

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**

**Department of Education and Skills**

**Subject Inspection of English  
REPORT**

**The Royal and Prior Comprehensive School  
Raphoe, County Donegal  
Roll number: 81011L**

**Date of inspection: 7 October 2011**



**A N R O I N N | D E P A R T M E N T O F  
O I D E A C H A I S | E D U C A T I O N  
A G U S S C I L E A N N A | A N D S K I L L S**

**REPORT**  
**ON**  
**THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN ENGLISH**

---

**INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION**

<b>Dates of inspection</b>	6, 7 October 2011
<b>Inspection activities undertaken</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Review of relevant documents</li><li>• Discussion with principal and teachers</li><li>• Interaction with students</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Observation of teaching and learning during seven class periods</li><li>• Examination of students' work</li><li>• Feedback to principal and teachers</li></ul>

**MAIN FINDINGS**

- Teaching and learning is generally good.
- Methods and resources used are very supportive of students who find learning challenging.
- Attainment is good overall and very good in some cases but there is scope for raising expectations among some ordinary-level students.
- Attention is paid to the oral extension of vocabulary and good use is made of keywords.
- Whole-school support for the subject is good.
- Planning is good in a number of areas but there is scope for development in some.

**MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS**

- As the school participates in the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) action plan, there should be evidence of planning for improvement in key areas such as examination attainment, literacy and numeracy. Specific attention should focus on increasing uptake of higher-level English beginning with the junior cycle.
  - Planning for Junior Certificate (JC) and Transition Year (TY) should be reviewed.
  - A whole-school reading policy should be developed.
-

## **INTRODUCTION**

The Royal and Prior Comprehensive School is a co-educational second level school that caters for a diverse and geographically dispersed student population. It is supported through the DEIS action plan. English is provided in the JC, Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP), optional TY, Leaving Certificate (LC) and Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP). The school currently has an enrolment of 509 students.

## **TEACHING AND LEARNING**

- The quality of teaching and learning is good on the whole but with scope for development in some areas.
- Lessons were well planned to support learning. The pace and variety of activity was appropriate in most. In one very good lesson, the learning intention was written on the board. This good practice should be replicated in all lessons and the closing phase of the lesson should review progress and summarise learning.
- Literacy skills, particularly vocabulary development, were an appropriate focus in many lessons visited. The level of scaffolding for those who find learning challenging was good. Very good use was made of keywords and diagrams that helped students to access meaning. It is commendable that JCSP resources are used effectively. The focus on listening skills in a lesson observed is commended.
- The quality and variety of written assignments in copybooks varied. In some, good practice was noted for example, the integration of language and literature. In others, the assignments set were insufficiently pitched or varied to meet syllabus requirements. Students should write in a variety of genres, there should be a greater level of challenge in assignments set and the focus should be on enriching students' experience and use of language. The expression of a personal response should be encouraged in all lessons both orally and in writing.
- Students were actively involved in learning in many lessons through questioning and the filling in of worksheets. In a very good lesson observed, collaborative and independent learning was facilitated. Good practice should be shared.
- Good use was made of audio and visual resources in a small number of lessons. To cater for the diversity of learning styles, all teachers should take full advantage of available digital resources, given that classrooms are equipped with the technology.
- Questioning strategies were good in lessons, particularly for testing recall and understanding. Use of questioning for theorising and speculation was infrequent although some examples of good practice were observed. Higher-order skills should be developed through questioning in all lessons.
- The level of student engagement in learning was good in almost all cases. In one lesson, students' enthusiasm for the subject was evidenced through the level and quality of interactions.
- Student attainment is good overall. Attainment at ordinary level is very good and some of these students may be capable of higher-level English.
- Class routines were observed. Not all students are entering homework assignments in their journals; practice should be reviewed.

- Classroom-related assessment practices were good in some cases. Good quality teacher feedback directed learning in some copybook samples. Commendable motivational strategies were noted in one case. Orally, there was an emphasis on formative assessment in all lessons. Good assessment practice should be consistently implemented in all lessons.
- Classroom management was very good in all lessons and there was a very positive learning atmosphere in all classes visited.
- Extracurricular and co-curricular activities support learning outside the classroom.

#### **SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT**

- Subject provision is supportive of learning. Timetabling for English is good. Students are organised in mixed-ability classes in first and second year and in TY. In third year and in the LC programme, setting for levels occurs. Concurrent timetabling facilitates change of levels. Commendably, JCSP students are integrated into classes. Students who take JC ordinary level are assigned to ordinary level in the LC programme irrespective of enrolment in the TY programme. This should be reviewed.
- There is regular summative assessment and standard reporting practices to parents are in place.
- The school is supportive of staff development. The English department should now identify and target key areas to be addressed.
- Resources, including information and communication technology (ICT) resources are good. The school library is currently being developed, led by members of the English department. To build on existing good practices, a whole-school reading policy should be developed.

#### **PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

- Good structures are in place to support planning and there is evidence of collaboration.
- Curriculum content of the JC plan focuses primarily on cultural literacy: the department should identify the key skills and learning outcomes to be achieved across the three literacy domains and four skills sets for each year of the junior cycle. There should be a clear focus on the process of writing for an audience in a variety of genres and the integration of language and literature.
- The class novels chosen for each year of the JC should be reviewed to ensure they are sufficiently challenging and to avoid overlap with the primary curriculum.
- There is a good level of interaction between the learning-support department and individual teachers.
- The LC programme reflects curriculum content. It is noted that only two texts and not the required three are studied for comparative purposes at ordinary level. This needs to be addressed.
- The TY plan indicated very positive, creative elements. Experiential approaches to the development of all four skills, underpinned by the principles of the TY programme, should be developed and implemented by the English department.

- As the school is a participant in the DEIS action plan, the subject plan should show clear evidence of target setting for improvement in examination attainment. A start has been made on the analysis of baseline data. Targets should be set for improving uptake of higher-level English beginning with the JC. Particular note should be taken of boys' needs. Strategies and implementation mechanisms should be documented and there should be evidence of progress review.
- The department should also plan for improvement in literacy and numeracy. Strategies implemented in the past such as the JCSP Word Millionaire are reported to have been effective but evidence of progress made needs to be recorded in planning documentation.
- Records of attendance are well maintained.

---

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, and the response of the board will be found in the appendix of this report.

# **Appendix**

**SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT**

**Submitted by the Board of Management**

**Area 1: Observations on the content of the inspection report**

The Board of Management is greatly encouraged by this report and the positive observations made concerning the English Department, including the overall level of attainment and their very supportive deployment of methods and resources for the benefit of students who find learning challenging.

**Area 2: Follow-up actions planned or undertaken since the completion of the inspection activity to implement the findings and recommendations of the inspection**

The various recommendations contained in the inspection have either been addressed or are being addressed by the English Department and the management of the school. A DEIS Coordinator has recently been appointed to assist in the organisation and delivery of the DEIS plan in the school.