Subject Inspection of English
REPORT

Saint Kevin’s College
Crumlin, Dublin 12
Roll number: 70160R

Date of inspection: 12 April 2011
REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN ENGLISH

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dates of inspection</th>
<th>11 and 12 April 2011</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inspection activities undertaken</td>
<td>Observation of teaching and learning during six class periods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Examination of students’ work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Feedback to principal and teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Review of relevant documents</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Discussion with principal and teachers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Interaction with students</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

MAIN FINDINGS

• Good, authoritative, supportive teaching was observed in most lessons.
• There was evidence of learning in all lessons; many students showed good recall of prior learning and a number of students displayed a very good grasp of complex texts.
• Examples of very good formative assessment were noted, but some students’ poor completion of homework and poor attendance were of concern to teachers.
• An English lesson every day is provided for junior cycle and Leaving Certificate class groups, but provision in the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programme is less good.
• Collaborative planning is developing, while individual planning is generally good.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

• Planning, teaching and assessment practices should have a common focus on the raising of students’ expectations and attainment.
• School management should give serious consideration to the formation of discrete higher-level English class groups, and provision for LCA should be increased from three to four English lessons per week.
• A whole-school assessment policy setting out practical targets should be developed and implemented consistently.
• Formal subject planning time should be used to support the collaborative development of a subject plan, based on clearly differentiated learning outcomes in the form of statements of what students must, should and could know and be able to do.
INTRODUCTION
St Kevin’s College is maintained by the City of Dublin Vocational Education Committee (CDVEC). It comprises a mainstream co-educational post-primary school of 189 students and a further education section offering post-Leaving Certificate (PLC) courses. It participates in the Department’s DEIS initiative (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools), and planning to promote attendance and literacy development is ongoing. All junior cycle students follow the Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP) and senior cycle students choose between the Leaving Certificate and LCA programmes. The school has a JCSP Demonstration Library. The board of management was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the report; a response was not received from the board.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

• The six lessons observed covered all years, levels and programmes and involved all members of the English teaching team. In most lessons, teaching of a good quality was observed and good classroom management created a structured and supportive learning environment.

• Teachers had prepared a range of resources and activities to provide students with meaningful learning tasks. These were most productive where their purpose was clearly explained, they provided valuable practice in a range of skills, and they were grounded in a real context so that students saw how the skills could be applied. A structured approach to literacy development was evident in these tasks.

• In a minority of instances, classroom activities were less productive. Where assignments from textbooks were set as classwork, the questions did not always progress from the straightforward to the more challenging, and this caused difficulties for students. Teachers are advised to vet all such assignments carefully and substitute their own carefully graded questions where appropriate.

• Whole-class teaching was mostly a feature of senior cycle lessons. Its use was well judged in that teachers spoke authoritatively but also clearly and enthusiastically, and effective questioning ensured that teacher talk was balanced with a good measure of student input. Some excellent contributions from students were noted.

• One-to-one instruction featured more than usually, as many class groups are small and students often sought individual attention. While very good practice in supporting students was noted, there was also quite a high level of dependency, and some instances where students did not attend to general instruction because they were confident of receiving individual attention later. One-to-one instruction will always be valuable in classrooms where students have specific difficulties, but teachers should also consider approaches that would encourage a greater ability to listen to and learn from whole-class instruction and direction.

• Pair or group work was little used, although a productive group exercise with a senior cycle class elicited some thoughtful responses. It is worthwhile to discuss the advantages of group work with senior cycle students, and especially to consider ways in which feedback from each group can be managed so that all students remain engaged. Teachers of junior cycle classes could investigate co-operative learning strategies with a view to adding a pair-work element to the good task-based classwork observed.
Examples of good formative assessment were noted, where students were given very useful developmental feedback, and teachers established appropriately high expectations. This practice should be followed so that assessment is part of the learning process.

**SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT**

- Junior cycle and Leaving Certificate class groups have an English lesson per day, and this is optimal provision. Three lessons are provided for LCA groups. In order to deliver the level of skills development required, four lessons should be provided to these groups.
- School management and teachers of English are keen to raise attainment generally and to meet the educational needs of the very able students as well as those with learning difficulties. To this end, the creation of a discrete higher-level group in second or third year and in fifth year merits serious consideration.
- Teachers were concerned about patterns of poor attention to homework among some students, often linked to poor attendance. This issue requires a whole-school response, and an assessment policy with realistic and measurable targets should be developed and implemented consistently. This would complement the existing DEIS planning that focuses on attendance and literacy development.
- Good support for students learning English as an additional language (EAL) was noted. An EAL classroom and a designated teacher are in place, providing a stimulating and affirming learning environment with a strong intercultural dimension.
- The English team includes both experienced and newly-qualified teachers. Some also teach in the further education section; their expertise and experience should be deployed as far as possible in the post-primary school. School management and CDVEC support teacher professional development. There is some engagement with the subject association and greater involvement is encouraged.

**PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

- The practice of producing individual yearly schemes of work is well established, but collaborative planning is a newer process, still in development. Meetings take place every term, mostly dealing with organisational matters and text choices. A rotating co-ordinator role with a greater developmental focus should be discussed and agreed. The more defined time now available for subject planning should be directed towards the collaborative development of a subject plan.
- An outline subject plan, based on the syllabuses and with some detail of texts and methods, has been drawn up. The planning focus should now be directed to developing a plan that views English as a continuum of knowledge and skills development from first year to sixth. Clear and realistic statements of learning outcomes for each year should be agreed. In order to assist the differentiated approach required, these outcomes are best expressed as statements of what students must, should and could know and be able to do.
- Texts chosen balanced accessibility and challenge. Since ICT facilities are good, a focus in planning on extending ICT use to develop students’ analytical and creative skills is advisable.
- Good records of students’ progress and attainment are maintained.
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.

*Published October 2011*