

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**

**Department of Education and Skills**

**Subject Inspection of English  
REPORT**

**Saint Paul's Secondary School  
Greenhills, Dublin 12  
Roll number: 60902G**

**Date of inspection: 13 May 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**

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**INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION**

<b>Dates of inspection</b>	12 and 13 May 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 eleven class periods</li><li>• Examination of students' work</li><li>• Feedback to principal and teachers</li></ul>

**MAIN FINDINGS**

- The teaching and learning practices observed were of a high quality.
- Students' active engagement in their own learning, including the development of their critical thinking skills, was a notable feature of the practices observed.
- Information and communication technology (ICT) of very good quality is widely available in the school, and was used very effectively as a teaching and learning tool.
- School management is very supportive of English and timetable provision for most year groups is very good.
- The English department takes a collegial and collaborative approach to planning the delivery of the subject, although there is scope for some development of the subject planning process and the subject plan.

**MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS**

- The provision of a fifth English lesson each week in first year should be prioritised.
  - A description of the subject co-ordinator role, with an emphasis on subject development as well as subject organisation, should be agreed and included in the subject plan along with arrangements for its rotation.
  - The subject plan should encompass all curricular programmes and should identify specific learning outcomes appropriate to each year group and programme.
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## **INTRODUCTION**

St Paul's Secondary School is a voluntary secondary school for girls, with a wide catchment in an established and socially mixed suburban area. In 2010/11, 692 students were enrolled. It offers the Junior and Leaving Certificate programmes, the Leaving Certificate Applied programme, and a Transition Year (TY) programme whose compulsory status is currently being reviewed by school management. The board of management of the school was given an opportunity to comment on the findings and recommendations of the evaluation; the board chose to accept the report without response.

## **TEACHING AND LEARNING**

- Ten lessons were observed, covering all years, levels and programmes and involving all members of the English department. A support lesson for students with English as an additional language (EAL) was also visited. A very good quality of teaching was observed, including many instances of exemplary and highly effective practice. Teachers responded positively and professionally to any suggestions for development, and showed a high level of commitment to the subject and to their students.
- Lesson topics included a wide range of poetry, the comparative study, fiction, and writing skills. The focus on revision in many lessons was appropriate to the time of year. Lessons were generally very well planned and a substantial amount of material was covered in each. In a few instances, too little time was allowed for valuable learning activities. Since students were observed to work very well and productively together, all teachers should feel confident in allotting a generous portion of lesson time to student-centred work.
- Overall, the teaching and learning approaches taken created a very good balance between teacher and student talk. Some excellent pre-reading strategies were used, leading students to respond readily to quite complex texts. Students were encouraged to make a first response to a poem in turn, thus creating a platform for further discussion in which all could participate. Effective questioning strategies allowed for differentiation and encouraged students towards deeper analysis and inferential reading. In building on these constructive approaches, teachers should focus on developing all students' powers of analysis and expression at whatever level is appropriate.
- Excellent resources, many involving a learning-rich use of ICT, had been prepared. Use of the same text or image for a range of purposes would add to their value and demonstrate different ways of looking at the same thing, an approach in keeping with syllabus objectives.
- The development of reading and writing skills was central in many lessons, and was approached creatively and with good use of real-life contexts. Where students have difficulty with structuring extended pieces of writing, the use of writing frames is recommended.
- Students' copybooks and folders contained regularly set and monitored assignments. These were usually substantial with little lower-order comprehension work. In general, substantial work received helpful developmental feedback. Varied forms of marking were noted. The English department could usefully discuss assessment practices and reach consensus on the criteria to be applied. These criteria, and those published by the State Examinations Commission, should be shared with students.

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

- English is well provided for in all senior cycle programmes, both in the number and distribution of lessons. Provision is less generous in the junior cycle, where only third-year classes have a daily lesson. School management should prioritise provision of an English lesson per day in first year, the foundation year for the post-primary English curriculum. This would assist all students to acquire and apply key skills and knowledge at the most appropriate stage.
- The practice of forming a discrete class group in junior cycle for students requiring additional support has been discontinued, and the integrated approach now being taken is commended. There is good communication and information flow between teachers of English and the special educational needs team. Concurrent timetabling of English allows higher and ordinary-level class groups to be created where appropriate. It also facilitates whole-year English activities, and should be used to the full in this regard.
- Very few students take English at foundation level in the Junior Certificate, uptake of higher level in both the Junior and Leaving Certificate is high, and almost all students have successful outcomes in English.
- The school has developed its ICT infrastructure through participation in Department-funded projects. Most classrooms have very good ICT facilities, an e-learning team has been set up, and the development of ICT as a teaching and learning tool is an identified priority. The focus on ICT use is clearly evident in the English classroom.
- Eight teachers form the English department and almost all teach the subject to at least two class groups. This consolidated deployment gives teachers experience of teaching a range of years, levels and programmes, and supports delivery of the subject as a continuum of knowledge and skills development.
- With the support of the parents association, the school is developing a very attractive and well-stocked library, and is planning its management and access for maximum use by students.

## **PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

- The English team maintains a subject plan and records of department meetings, which reflect both organisational and developmental concerns. The plan's aims and objectives are specific to the school and its context, and represent good reflective practice. Given the English team's enthusiasm for the subject and the stimulating atmosphere they created, the stated aims might be amended to include the shared enjoyment and appreciation of language and literature.
- Many elements of good subject planning are in place. Development of existing practice would be best focused on planning based on clear and agreed learning outcomes for each year, and should include all programmes. This approach allows for differentiation by identifying what students must, could and should know and be able to do by the end of each year. Planning and assessment in TY should explicitly support the development in students of a sense of responsibility for their own learning.
- Collaborative planning practices are in place, although greater agreement on choice of texts is desirable. Following the retirement of the long-time subject co-ordinator, the team plans to fill this role on a rotating basis. To support this new practice, a role description

should be discussed, with a focus on its developmental aspects, and added to the subject plan, along with the agreed rota.

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The draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation were discussed with the principal and subject teachers at the conclusion of the evaluation.

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