questioning strategy ranged from fair to very good. Best practice was observed where individual students were targeted and where higher-level thought processes such as analysis and synthesis were developed. Where practice was poor, there was overdependence on global questioning and on basic information retrieval and comprehension.
- A good range of resources was used in most lessons. In one, an audio resource was deployed to good effect; in another, visual literacy was developed. Good supports such as teacher-generated notes and workbooks were noted. All classrooms are equipped with information and communication technology (ICT) equipment and the full scope of these resources should be developed over time.
- Skills development was a positive focus in many lessons. Particularly commended were vocabulary development and use of dictionaries in a few. The oral and written extension of students’ vocabulary should be a focus in all lessons. In one, it was noted that the skills of planning, drafting and re-writing were learned and this is good practice.
- There is a need to implement differentiated approaches in content, methods and assessment to cater for a very wide range of ability in all lessons and the planned school-based continuing professional development (CPD) event in this area is to be welcomed.
- There was an emphasis on higher-order thinking in some lessons. Commendably, in one, a personal response to a text was sought. All students should be encouraged and facilitated to develop a personal response to texts.
- Teacher instruction was clear in most lessons and expectations were high in almost all. Commendably, high standards of copybook maintenance were noted in some. However, more emphasis could be placed on the development of good organisational skills in relation to folder management and to presentation as these were notably lacking in a couple of cases. Account needs to be taken of the special educational needs of some students in this regard.
- Classroom management was very good and there was a warm rapport between students and teachers in all lessons. A positive atmosphere for learning was noted. Teacher-based
classrooms facilitated some very good displays of students’ work and there were a number of learning aids to support subject-specific language. To develop this further, a list of lesson keywords should be displayed at the start of lessons.

- AFL practices were implemented in lessons. In many, quality teacher feedback directed learning. Student self-assessment was noted in a lesson and this was positive. Use of the discrete assessment criteria for LC was observed.
- Students have opportunities to learn in other sites apart from the classroom and the department is commended for its strong support of extracurricular and co-curricular activities.

**SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT**

- Whole-school support for English is good. Timetabling allocation, facilities and resources are good.
- There is good access to higher-level English and uptake is very good. In line with school policy, all students in the junior cycle and in TY are organised in mixed-ability settings.
- Standard whole-school assessment and reporting procedures are in place.
- Staff is appropriately deployed and the school is very supportive of CPD.

**PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

- There are good planning structures in place and the department is characterised by a collaborative ethos. Meetings are regular and documented. Sharing is routine and there are positive developments in relation to ICT.
- The team has a good induction policy. It is committed to reading, has been actively developing a library and first-year students have allocated library time. There is no formal reading policy and this could be a focus for future planning. Some aspects of the current homework policy need review.
- Capacity for self-evaluation is good; some good practices are in place, for example, seeking students’ opinions and commitment to follow-up action.
- It is very commendable that the department has developed an action plan for the subject. Data gathering has started. To build on this, baseline data should include pre-entry and all school-based assessment. An analysis of this data would help to inform future action plans and targets, for example in the area of literacy.
- Planning is conscientious and shows an awareness of skills development. The plan for junior cycle English should demonstrate the integration of the three literacies and four skills as defined in the JC syllabus within a learning outcomes framework. This should be reflected in individual teacher planning. The TY plan for English is good and there is commendable focus on experiential learning.
- Given the department’s established commitment to renewal, the range and level of challenge in junior cycle texts should be reviewed with the aim of improving both. To build on prior learning, feeder primary schools should be contacted to establish what texts have been studied. Very strong consideration should be given to the study of Shakespeare in the junior cycle.
Individual teacher planning is good and record keeping is good in almost all cases.

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.

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