

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

**Subject Inspection of English
REPORT**

**Ardcoil Rís
North Circular Road, Limerick
Roll number: 64201T**

Date of inspection: 15 November 2012



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	13, 14, and 15 November 2012
Inspection activities undertaken <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review of relevant documents• Discussions with principal and teachers• Interaction with students	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Observation of teaching and learning during nine class periods• Examination of students' work• Feedback to principal, deputy principal, and teachers

MAIN FINDINGS

- In most lessons evaluated, teaching was very good, with exceptionally good practices evident in a number of classes
- Overall, learning was good or very good in the lessons observed.
- In the school, the vast majority of students take English at higher level in the Junior and Leaving Certificate examinations.
- All students study English in mixed-ability classes in first year and Transition year (TY). In second year, students are placed in one of two bands for all subjects, including English, based on their performance in examinations in all subjects taken at the end of first year. They remain in these classes in third year as well. Almost all are placed in mixed-ability higher level classes for English in fifth and sixth year.
- The teachers of English are a hard-working and collaborative group who demonstrate a strong commitment to continuing improvement of their delivery of the subject. To date, they have achieved good progress in preparing subject department folders and in sharing practice.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- The department should further expand its range of assessment for learning (AfL) strategies.
- The department should work towards the greater use of information and communication technology (ICT) to promote a process approach to writing.
- To ensure that all students in second and third year are appropriately supported to learn English at their own ability level, the department should seek to further expand its range of differentiation strategies.
- To advance subject department planning for English even further, the teachers need to engage in annual, targeted action planning for the subject and to revise the department's existing schemes of work, as advised in this report.

INTRODUCTION

Ardcoil Rís is a voluntary secondary school with an enrolment of 726 males, under the trusteeship of the Edmund Rice Schools Trust (ERST). The school offers the following programmes: the Junior Certificate (JC), a TY programme, the established Leaving Certificate (LC), and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP). At the time of the evaluation, work had re-started on a substantial school refurbishment project after a significant delay. The school hopes to begin the 2013/14 school year in its newly completed facilities.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- Excellent, affirming rapport exists between teachers and students.
- In most lessons teaching was very good, with exceptionally good practices evident in a number of classes. The very good methodologies observed included the sharing of learning outcomes with students at the outset of lessons and recapping on them at the end, the promotion of higher-order thinking through the setting of written creative interventions, and one whole-class role play in response to a studied text.
- Writing skills were supported by practices such as equipping students with word banks on specific topics to expand their personal vocabulary and sentence structure ranges, the use of graphic organisers to help students structure substantial answers, and the provision of models of writing from contemporary newspapers to support creative modelling.
- To support even higher student writing-skills achievement, and as soon as ICT facilities become available on completion of the building project, teachers should capture student feedback electronically, and then use it to engage in explicit modelling of drafting, editing and rewriting skills using ICT. They should also require students to draft and redraft substantial compositions, sometimes using ICT, from time to time. Furthermore, in addition to commercially-published exemplars of standard, the department could gather exemplars from students' own work, with student permission, and use them to prompt peer and self assessment.
- Overall, learning was found to be good or very good. Where weaknesses were noted in a small number of lessons observed, students' personal responses were not being sufficiently activated and opportunities to equip students with strategies to independently respond to unseen texts were being missed.
- Strong team-teaching links between the teachers of English and the special educational needs department support students' learning in some class groups.
- Certain AfL approaches, trialled by members of the English department in 2010/11, have been firmly established as departmental practices and this is commended. Building on this work, it is recommended that the department adopt three additional AfL approaches. The first is sharing the criteria for assessment when setting homework tasks and then checking students' understanding of the criteria. The second is teachers' use of criteria for assessment when marking and providing formative feedback on substantial writing tasks for students in junior and senior cycle. The third is the allocation of a percentage of marks toward end-of-term reports for particular tasks, such as composition work and folder maintenance, to further encourage the development of students' literacy and organisational skills.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- School management supports the subject by keeping the number of teachers of English relatively small, by deploying teachers across all class groups and levels, and by planning for the stocking of the future school library. The subject is also supported by very good timetable provision for third year, TY, fifth and sixth year. School management plans to increase provision for English in first and second year, as per a recommendation in Circular 25/2012, when advice on the timetabling of the reformed junior cycle programme is provided by the Department of Education and Skills.
- The vast majority of students take higher level English in the certificate examinations. This reflects the high level of encouragement and support given to students by the school and also, the data concerning student ability at intake which were made available during this evaluation.
- All students study English in mixed-ability classes in first year and TY, and almost all are placed in mixed-ability higher level classes in fifth and sixth year.
- In second and third year, students are placed in class groups in one of two bands, based on their examination results in all their first-year subjects. The students remain in those class groups in second and third year. Teachers need to be mindful that students of strong ability in English can end up in a class in the second band and that some students placed in class groups in the top band might not be particularly strong at English, and might need extra support. In light of this, the department could usefully discuss its strategies for ensuring that such students are appropriately supported to learn at their own ability level. Personal learning logs, aiming to encourage students to engage in some independent learning tasks, could be useful here, particularly if a percentage of end-of-term marks is allocated for students' work in these logs. Continuing to expand the department's range of differentiation strategies is also important in this regard.
- A very good variety of co-curricular activities is provided to foster students' skills and interest in the subject, including class library reading sessions, public speaking, debating, film studies, journalism, and the staging of theatrical productions.
- The teachers of English have been very actively engaged in continuing professional development, through internal sharing of expertise and attendance at external seminars.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- High-quality teacher preparation was observed in all lessons.
- The strengths of departmental meetings include discussions of methodologies and some self-evaluation in relation to students' achievement rates at higher level in Leaving Certificate English, based on statistical analyses prepared in relation to national norms.
- Very detailed subject department folders have been prepared. However, each teacher assigned to a class group has provided his or her own individual scheme of work to date, resulting in a multiplicity of schemes for each year group. Where class groups are preparing for the same examination level, a common scheme should be devised, allowing for different text choices to support the interests and needs of each class. This would aid the preparation of common assessments and would also aid substitute and student teachers taking charge of classes during the school year.

- To support the development of the subject into the future, planning in the following two areas is recommended. First, the teachers of English need to identify the aspects of the subject which the students find most difficult and then share strategies on addressing those areas and engage in targeted, action planning for improvement. Second, the department should overhaul its schemes of work to ensure that they are grounded in the agreed learning outcomes for classes preparing for the same examination level in each year group, that they show a progressive building of skills from first to sixth year, and that they are prepared for the entire academic year, subject to ongoing amendment based on departmental reflection.

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 in writing on the findings and recommendations of the report; the board chose to accept the report without response.

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