Subject Inspection of English
REPORT

Athboy Community School
Athboy, County Meath
Roll number: 91517D

Date of inspection: 14 December 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>13, 14 December 2011</th>
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<td><strong>Inspection activities undertaken</strong></td>
<td><strong>Observation of teaching and learning during seven 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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MAIN FINDINGS

- The quality of teaching and learning was good in the majority of lessons observed.
- A good variety of methods designed to improve learning was used in some lessons.
- There was good teacher use of recently enhanced information and communication technology (ICT) resources in many lessons.
- There was a very good rapport between students and teachers in all lessons.
- Whole-school support is good in areas such as timetabling allocation and resources.
- The quality of assessment is uneven and in some cases, poor.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- Assessment criteria and procedures should be agreed at departmental level and should be consistently implemented in all lessons. Written teacher feedback should direct student learning.
- There should be a clear and consistent focus on the development of higher-order thinking skills and on the expression both orally and in writing, of a personal aesthetic response.
- In order to increase the number of students taking higher-level English, and to raise expectations, a number of measures should be considered, for example, mixed-ability setting in the junior cycle.
- Planning for Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) year one is in immediate need of revision.
INTRODUCTION

Athboy Community School is co-educational and has a current enrolment of 508. English is provided in the Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate programmes, the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) and the optional Transition Year (TY) programme. English and Communications is provided in the LCA. The school has recently moved to a new building and facilities for the teaching and learning of English are very good.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- The quality of teaching and learning was good in the majority of lessons observed.
- Lessons were well planned in most cases. In some, the learning intention was clear from the outset. In all lessons, planned learning outcomes should be written on the board. The closing phase of the lesson could then be used to check if the outcomes had been achieved.
- Resources were used effectively to enhance learning in many lessons. There was good teacher use of information and communication technology (ICT), for example, to demonstrate the skills of planning and drafting. To build on this good work, students should be given an opportunity to practise the technique in order to monitor learning in the immediate context. In some cases, writing frames could be used.
- It is commendable that students were writing in a variety of genres in a lesson observed. In this case, students demonstrated a very good understanding of both the use and impact of poetic devices. Critical thinking was promoted. Such good practice should be emulated. In all lessons, there should be clear and consistent focus on the development of higher-order thinking skills.
- In all programmes and at all levels, students should be facilitated to express an affective opinion both orally and in writing in the course of their initial encounters with a variety of texts and genres. This would provide a firm foundation on which students learn to build evidence-based, critical evaluations.
- Active learning methods were used well in some lessons to engage students. In non-examination classes, undue emphasis on the examination as a motivational strategy is inappropriate. Collaborative learning was promoted in some lessons and this is commendred.
- Students’ participation in classroom activities is closely monitored by teachers.
- The quality of assessment is uneven. There is evidence that assessment for learning (AfL) is practised orally in lessons. However, in a number of classrooms visited, there was little or no evidence of written teacher feedback or consistent assessment of copybooks that would deepen learning, broaden students’ repertoire of syntactical structures or help them to master the mechanical conventions of written English. This is an area for development.
- There was a very good rapport between students and teachers in all lessons

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- Whole-school support is good in general. Timetabling allocation is good overall. It would be desirable to increase the number of LCA lessons from three to four.
• Commendably, students are organised in a mixed-ability setting in first year and in TY. Classes are streamed into higher and ordinary-level classes in other years. Uptake of higher-level English is below national norms in both cycles and this is an area at which to target improvement. In order to increase higher-level uptake, a number of measures should be considered, one of which is mixed-ability setting in each year of the junior cycle.

• Standard whole-school summative assessment procedures and reporting processes are in place.

• The school has a new library that is currently in the initial stages of development. In line with the school’s literacy strategy, the English department is currently implementing the Spell Write Right programme in second year and this is commended.

• It is commendable that there has recently been formal whole-staff professional development in the area of AfL and it is now being piloted in first year by some teachers.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

• There is a positive, collaborative spirit among the teachers of English and meetings occur regularly. Department planning would be greatly enhanced by more formalised structures, for example, the appointment of a subject co-ordinator to undertake a leadership role. Consideration could be given to the rotation of the role.

• The team has developed a detailed plan for the subject. However, the current plans for the Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate use examination requirements as a template. Future review should ensure that planning is structured on the syllabuses using an outcomes-based framework. In the case of the junior cycle, the three literacies and four skill sets outlined in the junior cycle syllabus should form the rubric.

• A greater number of class novels and plays should be studied in the junior cycle to meet full syllabus requirements and to raise expectations. Particular care should be taken to ensure that the first-year plan builds on the prior learning acquired in primary school. It is noted that the same author features strongly in the TY and the LCA programmes. Students should experience a diversity of language experience in a variety of genres.

• The TY planning approach is good in many respects. To build on work done, the learning outcomes sections should be completed, the range of texts broadened and more experiential learning promoted. The creative writing project is commended.

• Planning for LCA year one is in immediate need of revision. The plan outlined for modules one and two is not based on syllabus guidelines and contains no detail. The plan for modules three and four in year two is appropriate.

• It is commendable that outcomes of the state examinations are analysed. To build on this, information gleaned should be used to target areas for improvement.

• The department should now develop a comprehensive reading policy.

• A whole-school assessment policy exists. Subject-specific assessment policy and practice needs to be reviewed; rationale, criteria and procedures should be collaboratively agreed and then consistently implemented.

• The plan lists in-service events attended in the past. An audit of the professional needs of all English teachers should now be carried out to plan for future development.
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 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.
Appendix

School response to the report

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

The Board of Management welcomes this comprehensive Subject Inspection Report and is pleased that it recognises the various ways in which the teaching of English is supported in the school, while also acknowledging the good quality of teaching and learning in classes.

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 English Department will agree assessment criteria and procedures to be implemented in all classes while building on the strategies already being introduced through the school’s development of Assessment for Learning. Where feasible, English will be taught in a mixed ability setting in the Junior Cycle.