

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**

**Department of Education and Skills**

**Subject Inspection of English  
REPORT**

**Meánscoil Iognáid Rís  
Walkinstown, Dublin 12  
Roll number: 60480G**

**Date of inspection: 30 September 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</b>	29 and 30 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 eleven class periods</li><li>• Examination of students' work</li><li>• Feedback to principal and teachers</li></ul>

**MAIN FINDINGS**

- The teaching observed was of a good quality and, while it was generally more traditional than innovative, many instances of effective practice were noted.
- Students were co-operative though often rather quiet, and many showed a good level of engagement with the work of the lesson.
- Students are placed in one of two streams on the basis of assessments during first year; however, many students in lower-stream classes take Junior Certificate English at higher level.
- A subject plan has been drawn up, focusing on subject organisation more than subject development.
- Teachers demonstrate a commitment to the subject and to their students which is supported by a good level of collegiality.
- There is little formal collaboration to develop agreed programmes of work and common assessments.

**MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Teachers should work collectively to develop a greater variety of teaching approaches, so as to provide students of all abilities with the broadest possible range of learning opportunities and appropriate challenges.
  - The basis of class formation should be reviewed to consider what system best supports appropriately high expectations and outcomes for all students.
  - Professional collaborative practices should be strengthened with the aim of agreeing plans of work for each year detailing specific learning outcomes, methods and materials.
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## **INTRODUCTION**

Meánscoil Iognáid Rís, popularly known as Drimnagh Castle, is a long-established boys' school with a current enrolment of 698. It is a voluntary secondary school under the trusteeship of the Edmund Rice Schools Trust. It offers an optional Transition Year (TY) programme, and there is one TY class group in 2011/12.

## **TEACHING AND LEARNING**

- Eleven lessons were observed during the evaluation, covering all years, levels and programmes offered and involving all seven teachers of English. The quality of teaching in the lessons observed was good. Some very effective teaching, both traditional and innovative, was noted in a number of lessons. However, the predominantly traditional approaches taken did not engage all students.
- Direct instruction and teacher exposition were often effective in introducing students to new material, engaging their interest and structuring their learning. Nonetheless, while the validity and value of these methods is acknowledged, they require a readiness on the part of students to participate as active listeners and to engage in whole-class discussion. Therefore, in order to support students' different styles of learning and their acquisition of a range of skills, teachers should be open to extending the range of approaches they use, and should share effective practice in this regard.
- Some innovative approaches were also observed. These included a drama workshop, a debate, and a discovery exercise requiring critical reading skills. They successfully engaged students in their own learning and built confidence. However, care should be taken to consolidate and reinforce learning so that activities are always purposeful and productive.
- Questioning was generally good, and frequently went beyond the factual to encourage students to speculate and to infer meaning. Teachers should consider a hands-down policy so that the class has adequate time to formulate considered responses to higher-order questions. The balance of teacher and student talk in question-and-answer sessions was often good, but the teacher's voice tended to predominate. Approaches that encourage purposeful discussion between students, for example the 'think, pair, share' strategy, should be considered.
- Student contributions were often used effectively. Students read their work aloud, and it was commented on constructively by other students and used as exemplar material by the teacher. Where students were engaged in activities such as debating and drama, they were encouraged to think of how they might develop and improve their contributions. All approaches that offer students opportunities to reflect on what and how they are learning should be exploited to the full, in keeping with good assessment for learning (AfL) practices.
- Students' written work was reviewed during the evaluation. Assignments varied from extended composition to short and uncontextualised comprehension answers. Comprehension work requires a context to give it developmental value. The extended writing assignments were often imaginative and challenging. In some cases, the Leaving Certificate assessment criteria were applied and this helpful practice should be followed wherever appropriate. Extended work merits developmental comment from teachers to affirm effort and indicate how improvement can be achieved; practice in this regard varied considerably.

- Rooms are assigned to class groups rather than teachers. Apart from the library, they provide little flexibility and few teaching and learning resources. While the board was well used in many instances to model structured writing, all teachers should take a student's-eye view occasionally to check on the clarity of writing and layout. Teachers should also be very vigilant with regard to modelling accurate use of language both in speaking and writing.
- Classroom management was uniformly good, with a place for humour as well as firm control, and the prevailing atmosphere was supportive.

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

- There is a generous allocation of six lessons to English in fifth and sixth year. Good provision is also made in TY and includes a double lesson. While second year is allocated five lessons, first and third year have just four, and in two instances these are distributed over three days, leaving a large gap between lessons. This poor distribution should be addressed in next year's timetable, and in the longer term the provision of an English lesson per day in first year would ensure a good grounding in key skills.
- Students are placed in an upper or lower stream, following assessment during first year. Typically, there are two large higher-level classes in the upper stream, although the uptake of higher level extends to students in the lower stream also. The current system of class formation should be evaluated, with a view to ascertaining its impact on student expectation and attainment. The extent to which students of average ability would benefit from interacting with their more able peers should be considered, as should current research on streaming from the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) and others.
- Most of the seven teachers of English teach in both junior and senior cycle, and rotate the teaching of higher-level and ordinary-level classes. Teachers of other subjects who have English to degree level have recently been assigned to English classes also at their request, thus building capacity. Most teachers of English have a high proportion of English on their timetables, ensuring consolidated delivery of the subject.

### **PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

- The English subject plan gives an overview of subject organisation and broad aims for the subject. It does not contain agreed year plans; detailed planning, where it exists, is done individually. There is no subject co-ordinator.
- While a collegial spirit exists, the tradition of teacher as individual practitioner remains strong. However, the school size and context require more than informal collaboration in subject planning. A co-ordinator role with a developmental focus should be agreed and rotated. Agreed plans, with flexibility as required, should be drawn up for each year. These should focus on skills and should contain learning outcomes that are specific and clear. Differentiation can be planned through identifying what must, should and could be learned in each year. Planning of teaching resources, including digital resources, should also be included.

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 was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the report; a response was not received from the board.

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