

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection of English
REPORT

CBS Secondary School
Mitchelstown, County Cork
Roll number: 62420V

Date of inspection: 10 May 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**

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

Dates of inspection	9 & 10 May 2012
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 class periods• Examination of students' work• Feedback to principal and teachers

MAIN FINDINGS

- Overall, the standard of teaching and learning was good.
- There was good use of information and communication technology (ICT) and moves towards incorporating this element in teachers' practice are to be encouraged.
- English lessons incorporated a good focus on writers' use of language in texts studied.
- Overall, there was a preponderance of teacher talk in English lessons.
- Some development of print-rich environments in classrooms has been undertaken.
- At present, the analysis of results in the certificate examinations is not undertaken by the English department.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- Analysis of results and uptake levels in the certificate examinations should be undertaken by the English department on a regular basis.
 - It is recommended that appropriate tests should be administered to first-year students as a support in the transition process from primary to post-primary education.
 - Senior management should investigate means by which timetabling can be adjusted in order to ensure students experience one English lesson on each day of the week.
 - Choice of levels in English should be delayed until the beginning of third year.
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INTRODUCTION

Christian Brothers Secondary School, Mitchelstown is a voluntary secondary school with a current enrolment of 348 students. The school currently offers the Junior Certificate, the Leaving Certificate (Established), the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP), and the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programme. In addition, there is an optional Transition Year (TY) programme.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- Overall, the standard of teaching and learning was good. Classroom management was good and teachers' relationship with students was very good. Lessons were clearly structured and learning intentions were clear. This was particularly well-managed where learning intentions were explicitly delineated for students from the outset.
- There was good use of ICT and moves towards incorporating this element in teachers' practice are to be encouraged. ICT was used as a support for learning through the appropriate use of excerpts of films and news clips. A key area for the department to explore, and the school to support, is the use of ICT to enhance students' writing, particularly where literacy difficulties are being experienced.
- There was a good focus on writers' use of language in lessons, with students frequently displaying an ability to engage with literature on this level. Particularly good practice was evident where higher-order questions were utilised to engage students in critical literacy and teachers are encouraged to adopt this approach across all class groups.
- Teachers made use of pair work and group work in lessons and this was positive. Overall, however, there was a preponderance of teacher talk. In addition, there is a need for closer organisation of collaborative work in order to maximise the requirement on students to communicate effectively. It is therefore recommended that the department should engage more extensively with co-operative learning strategies which would provide greater opportunities and more robust structures for student discussions.
- Students frequently engaged in reading in English lessons. This is worthwhile. There is now an opportunity for a wider range of strategies to be explored in this area. Such strategies could include teacher 'think-alouds', text-marking, prediction exercises and other Directed Activities Related to Texts (DARTS). Opportunities for tightly structured, extended discussion between students and between students and their teacher about texts they have read should also be considered as a useful motivational tool for student reading. In particular, students' personal responses to texts could form one useful focus for such work.
- Some development of print-rich environments in classrooms has been undertaken. It is recommended that this approach should be advanced in English classrooms. Senior management is encouraged to support such improvements. The display of students' writing is particularly important in this regard to raise awareness of audience, of the drafting and redrafting process, and to enhance student motivation.
- At present the analysis of results in the certificate examinations is not undertaken by the English department. It is recommended that this practice should be adopted on an annual basis. This will serve to affirm success and highlight areas in need of improvement. Both overall grades and uptake of levels should be considered in this context.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- At present information regarding students' needs, specifically in the area of literacy, is limited as English reading, and cognitive ability assessments are not administered prior to, or immediately following, students' entry. Diagnostic tests for some students are undertaken. This does not adhere to good practice in the vast majority of schools and, consequently, it is recommended that such tests should be administered to support the transition process from primary to post-primary education. The results of such tests should then be analysed and used, with due care, to inform teaching and learning.
- Currently, timetabled provision for English is adequate, in terms of the number of contact points provided in first year, second year and third year. Timetabling provision is good in all other year groups. It is recommended that senior management should investigate means whereby a contact point each day can be provided in English for each junior cycle class.
- English classes are formed on the basis of mixed ability in first year. This is positive. Students are assigned to ordinary level and higher level class groups at the end of first year on the basis of results in summer assessments, and consultation with first-year teachers and parents. Classes are timetabled on a concurrent basis to facilitate movement if necessary, and students may change levels if they wish, upon entry to senior cycle. Nevertheless, the potential for such early choice of levels to result in a deleterious impact on student uptake of levels should be considered very carefully. It is therefore recommended that choice of levels should be delayed until the beginning of third year in order to allow further time for students' affective, cognitive and physical development.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- A subject co-ordinator has been appointed on the basis of seniority. The department is encouraged to consider the adoption of a rotational arrangement whereby this role moves between different teachers. Regular formal meetings of the department are held and minutes of these meetings are recorded electronically.
 - A subject plan has been created which includes documentation relevant to the subject along with common plans. It is recommended that the department should now move towards further developing these common plans on an incremental basis, beginning with first year, so that they incorporate clear learning goals which are time-linked.
 - Three comparative texts are studied in ordinary level Leaving Certificate classes. This is positive and conforms to the requirements of the syllabus. In addition, at present, a novel is not studied in first year. It is recommended that the study of a novel should now be incorporated as policy in the English department plan.
 - There is a good approach to the TY programme, with active learning and real-world publications being advanced, along with a range of co-curricular activities. This is positive and it is suggested that a portfolio of English writing could be used to focus student efforts on the process approach to the writing of a number of specific genres arising from texts they have studied. This should then form a key part of students' assessments for the year.
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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 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 school is satisfied that the evaluation was conducted in a courteous and professional manner.

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

As a result of the inspection the school has implemented the following:

- (1) All first year students were administered the CAT level E tests - to give a benchmark for evaluating their future performance. The results will also allow the school to 'profile' the group and cater for their varying educational needs.
- (2) Students entering second year were strongly encouraged to take Higher Level English, and to defer choosing a level until third year.