

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**  
**Department of Education and Skills**

**Subject Inspection of English**  
**REPORT**

**Ardcoil Éanna,**  
**Crumlin Road, Dublin 12**  
**Roll number: 60990G**

**Date of inspection: 18 September 2012**



**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>Date of inspection</b>	18 September 2012
<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 four class periods</li><li>• Examination of students' work</li><li>• Feedback to principal and teachers</li></ul>

**MAIN FINDINGS**

- Teaching of a good quality was observed, including instances of very effective practice.
- Where scope for development in teaching practices was identified, teachers were open to suggestions for improvement.
- A supportive learning environment was created and classroom management was excellent.
- Student participation in lesson activities was generally good, and included some very perceptive responses.
- Timetabling provision for English is optimal and the subject is well resourced.
- Good individual planning and preparation were evident; however, there is considerable scope to develop a more targeted and collaborative subject plan.

**MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Teaching and learning processes should have a greater focus on the development of students' writing skills and oral competence.
  - Assessment for learning practices that provide students with clear guidance for improvement should be further developed.
  - The English department should collaboratively develop a subject plan that identifies key learning outcomes for each year, expressed as statements of what students must, should and could know and be able to do.
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## **INTRODUCTION**

Ardcoil Éanna is a co-educational voluntary secondary school. It was established in 1939 and remains in the ownership of the founding family. School enrolment decreased over many years but is rising again and currently stands at 78 male and 47 female students. The school offers the Junior Certificate, the Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP) and the Leaving Certificate, and participates in the Department's DEIS initiative for delivering equality of opportunity in schools.

## **TEACHING AND LEARNING**

- Four lessons were observed, covering all programmes and levels, and most year groups, and involving both members of the English department. The teaching observed was of a good quality and included instances of very effective practice, and very good classroom management. Teachers were open to suggestions for improvement where scope for further developing teaching practices was identified.
- The lessons observed focused on increasing students' ability to engage with and respond to texts. Pre-reading activities alerted students to aspects of figurative language. While students learned and used the relevant terms, the effect and impact of figurative language was also considered. This more response-centred approach is helpful to students when finding their way into a poem; teachers should therefore avoid moving too quickly to line-by-line analysis before students have had a chance to respond to the poem as a whole.
- Junior cycle students are being introduced to a wide variety of novels through shared reading aloud in class. This approach was most effective where the students could read aloud competently. However, more reading by the teacher might enhance students' enjoyment of the novel, and students could be given opportunities to prepare key scenes for reading aloud, thus developing their confidence and skill.
- Teachers demonstrated the application of key skills through their close and responsive reading of texts, and modelled the use of expressive and accurate language in their explanations and interactions. To complement this good practice, students could be given more scope to develop oral responses through collaborative learning approaches such as 'think, pair, share'.
- A good standard of work was noted in some students' copybooks, in line with the very perceptive responses from some students in lessons observed. To improve the general standard of students' written work, a greater focus on writing skills is recommended, including the use of writing frames and creative modelling. While some written comment from teachers was noted in students' copybooks, greater use of assessment for learning practices would give students clear guidance for improvement.
- A limited range of additional resources was used in the lessons observed. Wordgame worksheets had been prepared in some cases. Although these are useful in reinforcing accurate language use, they need to be placed in a meaningful context to be of durable value to students. Information and communication technology (ICT) was available in the classrooms visited, and was used once, to good effect. The potential of ICT to introduce good-quality visual resources to the classroom should be further exploited.

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

- The school timetable provides the optimal number and distribution of English lessons for all junior cycle years, and the provision of six lessons per week in senior cycle is very generous.
- The JCSP is integrated into mainstream junior cycle provision. JCSP target statements are used to record students' progress in the skills and knowledge relevant to junior cycle English.
- Students have opportunities to take part in co-curricular activities that extend their experience of English.
- There is one English class group in each year, and examination classes are mixed level. The uptake of foundation level English is commendably low, and the school should continue to advise junior cycle students and their parents to opt for ordinary level where it is within the students' capacity. Uptake of higher level English varies, and a sustained upward trend should be aimed for. A careful year-on-year analysis of examination results would assist the teachers of English to set realistic targets and measure progress in achieving them.
- In the context of a small school, English is well resourced. Teachers of English have their own classrooms and a pleasant reading room with an attractive library of books has been created, to encourage private reading for pleasure. A high priority is given to fostering in students a love and awareness of books, as evidenced in the classroom practice observed.
- Whole-school in-service has included areas of relevance to the teaching and learning of English. The areas of differentiation and co-operative learning are worth further exploration by the English teaching team.

## **PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

- The year plans for English are soundly based on the relevant syllabuses and have the worthy objective of affording students a rich and varied experience of the subject. They are drawn up by teachers individually and reflect the fact that one member of the English teaching team takes all junior cycle English classes, while both are involved in the senior cycle.
  - Strengths noted in the junior cycle plans include the reading of an exceptionally wide variety and number of novels, the study of Shakespeare, and a clear commitment to providing a varied classroom experience of English. However, a greater focus on stated learning outcomes is recommended; these are best formulated as statements of what students must, should and could know and be able to do. It would be useful to identify these outcomes collaboratively, linking them to the material selected for study, and the most appropriate teaching and learning approaches and methods of assessment.
  - There is greater scope for collaboration in planning the senior cycle English programme. Again, a focus on the desired learning outcomes should inform discussions within the English department relating to materials and methods. As discussed during the evaluation, there would be merit in including film in the choice of texts for the comparative study, thereby extending the range of narrative genres studied.
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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. 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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