

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection of English
REPORT

CBS Westland Row
Dublin 2
Roll number: 60490J

Date of inspection: 9 May 2013



AN ROINN | DEPARTMENT OF
OIDEACHAIS | EDUCATION
AGUS SCILEANNA | AND SKILLS

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

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

Dates of inspection	8 and 9 May 2013
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 seven class periods• Examination of students' work• Feedback to principal and teachers

MAIN FINDINGS

- The teaching observed was of good or very good quality, with some notable instances of innovative and effective practice.
- Teachers took an enabling approach in the lessons observed, characterised by good structure, careful sequencing and the choice of appropriate texts.
- In all lessons, there was evidence of prior learning and of students' engagement with the subject, although the quality of student work varied considerably.
- Timetable provision for English is optimal and the subject is well resourced.
- Subject planning is well advanced and reflects an integrated approach to the development of key language skills.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- Teachers should increasingly use methods that enable students to express and develop their ideas orally as a preparation for writing.
 - The English department and school management should continue their valuable focus on improving student outcomes, especially in the case of able students who may lack motivation or confidence.
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INTRODUCTION

CBS Westland Row is a small co-educational voluntary secondary school. It is located close to Dublin city centre and most students live in the immediate area. The school offers the Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP), the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP), and the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programme. It participates in the Department's DEIS initiative to deliver equality of opportunity to schools. Enrolment for 2012/13 stands at 134.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- Seven lessons were observed, covering all years, levels and programmes offered in the school, and involving all members of the English department. The teaching observed was good or very good, with some notable instances of innovative and effective practice. Teachers were reflective in their work, and open to suggestions for further development.
- The lessons observed were well structured, with a focus at the outset on communicating the lesson topic, the learning outcomes, and how students needed to organise themselves for learning. This last point is of particular value in helping students to develop a sense of responsibility for their own learning; the good practice could be extended by occasionally asking students to reflect on the lesson plan and to check, for example, that they have the necessary equipment to do the work planned.
- Teachers consistently adopted an enabling approach in the lessons observed. Material was well chosen and was presented in an accessible way when it posed challenges. Tasks were differentiated in a number of instances. Prompt questions and other approaches were used effectively to elicit prior knowledge and to position students for new learning. Learning activities were well sequenced and a phased approach was taken, enabling students to build their knowledge confidently.
- An effective focus on key words was noted, through which the words themselves, their meanings and associations were examined and discussed. Resources such as visual/verbal squares were deployed very constructively during lessons, and completed squares were displayed and used to consolidate and review relevant vocabulary. Students were generally well able to incorporate specific literary terms into their own spoken responses and observations. It would be useful for the English department to consider how best to guide students from a basic grasp of poetic techniques to a deeper understanding of their effectiveness.
- The quality and substance of students' contributions and written work varied considerably. Teachers were conscious of the need for students to develop their writing skills, especially with regard to extended writing. The good practices observed included students' use of information and communication technology (ICT) to assist a process approach to writing; and the regular provision of developmental feedback to students on their written work. A greater focus on extended oral production is recommended as a worthwhile skill in its own right and as a precursor to written tasks.
- In all lessons, students' ability to access and use prior learning was clearly evident. Some students in all class groups showed an ability to reflect on their learning. Students were seen to respond honestly and openly to texts and to relate them to their own experience. These are valuable qualities that merit safeguarding and development, while at the same time students should be encouraged and challenged to expand their horizons.
- Very good efforts are made to encourage all students to achieve their potential. Nevertheless, the possibility of student under-achievement merits ongoing attention.

Teachers and school management articulated concerns that some very able students lack self-confidence or motivation. It was noted that teachers affirmed students' efforts, and were also commendably prepared to say where students' responses were not valid or clear. This balance of affirmation and challenge is crucial to maintaining appropriately high expectations and assisting students to realise their potential. The students and their parents or guardians also have a central role in striving for achievement at an appropriately high level.

- Classroom management was universally good, and students were co-operative at all times. The prevailing classroom atmosphere was friendly and supportive, within clear structures and procedures.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- Timetable provision for English is optimal, with four lessons per week for LCA students, and a daily lesson for all other class groups.
- English is concurrently timetabled in all years, mostly to create small class groups for the subject. School management is considering ways to timetable the subject in order to best support an increased uptake of higher level. This is a worthwhile focus and all options should be considered.
- Four experienced teachers form the English department, and the pattern of deployment is good within the constraints of a small school.
- The school is part of a network of schools that are engaged in action research relating to the reform of the junior cycle. This and other initiatives have presented teachers of English with valuable opportunities for continuing professional development.
- The school has an assessment policy. It would be useful for school management and staff to consider collectively the area of homework, and to draft a realistic homework policy in consultation with students and parents that would support students' progress.
- Resourcing of the subject has been significantly enhanced in recent years. Books and other reading material are very visible in classrooms and other areas. Private reading for pleasure is strongly supported. ICT is used dynamically by teachers and students. While English is taught in classrooms of varying sizes, the layout of classrooms is appropriately flexible.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- English is jointly co-ordinated by the two main teachers of the subject, and a good level of collegiality was evident. Regular formal and informal meetings are held, and there is especially close co-operation between teachers teaching the same year.
- A detailed subject plan has been drawn up; it is reviewed every year and reflects very good practice. It incorporates aspects of the school's literacy and numeracy strategy, highlighting key words and concepts for each syllabus area. The plan also includes references to the key skills in junior cycle, linking them to teaching and learning approaches. Further meaningful development of subject planning could be achieved by discussing and agreeing core learning outcomes for each year, based on what students must, should and could know and be able to do.

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.