

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**

**Department of Education and Skills**

**Subject Inspection of English  
REPORT**

**Bunclody Vocational College  
Bunclody, County Wexford  
Roll number: 71620H**

**Date of inspection: 25 November 2009**



# **REPORT ON THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN ENGLISH**

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## **SUBJECT INSPECTION REPORT**

This report has been written following a subject inspection in Bunclody Vocational College, conducted as part of a whole school evaluation. It presents the findings of an evaluation of the quality of teaching and learning in English and makes recommendations for the further development of the teaching of this subject in the school. The evaluation was conducted over one day during which the inspector visited classrooms and observed teaching and learning. The inspector interacted with students and teachers, examined students' work, and had discussions with some teachers. The inspector reviewed school planning documentation and teachers' written preparation. Following the evaluation visit, the inspector provided oral feedback on the outcomes of the evaluation to the principal and deputy principal.

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

The school provides two programmes in second-level education: the Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP) and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP). Provision of English lessons is good as each year group from first year to sixth year has five English periods each week, although classes are only thirty-seven minutes in length. The core class group in both first and second year is divided into two for English which results in smaller class sizes. Concurrence is provided on the timetable for each year group and this facilitates movement of students and whole year group activities. However, there is not always an even distribution of English lessons across the week on the timetable. For example, first, third and fifth years have English timetabled twice on one day and one Post-Leaving Certificate (PLC) Communications class has all three lessons timetabled together on one day. This is not good practice and a more even distribution of English lessons is recommended for these class groups.

There are four teachers currently teaching English in the school. All are qualified to teach English to higher-level Leaving Certificate. One teacher has just one class group for English. More exposure to teaching English is recommended in this case. Teachers in the school have had some school-based in-service on the area of special educational needs (SEN). However, more regular opportunities for continuing professional development should be provided for staff.

The school has a number of SEN students and students who have English as an Additional Language (EAL). It was observed that not all EAL students were being supported in English although some have very little proficiency in the language. This is an area that needs addressing immediately. SEN students are supported through withdrawal. It was reported that co-operative teaching is being considered as another intervention for these students and this is to be encouraged.

Placement of students in class groups for English is appropriate. They are placed in mixed-ability class groups for junior cycle and are set into ability groupings for senior cycle. In fifth year there is one higher-level class group and one ordinary-level class group. In sixth year, due to a low

uptake of higher level, there is one class group containing a mix of ordinary-level and higher-level students and one standalone ordinary-level group. There was evidence that teachers are given the opportunity to teach different levels and this is good practice. All junior cycle students follow the Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP) and many of the literacy strategies recommended for use with JCSP class groups are implemented by the English department.

All English teachers have their own base classrooms and most of these rooms presented as stimulating, print-rich environments, with key words, key moments from texts, students' work and books on display. There is also a library in the school, which, although small, is quite well stocked. The efforts made to develop the library including fundraising are highly commended. There is a commendable focus on encouraging reading and building up the library and the English teachers are praised for implementing this recommendation from a previous English inspection. Strategies used to encourage reading include *Word Millionaire*, the use of book bags in classrooms and silent reading. In the case of the latter, it is recommended that this take place for a specific period of time as opposed to the full year and that students be assigned a specific task at the end of the reading period, such as presenting a review of the book to their peers.

A book rental scheme is in place for all students and it was reported that this does not affect the choice of texts for students in the school. One English classroom is well equipped with information and communication technology (ICT) resources and there are plans to equip other classrooms with ICT. This is to be encouraged as there are many ways that ICT can enhance the teaching of English. It was reported that there is good provision for updating resources.

## **PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

Although there is an English plan, it was reported in the subject information form and during the evaluation that no person has responsibility for co-ordinating the development of the subject. This is a lacuna that should be addressed. Therefore, it is strongly recommended that the English department agree and appoint a subject co-ordinator on a rotating basis who will take responsibility for leading the subject, distributing relevant documentation and chairing meetings. A definition of this role should be included in the English plan. It was reported that meetings of the English team are held on a monthly basis and minutes of these meetings are available. Minutes recorded discussion on areas such as choice of texts, fundraising for the library, organisation of theatre visits and development of an inventory of resources. The English teaching team should also discuss and share good practice in relation to effective teaching strategies and resources at such meetings and agree policies and practices in relation to areas such as frequency of assigned homework, presentation of work and strategies to raise attainment.

The English plan contains worthy aims and objectives for the teaching of English including an appropriate focus on developing reading and language awareness among students. This plan also documents the texts and genres that are taught to each class group. While some progress has been made in planning from the time of the last English inspection (2003), the subject plan has not been developed or expanded over the course of the last three years. It is recommended that the subject plan be developed to include the learning outcomes that each year group should achieve as well as possible texts, poems and topics that could be taught to each year group. The plan should also provide for the introduction of common examinations for junior cycle students and other class groups of mixed ability. A review of the plan should take place at the end of each school year. The draft rebalanced Junior Certificate English syllabus, available on the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) website, [www.ncca.ie](http://www.ncca.ie) should help in determining appropriate learning outcomes. The individual plans observed in one instance were

set out in this way and the learning outcomes were linked to JCSP statements. This plan could form the basis of the English plan for at least one year group.

The fact that all teachers cover all genres in all years is commended. In addition, a good range of texts is covered in each year and recommendations in this regard from the previous inspection report have been implemented. It is particularly commended that some class groups study at least one novel and one drama in each year of junior cycle.

