

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**

**Department of Education and Skills**

**Subject Inspection of English  
REPORT**

**Tralee Community College  
County Kerry  
Roll number: 70550H**

**Date of inspection: 21 October 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 20 &amp; 21 October 2011</b>	
<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 six class periods</li><li>• Examination of students' work</li><li>• Feedback to principal and teachers</li></ul>

**MAIN FINDINGS**

- The standard of teaching and learning observed during the evaluation was very good.
- An wide range of teaching methodologies which supported students' literacy skills was used during the evaluation.
- Teachers utilised information and communication technology (ICT) effectively to support students' learning.
- A very positive feature of teachers' practice is the development of print-rich environments in classrooms.
- There is evidence of very good practice in supporting students with English as an additional language (EAL).
- A whole-school literacy committee has been formed and some baseline data has been collated.

**MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS**

- The explicit modelling of reading and writing strategies should be increased in English lessons.
  - English teachers should investigate and adopt co-operative learning activities which will provide further opportunities for students to develop their literacy skills in lessons.
  - The frequency with which students are assessed using standardised tests should be re-examined. The value of current approaches to assessment should be evaluated very carefully.
  - The current common schemes of work should now be developed to incorporate clear learning goals.
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## INTRODUCTION

Tralee Community College is a co-educational school with a range of post-primary and Post-Leaving Certificate courses. The school participates in the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) action plan. The current post-primary enrolment is 124 students. The school offers the following programmes: the Junior Certificate, the Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP), the Leaving Certificate and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP). 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.

## TEACHING AND LEARNING

- The quality of teaching and learning observed during the evaluation was very good. Teachers undertook their work in a skilled and professional manner. Lessons were universally well-prepared.
- Pair work and group work were used regularly in lessons. Here, a wider range of strategies to encourage students' active engagement with listening and speaking activities should be explored. It is recommended that the English department should explore co-operative learning strategies which will support students' literacy skills. Activities which assign specific responsibilities to students such as *placemat*, *envoy* and *jigsaw* may be of particular relevance, especially where students are studying English as an additional language (EAL).
- ICT was used regularly and effectively. Opportunities to support students' learning through the use of visual resources were grasped, alongside the appropriate use of excerpts from films, plays and audio plays. This provided learners with important concrete support for ideas and texts they were encountering. It is suggested that the allocation of some additional time for English classes with students with additional literacy or English language needs in ICT rooms should be considered by senior management.
- There were numerous examples of teachers differentiating material to support students' engagement with reading and writing activities. It is recommended that teachers should now move to increase the explicit modelling of reading and writing strategies as part of their practice. This will provide a view of expert readers' and writers' thinking processes which students may then emulate.
- Homework was regularly assigned and monitored with evidence in all cases of the use of comment-based assessment. Some students displayed significant difficulties in literacy development. The use of writing frames and other scaffolds, where appropriate, to support such students was a further very good feature of teachers' practice. Alongside these strategies, moves towards the setting of specific product goals and rubrics for the completion of written work could be considered. Such approaches will support students in focusing on the learning goal of each assignment while also facilitating self-assessment and peer-assessment. There were some examples of the use of an integrated approach to the language and literature elements of the syllabuses. This approach should be expanded as a central feature of departmental and individual teachers' planning and should then be implemented in both students' homework assignments and their classwork.
- Classroom management was of a high quality. The relationship between teachers and students was very good. Student learning was evident in all lessons observed.

- A very impressive feature of the English department's practice is a consistent focus on the development of print-rich learning environments. A number of English teachers are provided with base classrooms. The school acknowledges the usefulness of base classrooms and views the provision of such rooms for subject teachers as a worthwhile aspiration. With this in mind, the English department is encouraged to submit a proposal for additional teacher-based classrooms. Senior management is encouraged to look favourably on such a proposal, within the limits of available resources.

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

- There is good provision for English on the school timetable.
- There is a well-supplied school library which is located in one of the English rooms. Discussions regarding the creation of a reading room have begun and this development is encouraged.
- A range of reading and other literacy initiatives are organised during the year to support students' literacy development. The school has created a comprehensive draft document dealing with the area of whole-school literacy. A literacy committee has been formed, baseline data has begun to be collated and the committee is moving towards developing action plans and self-evaluation tools. All of this work is positive.
- At present, the results of standardised tests are being used as a means of monitoring students' progress in literacy. It is recommended that the frequency with which students are tested using standardised tests should be examined very carefully. The impact of such testing on students' motivation, its validity with regard to the initiatives being undertaken, and students' familiarity with a particular type of testing should be considered. In addition, the potential to alternate such tests with other evaluation tools, such as observation schedules, focus groups, homework reviews and teacher observation should be explored. Alongside this, it should be noted that the use of tests of reading ages for EAL students should be treated with great caution due to language and cultural factors which could compromise the validity of test results.
- The English department undertakes the analysis of certificate examination results each year. A focus on actions to be taken resulting from this analysis should also inform the subject-planning process. Examinations are organised at Christmas and summer, as well as at the October midterm break and at Easter. Arrangements for Christmas and summer examinations are being formalised and this is worthwhile.

#### **PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

- An English subject plan, incorporating time-linked common schemes of work has been developed. This is worthwhile. It is recommended that the current schemes of work should now be further developed to incorporate specific learning goals. This should further increase the department's capacity to address the literacy and learning needs of students in English. In addition, the department could adopt a teaching-and-learning focus over the medium term which would form a discussion item at regular points during the year. Beyond this, the development of further links to first-year students' learning in primary school should be advanced.
- There is evidence of very effective practice with regard to EAL support and there are good links between the English department and the EAL department. Very significant

work has been undertaken in developing EAL policy documents and pursuing best practice in this area.

- A number of texts are studied in junior cycle and these include a Shakespearian play. This is good practice. It is suggested that an increase in the number of novels and plays studied in junior cycle may be worthy of consideration.

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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.

# **Appendix**

**SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT**

**Submitted by the Board of Management**

### **Area 1 Observations on the content of the inspection report**

The board is very pleased to note that the report has given affirmation of the high quality of teaching and learning. Which include:

- Varied approaches to teaching methodologies
- Print rich environments
- Supporting of students with English as an additional Language (EAL).
- Teachers utilising ICT to support students' learning
- The setting up of a whole school literacy committee

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

The school will endeavour to implement the main recommendations of the report and reduce the frequency of testing.