Subject Inspection of English
REPORT

St Fachtna’s De La Salle College
Skibbereen, County Cork
Roll number: 62480Q

Date of inspection: 23 March 2011
REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN ENGLISH

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

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MAIN FINDINGS

- The quality of teaching and learning was good in all cases.
- The use of comment-based assessment was a regular feature of the department’s work.
- Significant improvement is evident in the uptake of higher level Junior Certificate English due to approaches adopted by the English department.
- There are good arrangements for the monitoring of students’ learning.
- Good collaboration is evident in the English department. There is significant scope for development in the department’s common yearly schemes and in individual medium-term planning by teachers.
- There is clear engagement with and variation of texts used in senior cycle English.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- Specific elements of language used by writers should be highlighted more frequently in lessons.
- An integrated approach to the language and literature elements of the syllabuses should be adopted, alongside the exploration of a wider range of genres in students’ written work.
- Senior management should seek to expand the number of English lessons in first year.
- Common yearly plans which are time-linked and incorporate clear learning goals should be developed to inform individual teachers’ planning.
INTRODUCTION
St Fachtna’s De La Salle College has a current enrolment of 260 students. It is a voluntary secondary all-boys school. The school offers the following programmes: the Junior Certificate, the Leaving Certificate (Established) and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP). In addition, as part of its provision in senior cycle, there is a compulsory Transition Year (TY) programme.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

• The quality of teaching and learning was good in all cases.

• Teachers utilised a variety of worthwhile supports for the development of students’ reading and writing skills in lessons. It is suggested that the explicit modelling of writing by teachers could be added to these strategies, along with the use of proofing sheets and the appropriate provision of writing frames for students with difficulties in literacy development. In one lesson, a strong focus was maintained on the language of cinema. This was good practice. Across the department, however, it is recommended that teachers should highlight the use of specific elements of language in texts more regularly during lessons. These features of language could then feed into students’ own oral and written work. In addition, a dictionary and thesaurus should form a key part of all students’ classroom equipment.

• The use of pair work was observed during the evaluation in one lesson. This was worthwhile. In particular, the use of pair work served to ensure an appropriate balance between teacher inputs and student inputs during the lesson. The English department should pursue the wider adoption of tightly structured co-operative learning strategies.

• Currently there is limited availability of audio-visual equipment for English teachers. There was some use of visual resources in English lessons to support students’ learning. The English department has displayed an awareness of the need for further development in this area. Significant investment in information and communication technology (ICT) is planned for the very near future. The English department should seek to grasp this opportunity and focus on the development of its use of e-learning through departmental meetings and continuing professional development.

• A limited number of homework tasks with an integrated approach to the language and literature elements of the syllabuses were assigned. In addition, a limited range of genres was explored in students’ homework. The exploration of a wide range of genres and the use of an integrated strategy in both classwork and homework should be addressed through both teachers’ individual planning and common departmental planning. These developments should then be carried through into teachers’ practice.

• There are good arrangements for the monitoring of students’ learning with regular formal and informal assessments. It is suggested that an English portfolio should be included as a key element in the assessment of students’ work in TY, focused on the creation of a set number of major genre exercises. It is important that the analysis of certificate examination results in comparison with national norms, which is currently undertaken by the principal, be added to the department’s current practice.

• Homework was regularly assigned and monitored. The use of comment-based assessment of students’ written work is a very worthwhile element in the department’s current
practice. Another very good strategy which was observed during the evaluation was the organisation of peer assessment, with students being provided with rubrics upon which their assessment of students’ presentations was to be based. To build on this good practice, English teachers are encouraged to share clear rubrics with their class groups when assigning written exercises in order to provide an increased focus for students’ writing.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- Overall timetabling arrangements for English are very good. There are four English lessons per week for classes in first year, which is adequate. It is recommended that senior management should expand this provision.

- Mixed-ability class groups are generally organised in junior cycle. The English department has begun to adopt a clear policy of encouraging the uptake of higher level English by students in junior cycle. This is strongly endorsed. Significant improvements are evident in the uptake of higher-level Junior Certificate English.

- It is planned that teachers will move to base rooms from the beginning of the next academic year. This is very worthwhile. It is recommended that the English department should seize the opportunity presented by the provision of base rooms to develop strong print-rich environments in English rooms.

- The English department has developed good links with the local library. The *MS Readathon* is organised for first-year students. To build on this good work it is suggested that the department could explore other initiatives which could be adopted as a means of enhancing students’ engagement with reading.

- English teachers have engaged in continuing professional development (CPD), including postgraduate study. The department may now benefit from engagement with teaching and learning CPD, particularly in the areas of e-learning and co-operative learning.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- There is good communication and collaboration within the English department. Minutes of formal meetings are recorded. It is suggested that minutes of departmental meetings should be submitted to senior management. The English department could also submit a request for resources to senior management each year.

- Currently, there is no subject co-ordinator. It is recommended that a subject co-ordinator should be appointed on a rotational basis.

- A subject plan has been created. This is positive. There is significant scope for development in the department’s common yearly schemes and in individual medium-term planning by teachers, both of which should be linked. It is recommended that common yearly plans should be developed, supported by discussion within the department, which are time-linked, syllabus-based and have clear learning goals. These common plans should inform the further development of teachers’ individual planning.
• Teachers vary the texts studied in fifth year and in sixth year. This is good practice. It is suggested that a greater degree of variation could be brought to bear in junior cycle. It is very positive that the department has decided to adopt the study of a novel in first year. As a further development of this good practice, the department should consider the adoption of a further novel in third year and the range of genres studied in TY should be expanded.

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