Subject Inspection of English
REPORT

Enniscorthy Vocational College
Enniscorthy, County Wexford
Roll number: 71630K

Date of inspection: 6 May 2011
REPORT ON THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN ENGLISH

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

<table>
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<th>Dates of inspection</th>
<th>5 and 6 May 2011</th>
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**Inspection activities undertaken**
- Review of relevant documents
- Discussions with principal and teachers
- Interaction with students
- 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 often enthusiastic, and teachers endeavoured to make texts and topics accessible and relevant to students.
- A good level of learning was evident in most lessons, especially where students took ownership of their own learning, although there were some instances of low expectations and attainment.
- The Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP) is followed by specific class groups, some containing students whose profiles do not match JCSP criteria.
- Timetable provision for English is generous in almost all programmes, as is the allocation of teachers to the subject.
- English is generally well resourced although not all subject teachers have their own classrooms, and some classrooms are not stimulating learning environments.
- A subject plan with varying levels of detail has been drawn up; individual and collaborative planning was in evidence.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- Teaching and learning methods that extend students’ skills and develop their ability to work independently should be used wherever possible.
- The rationale for the formation of English class groups and the placement of students should be reviewed, and the possibility of team-teaching should be explored as an alternative to the formation of small class groups.
- The school’s full complement of classrooms should be used to ensure that teachers of English can develop stimulating learning environments for their students.
- Formal collaborative planning with a focus on skills development should be progressed.
INTRODUCTION
Enniscorthy Vocational College is a co-educational school with 414 post-primary students, serving the town and rural surroundings. An extensive building programme has been completed and fitting out of new classrooms is ongoing. The school participates in the Department’s DEIS initiative (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools) and also in the JCSP Demonstration Library Project. It offers the full range of post-primary curricular programmes and English is a core subject in all of them.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- Ten lessons were observed, covering all years, levels and programmes, and involving all members of the English department. Lessons were delivered competently, and most teachers communicated to the students an enthusiasm for the subject. With able groups, teachers used appropriately challenging material and searching questions. Accessible and engaging material was chosen for groups identified as less able. While this is good practice, teachers should approach the material in a way that ensures an appropriate level of challenge for all students.

- A wide range of student ability and attitude was noted. Students’ responses to questioning indicated generally good recall and understanding of prior learning. Many students responded well to more demanding questions, and posed questions themselves which showed higher-order thinking. Writing tasks in class also elicited a good level of engagement and application in many instances. However, student passivity or lack of application was noted at times. Improving student motivation is a whole-school issue requiring co-ordinated action, which should include classroom practices that emphasise students’ responsibility for their own learning.

- A variety of teaching methods including direct instruction, questioning and class discussion, were noted. Some productive well-managed tasks required students to work out solutions themselves. Approaches enabling students to be more independent learners should be taken wherever appropriate. While good whole-class discussion was observed, the tendency was for a few students to dominate it. A ‘think, pair, share’ approach could be taken to encourage less confident students to voice opinions. In some drama lessons, students read the parts with enjoyment, an approach worth developing.

- Some good developmental feedback on homework was noted in students’ copybooks, many of which showed evidence of progress. Leaving Certificate criteria of assessment should be shared with students and used in marking their work. The skills-based planning recommended below should help to identify the standards expected for substantial assignments and assessments. Variations in the volume of work and poor levels of homework completion by some students were noted. This issue also requires a co-ordinated whole-school response, especially in the light of its reported link to poor attendance.

- Teachers emphasised the accurate and imaginative use of language, using examples from texts, introducing rich vocabulary, and commending students for good expression of points. Class discussion should be used more deliberately as a preparation for extended writing, as a way of linking the development of speaking and writing skills.

- Classroom management was generally very good; teachers knew their students well, and exercised firm yet friendly control.
**SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT**

- Generous timetable provision for English is made in almost all programmes. A lesson per day is standard, with six lessons per week in second year and some JCSP class groups. Transition Year (TY) students have three single lessons of English per week, and the provision of a double lesson would give greater scope for student-centred active learning.

- Students are streamed on entry and one or two JCSP groups are formed. Some less able but diligent students with good attendance records have been placed in JCSP classes. These should not automatically be placed in a JCSP class and would benefit from working with able and equally diligent peers. The criteria for JCSP placement should be reviewed, as should the creation of discrete JCSP classes. The validity of streaming as a method of class formation should be examined, particularly in the light of the school’s educational attainment and progression targets within the DEIS initiative.

- The practice of forming very small English class groups to separate motivated students from less engaged peers is questionable. Team-teaching should be considered instead.

- The school’s assessment and homework policy is being revised. It should give realistic, measurable objectives with regard to students’ work and progress. A whole-school policy clearly stating assessment procedures and indicating the standards expected should provide a framework for subject departments’ assessment practices.

- The English department comprises eight teachers. Almost all teach English to at least two class groups, although none teaches the subject throughout the school and teachers of Leaving Certificate have little contact with junior cycle English. Deployment that enables some teachers to have substantial involvement in both junior and senior cycle would be preferable.

- The attractive library is used to encourage private reading for pleasure and is used regularly, especially by JCSP groups.

- Four teachers of English are established in their own classrooms, and base classrooms are being assigned to others. To support the development of stimulating learning environments, school management should expedite the assigning of newly available classrooms to teachers. A JCSP base room should also be considered.

**PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

- A good level of collaboration was noted. An English subject convenor is now in place and the role should be described in the subject plan. It would also be useful to record key points and decisions taken at subject department meetings.

- The English plan contains sound syllabus-based objectives for all programmes, and elements of action planning to deal with issues identified. The individual plans seen contained greater detail regarding texts and timeframes.

- Collaborative planning should now focus on agreeing learning outcomes, differentiated in line with the student cohort, setting out what students must, should and could know and be able to do in each year. Teaching methods aimed at developing students’ English skills should be included, along with appropriate forms of assessment.
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 evaluation, and the response of the board will be found in the appendix to this report.

*Published November 2011*
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, school management and teachers involved with this subject inspection wish to acknowledge the professional and courteous nature of the inspection.

Overall, the process was rewarding for all involved. However, there are a few issues we wish to highlight.

Having checked with the relevant guiding documentation with regards to the profiles of students included in the JCSP classes, we find all students match the criteria for inclusion. The fact that these students are progressing well and have good attendance is a direct result of the additional supports provided by inclusion in the programme.

While students are streamed, the vast majority of groupings are of mixed ability as a result of our policy of subject banding and comprehensive range of options. This will be reviewed in light of the recommendation made in this report.

At the time of inspection the completion of a significant building project was nearing its final fit out. Since then all subject teachers have been allocated a base room.

The schools JCSP library is used as a base room for JCSP students as and when required.