

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

**Subject Inspection of English
REPORT**

**Loreto Secondary School
Letterkenny, County Donegal
Roll number: 62840U**

Date of inspection: 10 October 2013



**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 October 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 eight class periods• Examination of students' work• Interview with subject co-ordinators• Feedback to principal and teachers

MAIN FINDINGS

- The overall quality of teaching and learning was good with some instances of very good practice.
- A range of methodologies was observed, including active learning methodologies; in some lessons, however, there was an imbalance between teacher and student activity.
- Differentiation for a variety of learning needs and styles was observed in many lessons.
- Teachers promote literacy through classroom practice and modelling of accurate and sophisticated language.
- Curricular provision is very good and the timetable is generally well balanced; however, a small number of class groups do not have daily contact with the subject and in one case, teacher continuity is not maintained.
- Higher-level uptake and attainment in state exams are very good.
- The subject plan is very well developed.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- Teachers should review the attainment of planned learning outcomes within the lesson framework.
 - Teachers should facilitate students to take responsibility for their own learning.
 - Where practicable, all students should have daily contact with the subject.
 - The subject plan and the TY programme plan should be further developed to link learning outcomes with skills development, assessment strategies, methodologies and resources.
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INTRODUCTION

Loreto Secondary School is an all-girls secondary school with a current enrolment of 974 students. The school provides the Junior Certificate programme, Leaving Certificate programme, Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programme, Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme and an optional Transition Year (TY) programme.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- The overall quality of teaching and learning was good with some instances of very good practice. In some lessons, however, learning opportunities were not fully developed.
- Lessons were well planned and, in most cases, learning outcomes were shared with students at the start of the lesson. In order to build on this good practice, teachers should ensure that students' attainment of planned learning outcomes is assessed within the lesson framework.
- Questioning strategies ranged from examination of knowledge to more probing investigation of understanding. Teachers should facilitate students to reflect critically on the material that they are studying. For example, as well as identifying key points in a text, students could also be challenged to prioritise and justify their selections.
- A range of methodologies was observed, including active learning methodologies that incorporated pair and group work. In some lessons, however, there was an imbalance between teacher and student activity, with teachers doing too much of the work. Teachers should consider ways of redressing that balance by facilitating students to take responsibility for their own learning.
- Planning for resources used in lessons was good: video clips, ICT based presentations, worksheets and whiteboards were used to support teaching.
- Classroom atmosphere was positive and affirming in all lessons. Students were universally polite and co-operative.
- Classroom assessment strategies included targeted and whole-group questioning and review of students' homework. In some lessons, selected students were asked to read their work aloud and the teacher responded with affirming and developmental feedback. To maximise learning opportunities, teachers should devise strategies to encourage the whole class group to engage with this activity.
- Differentiation for a variety of learning needs and styles was observed in many lessons. In one lesson, students were facilitated to develop aural comprehension and recall skills. In another lesson, the teacher used differentiated questioning to ensure that students would be both challenged and affirmed.
- Teachers support the well-established school literacy strategy through classroom practice and the modelling of accurate and sophisticated language.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- Curricular provision and timetabling allocation for English is very good. The timetable is well balanced with a spread of morning and afternoon periods. However, a small number of class groups do not have daily English lessons and one class group does not have

teacher continuity. Where practicable, all students should have daily contact with the subject and teacher continuity should be provided.

- Fifth and sixth year class groups are concurrently timetabled. This very good arrangement could be used to develop collaborative practice and team teaching. It is also commendable that junior cycle lessons are concurrently timetabled to facilitate the provision of additional support for students.
- Students are encouraged to study the subject at the highest appropriate level. Higher-level uptake and attainment in state exams are very good.
- Junior cycle classes are organised in mixed-ability groups. Classes in each year group are formed to provide for students who need additional assistance. Students opt for higher or ordinary level following the “mock” exams in third year. Written parental consent is required to transfer from one level to another.
- At senior cycle, higher-level and ordinary-level classes are formed based on Junior Certificate results, teachers’ professional judgement and students’ and parents’ wishes. Concurrent timetabling, programme planning and careful selection of texts facilitate movement between levels.
- A range of co-curricular and extra-curricular activities including theatre visits, public speaking and writing competitions provides for a broad and rich learning environment.
- Resources for English teaching are held in a central location and are shared on a collegial basis. Electronic storage of resources and subject-specific information should also be considered.
- Results of summative assessments are recorded on a monthly basis at least, and classwork and homework are monitored. Teachers should consider examining the relationship between feedback on classwork and homework, and outcomes in the regular summative assessments.
- The English teachers, each of whom has a subject-specific qualification, are committed and hardworking. Almost all have significant exposure to the subject at both junior and senior cycle and rotate between higher-level and ordinary-level classes. This good practice supports teachers’ skills development and provides a platform for sharing practice and resources at all levels.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- The subject plan is very well developed and includes learning programmes for each year group and level. Learning outcomes are clearly stated for each term within each year of the programme. The plan should be further developed to link the learning outcomes with skills development, assessment strategies, methodologies and resources
- The TY plan contains a broad outline of possible learning activities and does not reflect the teachers’ actual schemes of work. It should be developed so that it gives a full picture of the rich and varied TY English programme.
- The subject folder reflects a very well established department. Minutes from meetings over a number of years are evidence of ongoing work and collaborative effort. A greater sense of continuity would be apparent if the results of actions agreed at meetings were reported on at subsequent meetings, and the rationale for decisions were documented.

- Analyses of state examination results are reviewed at subject department meetings. Minutes should reflect the issues discussed and departmental responses, decisions and strategies relative to attainment.
- Evidence of student-led programme evaluation was seen in the subject folder. This very good practice of surveying students on their learning and knowledge levels contributes to an informed and responsive approach to programme planning.

The draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation were discussed with the principal, deputy 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.