

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**  
**Department of Education and Skills**

**Subject Inspection of English**  
**REPORT**

**St Joseph's Secondary School**  
**Rush, County Dublin**  
**Roll number: 60343T**

**Date of inspection: 21 February 2013**



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**

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**INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION**

<b>Dates of inspection</b>	19, 21 February 2013
<b>Inspection activities undertaken</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Review of relevant documents</li><li>• Discussion with principal and teachers</li><li>• Interaction with students</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Observation of teaching and learning during nine class periods</li><li>• Examination of students' work</li><li>• Interview with subject co-ordinator</li><li>• Feedback to principal and teachers</li></ul>

**MAIN FINDINGS**

- The overall quality of teaching observed was good with some instances of very good practice and some where there is scope for development.
- Very good interpersonal relationships were evident between students and teachers in most lessons
- Some very good classroom resources were used to enhance students' learning.
- The school is committed to developing literacy through focused initiatives such as a first-year reading and vocabulary development programme, known as "Bookworm".
- Higher-level uptake has increased significantly over the past four years and attainment is good.
- The English department subject plan and resource planning do not reflect a collaborative approach among teachers of the subject.

**MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Students should be encouraged to assess and reflect on their learning.
  - The English department should agree and implement a common approach for setting and grading homework that will support students' learning and skills development.
  - Teachers should ensure that high standards of literacy are evident in all material produced by the English Department.
  - The English department subject plan should be updated to reflect the work of the department and to focus on learning outcomes and skills development.
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## **INTRODUCTION**

St Joseph's Secondary School is a voluntary secondary school with a current enrolment of 671 students. The school offers a wide range of programmes including the Junior Certificate, the Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP), an optional Transition Year, the Leaving Certificate and the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA). The school participates in the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) initiative.

## **TEACHING AND LEARNING**

- The overall quality of teaching and learning in the lessons observed was good with some instances of very good practice noted. However, practice was also observed which indicated scope for development.
- In most lessons, learning objectives were shared at the start of the lesson. It is recommended that this good practice be further developed by focusing on skills development and expressing learning outcomes in terms of what the students should know or should be able to do by the end of the lesson. Open questions should be used to encourage students to reflect on their learning.
- Active learning, including group and pair work, was observed in most lessons. It is recommended that teachers extend opportunities for students to engage in group and pair work, with a particular focus on developing students' oral and listening skills, providing greater levels of differentiation for all students, and actively supporting English as an additional language (EAL) students.
- In some lessons, the pacing of activities or the level of challenge was not sufficient to keep all students on task. Differentiating resources and adapting tasks so that students of all abilities are challenged and engaged should be considered as a means of engaging all learners.
- Classrooms generally have displays of students' work and subject-specific posters on the walls. In some lessons, these were used to help students connect with prior learning. The development of the classroom environment as a learning resource should be encouraged.
- Very good interpersonal relationships were evident in most lessons. Students were well behaved and cooperative and teachers provided a supportive learning environment. In general, instructions were given clearly.
- ICT was used very effectively in many lessons and well thought-out video clips enhanced students' learning experiences. One particularly effective example was seen in a junior cycle lesson where the elements of short story writing were communicated to students through a video clip with a rap voice-over.
- Questioning was the main form of in-class assessment. Higher and lower-order questions were used effectively in most cases. Both global and directed questions were used. Where teachers gave students time to think about and develop answers, some very reflective contributions were shared with the class group. In some lessons, students reviewed each other's work to assess whether or not it met defined criteria. The very good practice of peer assessment could be extended and developed.
- The regularity of assessment of written work in some of the copybooks and records observed was inconsistent. It is recommended that the English department agree and implement a common approach for setting and grading homework. A variety of

assessment methods, such as oral assessment, self assessment and peer assessment, should be considered.

- The school is committed to improving literacy levels among students. Dedicated lessons for reading and vocabulary development, known as “Bookworm”, have been timetabled on a modular basis for all first-year students. The impact of this initiative will be evaluated to inform planning for next year’s programme. This very good practice is commended.
- In keeping with the national focus on literacy, teachers of English should be seen to be models of good language usage at all times. In this context, it is recommended that teachers ensure that all material produced by the English department meets the high standard required.
- State examination results provide valuable indicators of attainment and achievement. It is recommended that the English department systematically review and analyse results with a view to planning for development and improvement.

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

- Curricular provision for English is generally good. Apart from first year, all junior cycle classes have daily contact with the subject. It is recommended that first-year classes should also have a daily timetabled English lesson.
- All junior cycle classes are organised in mixed ability groups and teachers encourage students to study the subject at the highest appropriate level. Over the past four years higher-level uptake has increased significantly and attainment is good. The school is committed to continuing this trend. Parental consent is required for students who wish to change levels.
- At senior cycle, higher and ordinary-level classes are formed based on consultation with teachers, junior cycle achievement, student and parental inputs. All students are encouraged to develop their potential.
- Management supports teachers’ attendance at continuing professional development (CPD) events. Teachers should seek out subject specific CPD and should also consider joining the Irish National Organisation for Teachers of English (INOTE).
- Whole-school literacy strategies are being developed and the school is participating in literacy training initiatives for all teachers.
- The learning-support team provides for students with special educational needs through a combination of small group lessons, individual support and team teaching. Contacts with feeder primary schools, standardised tests, teacher referrals and the profiling of students as they progress through the school are used to identify learning needs and target the provision of teaching supports.

#### **PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

- The English department subject plan does not accurately describe the work and activities of the English teachers. It should be updated to remedy this. Learning outcomes, methodologies, resources and assessment strategies that are associated with each topic or content area should be identified. Action planning should be used to drive subject

development and targets should be consistent with the school's DEIS plan in the relevant areas.

- Currently, resources for the teaching of English are stored in the classrooms of individual teachers. It is recommended that a strategy for sharing electronic and hard copy resources be developed.
- The subject co-ordinator's role is largely administrative. Subject leadership and the development of opportunities for professional dialogue are areas that could also be considered.

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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. 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 of St Joseph's Secondary School is encouraged by the findings of this Inspection Report. The noting of good practice and the school's commitment to drive attainment levels is affirming of staff and pupils.

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

As an integral part of on-going school development planning, the school management and English department will carry out the recommendations of the Inspection Report.