

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

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

**St Caimin's Community School**  
**Shannon, County Clare**  
**Roll number: 91447I**

**Date of inspection: 14 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**

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**INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION**

<b>Dates of inspection</b>	13 and 14 September 2011
<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 eight class periods</li><li>• Examination of students' work</li><li>• Feedback to principal and teachers</li></ul>

**MAIN FINDINGS**

- Good interpersonal relations exist between teachers and students.
- Overall, teaching was good in the lessons observed, with examples of excellent practices in some lessons. Learning ranged from adequate to very good in the lessons observed.
- There is good whole-school support for the subject. Further developing the school library would be a very useful whole-school literacy support.
- While progress has been made in subject department planning, this is an area where there is still scope for development.

**MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Learning would be enhanced by the utilisation of more active learning strategies in classes, by extending team teaching arrangements to meet the needs of particular cohorts, and by more widespread promotion of personal reading through planned year-group initiatives.
  - Subject department planning for English would be enhanced by regular, planned teacher sharing of effective teaching methods and by the development of departmental assessment for learning (AfL) practices.
  - The existing programme for first-year English should be revised in order to provide a consistent, skills-focused experience for students.
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## **INTRODUCTION**

St Caimin's Community School is a co-educational school with an enrolment of 700 students representing a diversity of cultural backgrounds. The school offers the following programmes: the Junior Certificate, Transition Year (TY), the established Leaving Certificate, and the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA).

## **TEACHING AND LEARNING**

- Overall, teaching was good in the lessons observed, with examples of excellent practices in some lessons.
- Learning ranged from adequate to very good in the lessons visited. Weaknesses were observed where teacher-talk predominated, where little differentiation to support students with additional educational needs was apparent, and where students' understanding of tasks was not checked before allowing them to proceed.
- Good interpersonal relations exist between teachers and students. Very positive teacher affirmation of students was observed in some classes.
- In the lessons observed, students' literacy skills were being well supported by print-rich classroom environments, by some teachers' explicit modelling of draft/redraft writing processes, and by the integration of language tasks with literary study.
- It is commended that a programme to teach spelling strategies and to encourage students' study of keywords is being developed for first-year students. The goals, process, and evaluation measures of that initiative should be devised and documented to ensure consistent and effective delivery, and to facilitate analysis of its impact on students' learning.
- There is good communication between the teachers of English and the co-ordinators of literacy and resource support. If management could extend team teaching arrangements to meet the needs of particular cohorts, then that could help embed approaches supporting students with additional educational needs into mainstream planning and practice, benefiting both students and teachers.
- A number of members of the department have Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) qualifications or experience. Language support is provided to those English as an Additional Language (EAL) students identified as experiencing particular difficulties. Collaboration between the support teacher and the mainstream teachers is reported in relation to those students' needs. To build on this, it is advised that further EAL-specific resources and methodologies be sourced and implemented.
- Homework was being set and monitored and written comments of varying depth were being given in the sample of copies reviewed. It is recommended that the department share practices that have been developed by individuals before agreeing a shared formative feedback policy and process for supporting students' writing development.

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

- Whole-school supports for English include timetable provision, mixed-ability class formation in first year, teacher-based classrooms, information and communication

technology (ICT) equipment in classrooms, and the school's shared map drive that enables electronic sharing of teaching resources.

- Established practice in organising class groups of students preparing to sit higher-level examinations has been to group them on ability, creating top and middle higher-level classes. It is recommended that this method of grouping be reviewed. The mixing of students aspiring to higher-level but who are of different abilities within that group is recommended, to support the development of their critical thinking and responding skills.
- Good progress has been made in organising, covering, and modestly increasing library stock. Preparing book boxes for different year groups and taking them to classes would be another means of promoting personal reading. In the medium to long-term, it is recommended that school management explore possible ways of opening the library for lunchtime borrowing and research, and of enhancing the stock and organisation of the library's texts.

#### **PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

- Teachers had engaged in individual planning for all lessons visited.
- Strengths of the current subject department plan for English include a strong focus on integrating different genre-specific writing tasks with the study of literary texts, some preparation of thematic units of work, and ongoing analysis of students' Leaving Certificate examination results in English.
- Subject department meetings appear to have focussed on logistical planning to date, with no formal inputs on teaching methods taking place. As a result, the meetings have not yet brought about systematic communication of the individual professional expertise of members to the wider group. Consequently, it is recommended that at the beginning of each subject department meeting, time should be specifically allocated for a "show and tell" input, where individuals would be asked to present a resource or strategy they use in their practice or have gained from continuing professional development (CPD) or from further study.
- It is recommended that the key learning outcomes and skills for development in each year of study be identified through subject department discussion. Those learning outcomes and skills can then be used as the framework for redrafting the programmes of work for the different year groups. In particular, the first-year programme should be reviewed, in consultation with the additional educational needs department, to provide a consistent, skills-focused foundation for students.

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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 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.