

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection of English
REPORT

Loreto College
Foxrock, County Dublin
Roll number: 60240J

Date of inspection: 22 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	21 and 22 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

- The teaching observed was competent and effective overall, with many instances of highly commendable practice.
- Students were most engaged and showed greatest enjoyment where teaching approaches required them to be active and reflective learners.
- English is very well resourced and provided for in the school, although timetabling arrangements are adequate rather than generous in the junior cycle.
- English planning documents record a very good level of forward planning and review.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- In further developing the teaching and learning of English, teachers should focus on increasingly imaginative and challenging approaches, and school management should encourage this.
 - In the further development of collaborative subject planning, teachers should ensure that year plans support the incremental development of students' skills and knowledge, especially in the Leaving Certificate programme.
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INTRODUCTION

Loreto College Foxrock is a fee-charging school for girls under the trusteeship of the Loreto Education Trust. The current enrolment is 658. The school offers an optional Transition Year (TY) programme which is availed of by almost all students. The board of management was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the inspection, and the response of the board will be found in the appendix to this report.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- The ten lessons observed covered all years, levels and programmes, and involved eight of the ten teachers of English and a student teacher. Overall, the teaching observed was competent and effective. Highly commendable practice was noted in many instances, especially where material was approached in a way that offered students a high level of challenge and stimulus.
- Resources, including information and communication technology (ICT) and audio material, were used effectively. In a senior cycle lesson, students' own writing in the form of e-mails was displayed on the data projector and added greatly to the class response to a poem by Boland. In a junior cycle lesson, students created objects inspired by a poem in a way that showed their grasp of the poem's central concerns.
- Very effective approaches to the integration of language and literature were observed. Excellent use was made of real diary entries to deepen students' understanding of Mahon's 'Antarctica'. Creative modelling was also successfully employed to assist students' understanding of specific genres. The potential of this approach to provide students with a frame in which to develop their writing skills should be fully exploited.
- An organised and systematic approach to student learning was evident. Lessons were well planned and the lesson topic, often stated in terms of learning outcomes, was frequently shared with students at the beginning of the lesson. Teachers should however seek to encourage open and exploratory discussion and analysis wherever possible.
- In most lessons, students showed application and interest, and their potential was most successfully developed where the methods chosen required their active engagement. Such active methods were noted in both junior and senior cycle lessons. In a few instances, the possibilities for students to develop personal responses and independent thinking were under-explored. While very good co-operative learning was noted, opportunities for students to work individually should also have their place.
- In extending the good practices noted, teachers should focus on increasingly imaginative and challenging approaches. Teachers should feel confident that such approaches will assist students to develop the range of creative and critical skills described in the relevant syllabuses, and will stand them in very good stead in the certificate examinations.
- The prevailing classroom atmosphere was supportive and calm. Good structure and sequencing created a sense of purpose and forward movement. Pace was generally well judged, although teachers should be confident about increasing the pace where appropriate, for example where reading a play.
- Very good assessment practices were noted. Good quality assignments are set regularly and students receive helpful developmental feedback. The principles of assessment for learning are well understood and applied. This is an area well worth focusing on as part of the mentoring programme for student teachers.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- Timetable provision for English is very good in the senior cycle but less generous in the junior cycle where four lessons per week are provided. The possibility of extending this provision in first year should be explored, as a lesson per day in first year would provide a solid foundation in the skills identified in the English syllabuses.
- English is taught in mixed-ability base class groups in the junior cycle and TY. A number of higher level class groups and an ordinary level class group are formed in fifth year. These arrangements underpin high expectations for students and deliver good outcomes.
- Drama, debating and public speaking are supported both within and outside the school curriculum.
- The English department comprises ten teachers, a relatively large number. Five teachers take just one or two class groups for English. While a more concentrated deployment would have advantages, consistency in the delivery of English is supported by a strong subject department structure. Consideration should however be given to a pattern of deployment that ensures that the main teachers of English teach a range of years in junior and senior cycle, including TY.
- A clear homework policy is in place; assessment practices are very supportive and an assessment policy is in development.
- English is very well resourced. Most teachers of English have base classrooms, many of which have been very well developed as stimulating learning environments. ICT and other resources are readily available in most classrooms, and there is a very pleasant and well-stocked library with a full-time librarian and a high-access policy.
- School management and the teachers of English have shown commendable commitment to continuing professional development. The principal oversees the deployment of student teachers; the role of the class teacher as mentor is documented but could be reviewed and expanded.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- Very good planning practices are in place. The systems developed support forward planning, reflective practice and flexibility where appropriate. The English department maintains comprehensive records of meetings and decisions.
- Subject planning displays a firm commitment to mixed ability, and differentiated approaches are identified as ‘must, may and might’ learning outcomes. All year plans have indicative timeframes and learning outcomes. It would be helpful to align these to appropriate teaching and learning methods.
- In the longer term, the TY programme could be further developed to support greater learner autonomy, with an emphasis on imaginative and challenging assignments, focusing on oracy and visual literacy as well as reading and writing skills. Modular delivery of TY English could be discussed with school management.
- A whole-school literacy initiative is underway, and a target list of twelve aspects of accurate language use has been agreed. It would be useful for the department to prioritise and sequence the twelve points, relating them to its programme for first year.

- The English department should look at its current practice in planning its Leaving Certificate programme and assess the extent to which it is supporting the incremental development of students' skills and knowledge in the required areas. A more staged approach to the study of poets and to the comparative study over the two years is recommended.
- Common assessments with agreed marking schemes are set where applicable. The department maintains records of student outcomes in school-based assessments and in the state examinations, and attainment is high. As well as the yearly analysis done, a year-on-year analysis would help to inform the department's review and forward planning practices.

The draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation were discussed with the principal, deputy principal and subject teachers at the conclusion of the evaluation.

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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 of Management is pleased that the excellent work of the teachers in the English Department was affirmed by the inspector. The Board of Management notes that the recommendations are developmental in nature, building on the current good practice.