Subject Inspection of English
REPORT

St Joseph’s Community College
Kilkee, County Clare
Roll number: 70880F

Date of inspection: 19 May 2011
REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN ENGLISH

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

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<th>Dates of inspection</th>
<th>18 and 19 May 2011</th>
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<td><strong>Inspection activities undertaken</strong></td>
<td><strong>• Observation of teaching and learning during six class periods</strong></td>
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<td>• Review of relevant documents</td>
<td>• Examination of students’ work</td>
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<td>• Discussion with principal and teachers</td>
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<td>• Interaction with students</td>
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MAIN FINDINGS

- Teaching was generally good and learning ranged from adequate to good in the lessons observed.
- High expectations are promoted by the placement of students into mixed-ability classes in first and second year and by the organisation of co-curricular activities to develop students’ subject-specific skills and interests.
- The individual capacity of the teachers of English in the school is not being fully realised currently.
- Opportunities to vary teaching methodologies are limited by poor timetable provision for some year groups, by the lack of a base room for the subject, and by poor information and communication technology (ICT) facilities.
- Due to a number of factors, significant staff turnover has and continues to be an issue in the English department, impacting on subject department planning and implementation and on the learning of some junior cycle students.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- Learning and achievement would be enhanced by the creation of more varied active learning opportunities for students, by greater integration of language tasks within the study of literary texts, and by the utilisation of more varied learning resources.
- Timetable provision for first and fourth year English should be increased and allocated lessons should be spread over the maximum possible number of days per week. There may be scope for this when the school adjusts its timetable to provide the required minimum time in school.
- Senior management should establish a base room for English and should explore the possibility of providing teacher-based classrooms.
- Existing termly schemes of work should be reshaped after discussions are held on the key learning outcomes and skills to be developed in each year of study. New assessment practices that link to those agreed learning outcomes should also be established.
INTRODUCTION
St. Joseph’s Community College is a co-educational school with an enrolment of 194. The school offers the following programmes: the Junior Certificate, the established Leaving Certificate and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP).

TEACHING AND LEARNING
• Good quality teaching was observed in lessons. This was facilitated by teacher preparation, knowledge of the subject, well-managed lessons, and good rapport with students.

• Learning ranged from adequate to good in the lessons observed. Lessons should incorporate greater emphases on sharing learning outcomes with students at the outset and on organising more varied active learning opportunities. Students’ writing skills would be enhanced by the department consistently promoting a process approach to writing, and integrating the study of literary texts with language tasks such as creative interventions and creative modelling. Students’ reading skills and interests should also be strengthened through models that have been developed by the Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP) and the UK Literacy Trust.

• A greater range of resources should be used to enhance learning, including graphic organisers, audio recordings, and props. No ICT was used in classes because of the absence of fixed equipment and of the reported unreliability of satellite coverage for the school. Senior management is working with Co. Clare Vocational Education Committee (VEC) to overcome these deficiencies.

• In contrast to the school’s foyer and corridors, almost all of the student-based classrooms visited were bare, unstimulating learning environments. It is recommended that school management facilitate the creation of a subject base room, in a location advised by the teachers of English. Learning charts customised to the texts and skills being taught could then feature on walls, along with samples of students’ work. In light of prevailing student enrolments, the possibility of providing teacher-based classrooms should also be considered.

• Homework was being set and monitored and some good written feedback being given in the sample of copies reviewed. The valuable practice of sharing criteria for the assessment of substantial pieces of writing with senior cycle students should be extended to junior cycle students.

• Teachers should engage in ongoing diagnostic assessments of students’ learning. For instance, teachers are advised to assign class time early in the first term of every year for students to produce a substantial personal writing sample. Analysing and recording the recurring errors in each student’s work would guide teachers in planning lessons to remediate students’ most common language errors.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT
• Whole-school supports for English include good timetable provision for fifth year, concurrent timetabling arrangements from third year onward, the installation of a large-screen television for screening film texts, and management support for teacher involvement in effective English-related co-curricular activities.
• Poor timetable provision in first and fourth year and poor distribution of allocated lessons in second year reportedly makes teachers feel under extreme pressure to cover subject content, at the expense of providing more varied skill-focused learning experiences for students.

• Teachers are actively involved in continuing professional development (CPD) and there is strong potential within the team for the achievement of even higher student outcomes.

• Due to a variety of factors outside of the control of senior management, teacher continuity has been poor in recent years. Evidence was gathered that, on occasion, the implementation of established schemes of work has suffered, with such teacher turnover impacting on some junior cycle students’ learning.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

• While progress has been made in subject department planning, this is an area where there is still scope for development.

• Strengths of subject department planning for English include good planning for movement between levels for senior cycle students, shared teacher preparation of common examinations for some year groups, and evidence of the department self-evaluating and reporting its needs to school management.

• To achieve more consistent understanding and implementation of the subject department plan, those permanent teachers who might be called on to teach English in replacement for colleagues should be invited to attend subject department meetings along with the teachers who are timetabled to teach English in any school year.

• At the beginning of each subject department meeting, time should be specifically allocated for a “show and tell” input, where individuals would be asked to present an effective resource or strategy they use in their practice or to share insights they have gained from CPD or from further study.

• Existing termly schemes of work should be reshaped after discussions are held on the key learning outcomes and skills to be developed in each year of study. The rebalanced Junior Certificate English syllabus available on the website of the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) would support this work.

• The department should agree a common position on awarding some marks towards end-of-term results for tasks linked to the agreed learning outcomes for different year groups. Tasks could include a cumulative average for composition work, folder-maintenance, quotation tests, oral presentations, and project-work. A comparison of students’ certificate examination results in English with national norms for the uptake of levels and for the spread of grades should also be discussed at subject department meetings, as an aid to collective self-evaluation and planning.
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 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.

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Appendix

**SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT**

Submitted by the Board of Management
Area 1  Observations on the content of the inspection report

The Board acknowledges the contents of the English Inspection Report

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

With regard to the ‘main recommendations’ of the report:

- School management has significantly increased the timetable provision for English following implementation of the ‘time in school 28hour instruction regulation’ by the Department of Education & Skills
- As part of its planned schedule of work for Summer 2011, school management established a base room for English and other core subjects. Funds for the purchase of resources are made available on request
- Classrooms have been equipped with information and communication technology (ICT) facilities
- The reliability of the school’s broadband service continues to be a problem. The school has now sourced internet broadband outside the NCTE broadband provision framework. The school pays for this out of its own resources.
- Staff turnover in the English department is an issue outside of the control of the Board of Management. The Board wishes to acknowledge that student learning and engagement with the subject has been enriched by the contribution and commitment of the school’s substitute teachers
- It is acknowledged that restructured subject plans and comprehensive schemes of work will contribute significantly to teaching and learning as well as lessening any negative impacts attributable to staff turnover.