

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection of English
REPORT

Loreto Secondary School
Balbriggan, County Dublin
Roll number: 60010P

Date of inspection: 13 September 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	12, 13 September 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 ten class periods• Examination of students' work• Feedback to principal and teachers

MAIN FINDINGS

- Overall, teaching and learning was very good and there was an appropriate focus on language development and basic skills in most lessons observed.
- Methods and resources used were appropriate in most cases and some very good practice was in evidence.
- Students are encouraged to achieve their full potential.
- Whole-school support is very good and school atmosphere is supportive of language enrichment and appreciation.
- Individual and department planning is very good on the whole and there is evidence of a strong collaborative ethos and capacity for reflection, self-evaluation and innovation.
- The school recognises the pressing need to develop staff in the area of learning support.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- Good practice observed in most lessons in relation to creative use of resources and student-centred learning activities should be shared to ensure consistency of learning in all classes.
 - Consideration should be given to mixed-ability grouping in Transition Year (TY).
 - To progress very good planning endeavour, areas for consideration now should be the implementation of the national literacy and numeracy strategy into the teaching and learning of English and the use of data to inform future planning.
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INTRODUCTION

Loreto Secondary School is a voluntary secondary, non-fee paying school and has an enrolment of 1220 girls. The school provides English in the Leaving Certificate, Junior Certificate, and a compulsory Transition Year (TY). Currently the school is involved in a major building project which is scheduled for completion in spring 2012 and this will add a new library to a range of good existing facilities.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- Overall, the quality of teaching and learning observed was very good.
- Good student-focused planning ensured student engagement in learning in most cases. In these lessons, texts and audio-visual and information and communications technology (ICT) resources were well chosen and appropriately deployed both to stimulate and support learning. In one lesson observed, students actively viewed a DVD; in another, a recording of a song was supported by a question handout that structured inquiry and response; in a third, students who find learning challenging were provided with an accessible framework for writing a letter.
- Less effective practice was noted in lessons that were text bound, where no additional resources were used or where the quality of resources was poor. Different learning styles were catered for in some very good lessons with regard to resources and tasks set.
- In very good lessons, the learning intention was shared and in some, was written on the board, so that students clearly understood the purpose of the lesson.
- There was a good focus on the development of core language skills in many lessons, and particularly on developing language awareness and vocabulary acquisition. In all lessons, students who are entitled to reasonable accommodations in state examinations should be taught to improve their basic skills in spelling, grammar and syntax.
- There is a good level of interaction between the learning-support department and teachers of English.
- In a very small minority of lessons, students were not equipped with the language skills to deal with material and content and methods were inappropriate for the class level. All aspects of planning for learning need review in such cases.
- Methods were designed to actively engage students in the majority of lessons. Effectively-managed strategies such as group work and “hot seating” engaged students and are highly commended.
- The “point, quote, explain” technique and use of mindmaps were taught in some lessons and this helped students to structure and organise information.
- Questioning technique was effective in lessons where individual students were targeted, level was differentiated and students were encouraged to think for themselves and to articulate evidence-based opinions. Poor practice such as the use of closed questions, overuse of global questioning, teachers answering their own questions having allowed insufficient time for students to formulate answers, was noted in a minority only. Technique should be reviewed in such cases.
- In most lessons teachers moved around the classroom and monitored students, assisting those in need and gleaned information that informed teaching.

- An ICT initiative designed to actively engage students in on-line discussion of texts has been developed and is currently being rolled out. This provides opportunities for the development of critical thinking and of a personal aesthetic response. Ways in which weaker students can be encouraged to engage are now being considered. This is highly commended. There is scope for the development of independent students' responses both orally and in writing in all lessons.
- Assessment for learning underpinned practice: oral feedback through teacher-student interaction and high-quality teacher correction in copybooks informed learning in the best lessons observed. In a minority of lessons, however, there is scope for improvement in the quality of teacher assessment. Good practice was noted where examination assessment criteria were used in marking copybooks. Peer review was encouraged in a lesson and this is commended.
- In just a small number of cases, learning was less effective due to the use of traditional didactic methods, inappropriate resources and lack of variety in learning activity. Teachers did not move around the classroom, there was disproportionate teacher talk and minimal student involvement. The very good practice evidenced in many good lessons should be shared; given the high standard of teaching and learning noted in some lessons, strong consideration should be given to peer observation to raise standards in all lessons.
- In all lessons, classrooms were very well managed and student behaviour was exemplary. Learning routines were observed. Care of students characterised the atmosphere in all lessons.
- Students are encouraged to achieve their full potential and attainment is very good.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- The quality of whole-school support for English is very good. Timetabling is good and access to and uptake of higher level is good. Mixed-ability grouping in TY should now be considered.
- The school is conscious of the need to develop staff in the area of learning support and this needs to be undertaken as a priority. Resources are good.
- School atmosphere is supportive of language enrichment.
- The school's focus on staff development and its current involvement in a cluster initiative to improve cross-curricular teaching and learning, inspired by TL21, is highly commended.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- The quality of planning is good and an emphasis on reflective practice and review is commended. The department's collaborative ethos, interest in innovation and encouragement of subject-specific personal development is highly commended.
- There are effective planning structures in place that take account of a very large student cohort and teaching team, and ensure that coherence is maintained.
- The quality of individual teacher planning is very good in most cases.

- Subject planning endeavour should now focus on how best to incorporate the national strategy for improvement in literacy and numeracy into the teaching and learning of English.
- The analysis of assessment outcomes could now be used to inform future planning and practice.
- Standard reporting procedures to parents on students' progress are in operation. The quality of record keeping is generally good.

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; a response was not received from the board.