

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

**Subject Inspection of English
REPORT**

**St Columba's Comprehensive School
Glenties, County Donegal
Roll number: 81010J**

Date of inspection: 9 October 2014



**AN ROINN | DEPARTMENT OF
OIDEACHAIS | EDUCATION
AGUS SCILEANNA | AND SKILLS**

REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN ENGLISH

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

Dates of inspection	8, 9 October 2014
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 eight class periods• Examination of students' work• Feedback to principal, deputy principal and teachers

MAIN FINDINGS

- Good teaching and learning was observed in the majority of lessons, however, there was scope for development in a significant minority.
- Creativity and personal response, including the development of critical analysis skills, were encouraged in some lessons.
- Information and communication technology (ICT) was used creatively in many lessons to support different learning styles and to engage students.
- Students' journals and copybooks did not reflect a consistent approach to the assignment, recording and correction of homework.
- Teachers' enthusiasm and passion for their subject was communicated to their students.
- There is good provision for students who need extra support in English.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- Learning outcomes should be used to give a focus and structure to lessons and should be revisited to evaluate students' learning at the end of lessons.
 - Teachers should agree and implement a common approach to the assignment and assessment of homework to support students' development and to enable the tracking of their progress.
 - Common end-of-term and end-of-year exams with agreed assessment criteria should be set for all years and levels where practicable.
 - Subject planning should be further developed to link learning outcomes with specific assessment strategies, skills' development, methodologies and projected timeframes and should reflect changes to the specification and programme in junior cycle.
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INTRODUCTION

St Columba's Comprehensive School has a wide, mostly rural, catchment area. The current enrolment is 213 boys and 176 girls. The school provides the Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate programmes, and an optional Transition Year (TY) programme.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- Good teaching and learning was observed in the majority of lessons, however, there was scope for development in a significant minority.
- In most lessons, the focus or purpose of the lesson was shared with students. However, in some lessons, a more direct connection between students' activities and the lesson objective was needed. Learning outcomes should be used to give a focus and structure to lessons and should be revisited to evaluate students' learning at the end of lessons.
- A range of methodologies was observed including group and pair work. In some lessons, however, there were few independent or collaborative learning opportunities for students. Lesson planning should provide for a balance between teacher exposition and active learning methodologies.
- Creativity and personal response, including the development of critical analysis skills, were encouraged in some lessons. This is highly commended.
- Students generally engaged well with classroom activities and tasks. In some instances, further support was needed to facilitate learning. All students should be enabled to attain the required outcomes through carefully planned differentiation. Strategies could include scaffolding, provision of clear and specific instructions and sharing of success criteria.
- Effective questioning was observed where teachers encouraged students to explore and expand their knowledge. Best practice was seen where answers were fully developed and students extended their oral skills.
- A wide variety of resources was observed and ICT was used creatively in many lessons to support different learning styles and to engage students. This is highly commended.
- Interpersonal relations were good and students were well behaved. Classroom displays celebrated students' work and teachers communicated their enthusiasm and passion for the subject.
- Some good formative and affirming feedback was observed in students' copybooks. To derive maximum benefit from developmental commentary, strategies could be adopted to direct and support students' engagement with feedback.
- Homework was given in most of the lessons observed. However, students' journals and copybooks did not reflect a consistent approach to the assignment, recording and correction of homework. A common approach to homework should be agreed and implemented with the objective of supporting students' development and the tracking of their progress.
- Literacy development was supported by teachers through a variety of approaches including the use of key words and the explanation of relevant vocabulary. However, in some lessons, students were not afforded sufficient time to engage with and develop a deeper understanding of subject-specific vocabulary. Strategies for literacy development should reflect the need for practice and repeated use to embed new vocabulary.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- Provision for the subject is very good at senior cycle with all Leaving Certificate classes having six lessons each week including one double period. Management is committed to extending junior cycle provision in line with best practice guidelines of daily contact with the subject.
- There is good provision for students who need extra support in English. Assessment, teachers' vigilance, parental referral and student self-referral ensure that there is timely identification of needs at both junior and senior cycle. English teachers are central to the provision of learning support in the school.
- First-year classes are taught in mixed ability groups. At the start of second year, higher-level and ordinary-level class groups are formed based on the results of first-year exams, continuous assessment and teachers' professional judgement. Commendably, students are encouraged to take the subject at the highest appropriate level. To support the development of all students' potential, consideration should be given to continuing with mixed-ability class groups throughout the junior cycle.
- TY students are taught in mixed ability groups. In fifth year, higher-level and ordinary-level class groups are based on Junior Certificate results, teacher's professional judgement, students' progress and parental wishes.
- Common end-of-year exams are set for first-year students and some other class groups. To support the monitoring of progress and profiling of students, common end-of-term and end-of-year exams with agreed assessment criteria should be set for all years and levels where practicable.
- Students' progress is reported to parents through two written reports each year and annual parent-teacher meetings. The school journal also provides teachers and parents with a channel for daily communication.
- The English teachers, all of whom are qualified, have a wealth of experience and subject-specific knowledge. School management promotes the good practice of ensuring that all teachers rotate between levels and programmes from year to year to support capacity building and continuing skills' development.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- The English subject folder reflects a well-organised department. Minutes of meetings are recorded and information is shared at formal and informal meetings. Sharing of teaching resources could be further facilitated through the use of the school's ICT system.
- The subject plan describes the curriculum content and learning outcomes for each year in each programme. Methodologies and approaches to assessment are also referenced. Individual schemes of work provide more detail including time-specific information. Further development of the plan should focus on linking learning outcomes with specific assessment strategies, skills' development, methodologies and projected timeframes and should reflect changes to the specification and programme in junior cycle.
- Some good practice was observed in individual teachers' record keeping where homework assignments and dates of completion were noted. This practice should be

extended so that all teachers keep records that support the monitoring and evaluation of students' progress.

- Very good practice has been initiated to promote the analysis of state examination results with a view to informing planning and target setting. This should continue to be developed.

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 of the school was given an opportunity to comment on the findings and recommendations of the report; the board chose to accept the report without response.