While it was reported that a PLC Communications plan has been prepared, it does not feature in the English folder. Therefore, it is recommended that the Communications plan form part of the overall English plan. The English department should also have access to and make use of key documentation such as chief examiners' reports in English, the Department of Education and Science publication *Looking at English* and other such resources.

## **TEACHING AND LEARNING**

The quality of teaching and learning was, on the whole, good. Most teachers were well prepared for their lessons. In most cases, the teachers' enthusiastic delivery of their lessons engaged their students and led to good learning. In all cases, teachers' explanations and instructions were clear.

All lessons opened with roll call and the purpose of the lesson was then communicated to students. The content, structure and pace of each lesson were generally appropriate and time was efficiently utilised in all but one instance. Examples of effective reading preparation strategies were observed prior to moving to the next part of the lesson topic. Lessons were best when there was a good break up of tasks, an appropriate pace and when students were fully involved in the lesson. In one instance, the students were observed to be passive participants in the lesson as they were not given any tasks or opportunities to participate. In this regard, there is a need for a focus on students' own personal response to texts rather than initially engaging in detailed analysis of texts such as poems. However, in most lessons, students were engaged through discussion, question and answer sessions and student activities. There were no instances of co-operative learning observed although there were opportunities when students could have been organised in pairs for a period of the lesson to share observations before communicating these to the teacher. In this way students would be learning from each other as well as from their teacher.

ICT was appropriately used in one instance to develop the listening skills of students. There were some lessons where use of ICT or audio or visual recordings could have enhanced learning, for example to demonstrate interview techniques to learners. Audio versions of texts are also useful for enhancing understanding of Shakespearean texts. The board was very well used in most instances to record students' points and their assigned homework. It could have been used better in one instance to record learners' responses to a specific question. Many teachers had useful worksheets to hand which enhanced students' learning.

It was observed from students' copies that some teachers integrate the teaching of language and literature, for example, by teaching points of grammar in conjunction with the studied novel or integrating media studies work with the other texts. This is very good practice and is another recommendation that has been implemented from the previous inspection. However, teachers should give students more opportunities to make oral presentations in class to develop their confidence in this area. Questioning was best when teachers asked questions by naming students rather than asking general questions of the whole class group as, in this way, no student dominated the lesson and all students had the opportunity to participate in the lesson.

Students were generally well managed and while some insubordinate behaviour was observed, it was dealt with effectively in most lessons. It was observed that those teachers who moved around the classroom and ensured that all students were on task were most successful in this regard.

## **ASSESSMENT**

All students sit formal examinations at Christmas and examination classes also sit 'mock' examinations. Non-examination classes sit in-school summer exams. It is recommended that, where appropriate, teachers keep a record of results of all longer pieces of work as well as records of class tests. An analysis of results in the certificate examinations indicates that English teachers should develop a strategy to encourage more students to take higher level in certificate examinations as it was observed that many students achieve very well at ordinary level. The fact that no student has sat foundation level English in recent years shows some evidence of progress in this area. Management should also analyse results in certificate examinations on an annual basis and the outcome of this analysis should be used to determine planning for the subject.

It was observed that teachers took time to prepare students for their assigned homework towards the end of most lessons and this is good practice. Many class groups have hardback copies for their English work and this strategy is highly commended as it was observed that these copies were very well maintained. Students' copies were well corrected and there was evidence of constructive feedback given to students on areas where they needed to improve. Other assessment for learning strategies observed included, in one instance, peer assessment. Students' copies showed that in most lessons they had been assigned an appropriate amount of work including longer and shorter pieces of writing and frequent essays. This is very good practice and it is suggested that students be also encouraged to draft and redraft their work. Learners in PLC classes retain folders of their key assignments and briefs and there was evidence that good progress was being made.

## **SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- Most English classrooms presented as stimulating print-rich environments.
- There is a commendable focus on encouraging reading and building up the library in the school.
- The English plan contains worthy aims and objectives for the teaching of English.
- All teachers cover all genres in all years and use a good range of texts.
- The quality of teaching and learning was, on the whole, good.
- Enthusiastic teachers engaged their students, resulting in good learning.
- The integration of the teaching of language and literature was evident.
- Homework was frequently assigned and the quality of students' work, particularly when they used hardback copies, was very good.
- Students' copies were well corrected and there was evidence of constructive feedback given to students on areas where they needed to improve.
- Students were assigned an appropriate amount of work including longer and shorter pieces of writing and frequent essays.
- The English teachers have implemented many of the recommendations made during the last English subject inspection (2003).

As a means of building on these strengths and to address areas for development, the following key recommendations are made:

- A more even distribution of English lessons is recommended for some class groups in the school.
- More regular opportunities for continuing professional development should be provided for staff.
- All EAL students who qualify for EAL support should receive appropriate support.
- The English department should agree a co-ordinator on a rotating basis who will take responsibility for leading the subject.
- Subject planning should be expanded to allow for sharing of effective teaching strategies and resources, agreeing policies and practices in relation to areas such as frequency of homework, presentation of work, strategies to raise attainment, implementation of common examinations, agreeing learning outcomes that each year group should achieve and ensuring that the plan is reviewed annually. The PLC Communications plan should be included in the overall English plan.
- A greater focus on co-operative learning, on use of ICT in teaching and learning and on oral presentations from students is recommended.

A post-evaluation meeting was held with the principal and deputy principal at the conclusion of the evaluation when the draft findings and recommendations of the evaluation were presented and discussed.

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