

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

**Subject Inspection of English
REPORT**

**Ashton School
Blackrock Road, Cork
Roll number: 81008W**

Date of inspection: 24 March 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**

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

Dates of inspection	21 & 24 March 2011
Inspection activities undertaken <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review of relevant documents• Discussion with principal and teachers• Interaction with students	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Observation of teaching and learning during seven class periods• Examination of students' work• Feedback to principal and teachers

MAIN FINDINGS

- The standard of teaching and learning observed during the evaluation ranged from good to very good.
- The school has recently expanded the availability of information and communication technology (ICT) in subject classrooms.
- English classrooms incorporated impressive print-rich environments.
- There was evidence of the use of comment-based assessment of students' work in all lessons observed.
- English teachers have undertaken initiatives to promote students' reading.
- A good subject plan has been created. The department has discussed the creation of common yearly plans.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- English teachers should incorporate the use of clear rubrics, the assigning of a wide range of genres, and an integrated approach to language and literature in pursuing the development of students' writing skills.
 - The use of e-learning should form a teaching-and-learning focus for discussion and development at departmental meetings over the medium term.
 - The English department should develop common, time-linked, yearly plans with clear learning goals.
 - The range of texts studied in junior cycle should be adjusted.
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INTRODUCTION

Ashton School has a current enrolment of 500 students. It is a co-educational comprehensive school. The school offers the following programmes: the Junior Certificate, the established Leaving Certificate and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP). An optional Transition Year (TY) programme is also available in senior cycle.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- The standard of teaching and learning observed during the evaluation was good in all cases and frequently very good. In one lesson, a greater focus on individual teacher planning with clear learning goals would have added to the student experience.
- A number of very worthwhile strategies was utilised to support students' reading and writing skills. As a further development of this good practice, teachers are encouraged to explore the adoption of explicit modelling of writing and reading as elements in their practice.
- The use of pair work and group work was frequently observed. This worked well, particularly in ensuring that an appropriate balance was struck between teacher and student inputs. The use of co-operative learning strategies should be adopted, where appropriate, across the subject department. In light of the good practice observed during the evaluation, it is suggested that this might prove a profitable area for discussion at departmental meetings. In particular, the manner in which co-operative learning strategies can serve an integrated approach to the development of students' oracy, reading and writing could be considered.
- Visual and other resources were used during the course of the evaluation to support students' learning. This was effective. Students are expected to have a pocket dictionary in lessons and dictionaries were in evidence in a number of English classrooms. It is recommended that a thesaurus should also form part of students' classroom equipment.
- The school has very recently invested in a considerable expansion of ICT in classrooms. English teachers are very interested in further incorporating ICT into their practice. It is recommended that the further development of the use of e-learning on the part of the English department should form a teaching-and-learning focus for discussion and development at departmental meetings over the medium term.
- A very good feature of the department's practice is the development and maintenance of a print-rich environment in English classrooms. It is suggested that this should be noted as policy and practice in the English subject plan.
- The assigning of some homework tasks which involved writing across a range of genres was undertaken in a number of classes, and there was strong engagement with this strategy in other classes. Staged questions and summary exercises were more frequently assigned as written homework. It is recommended that English teachers should carefully consider the purpose of written assignments and how best they can be used to ensure the development of students' writing skills. Clear rubrics should be set out prior to the completion of writing tasks across a wide range of genres. Further opportunities for written work to be linked to particular elements in the literature being studied, which may then act as a model for students' writing, should also be considered.
- There was evidence of comment-based assessment of students' work in all lessons observed. This is good practice.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- The timetabled provision for English is very good. In a limited number of instances double lessons were scheduled. This should be avoided where possible. At present, English is assigned four lessons per week in second year. This provision should be reconsidered with a view to ensuring students have contact with the subject once per day if at all practicable.
- An extensive range of extracurricular activities has been organised by the English department. These include theatre and film trips, school tours, writing competitions and a school magazine.
- The school library is well-stocked and a new librarian has recently been appointed. A summer reading list is distributed to students and the establishment of a paired reading scheme has been discussed by the English department. All of this is very worthwhile and the department is encouraged to advance the establishment of a reading initiative which will provide further support for students' experience of reading for pleasure.
- Very good informal induction procedures for teachers have been developed. These include classroom observation and discussion with student teachers regarding elements of classroom practice. It is suggested that these very good procedures could be noted as policy in the subject plan.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- A number of formal, departmental meetings are organised each year. Currently, minutes of these meetings are not maintained and it is suggested that this practice should be adopted. A subject co-ordinator has been appointed on the basis of seniority. As a means of ensuring a wide leadership base in the department, it is recommended that the subject co-ordinator should be appointed on a rotational basis.
- A good subject plan has been created. Currently the subject plan does not incorporate common yearly plans although these have been discussed within the English department. It is recommended that the department should develop common, time-linked, yearly plans with clear learning goals.
- A range of literary genres is studied in junior cycle classes. To add to current provision, it is recommended that the study of at least one full Shakespearean text should be reintroduced in junior cycle, along with an additional novel, in mixed-ability class groups. The study of three comparative texts by Leaving Certificate ordinary level class groups should be noted as policy in the subject plan.
- There are good links with the special educational needs department. The English department is open to exploring the use of team-teaching as a further mode of support for students with special educational needs. This is to be encouraged.
- There are good systems in place to monitor students' learning. As part of the assessment of students' achievement in TY, it is suggested that an English-specific portfolio of written work could be adopted. The use of common examinations in year groups has been discussed. This should be advanced as such an approach is not only good practice, but will eliminate the needless duplication of work on the part of teachers.

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 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.

Published, February 2012

Appendix

SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

Submitted by the Board of Management

Area 1 Observations on the content of the inspection report

The school is very pleased to note that the report gives affirmation that good progress has been made in relation to current educational initiatives. These include ICT in the classroom, print-rich environments, reading initiatives, and use of comment-based assessment.

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

The school will endeavour to address the recommendations of the report and is also committed to developing a new e-learning plan at whole-school level.