

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**

**Department of Education and Skills**

**Subject Inspection of English  
REPORT**

**Loreto Secondary School  
Kilkenny, County Kilkenny  
Roll number: 61580P**

**Date of inspection: 9 May 2012**



**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>	8 and 9 May 2012
<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 twelve class periods</li><li>• Examination of students' work</li><li>• Feedback to principal and teachers</li></ul>

**MAIN FINDINGS**

- Teaching of good quality was observed in most lessons, and teachers facilitated learning effectively.
- Productive co-operative learning activities were widely used, and students showed good application and engagement in their learning.
- Provision for English on the timetable and through the effective deployment of teachers is very good overall.
- While the English department has many good collaborative practices, there is scope to develop subject and programme plans.

**MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS**

- To further develop the good practice observed, the English department should encourage students to form, articulate and defend their own responses to texts.
  - The English department should work collaboratively towards the development of clearly stated learning outcomes for each year, and of a broad and challenging Transition Year programme.
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## **INTRODUCTION**

Loreto Secondary School is located in Kilkenny City and has an enrolment of 805 female students. The school offers a wide range of programmes to serve its large intake, including an optional Transition Year programme. An extensive building project is in progress in the school and at the time of the evaluation some base classrooms were not available to teachers.

## **TEACHING AND LEARNING**

- Twelve lessons were observed, covering all years, levels and programmes, and involving all members of the English department. The quality of teaching was good overall, and some very successful approaches to student learning were observed. Teachers were open to suggestions for additions to current good practice.
- A variety of teaching and learning methods was observed, and those where the teacher facilitated learning were most in evidence. Direct whole-class instruction did not predominate.
- Teachers had prepared very good materials and resources, often using the data projector effectively to present them to the class. While anthology textbooks were used quite judiciously in junior cycle lessons, teachers should encourage students to focus on the poem or story itself and to approach illustrations and commentary critically.
- Activities that involved students working together were used productively in almost all lessons. Co-operative learning strategies were most effective where students were clear at the outset on the objective of the task and the key terms or concepts involved. Some very good pre-task and pre-reading activities were noted, including the highlighting of new or difficult vocabulary. Such activities are especially enabling in mixed-ability classes.
- Feedback from group work was well managed and generally displayed considerable perceptiveness and critical acumen. At times, however, teachers accepted an imprecise or incomplete response and adjusted it themselves, when it would have been more beneficial to elicit the necessary correction or detail from the students.
- Many lessons involved revision work appropriate to the time of year. These were particularly constructive where teachers planned and sequenced the learning activities so that students could build on and consolidate earlier learning.
- Personal response journals were used in a number of the class groups, an approach in keeping with the objectives of the English syllabuses and with the development of students as reflective learners. However, the practice of giving notes at the end of the lesson was observed. It would be worthwhile for the English department to discuss practice with regard to such notes, particularly in the light of the chief examiner's reports which affirm the centrality of personal response.
- There was a good emphasis on building students' vocabulary and accuracy in language use. Practice was effective where words and constructions were considered in context. However, instances of uncontextualised drill-type exercises were noted and should be avoided.
- Students' copybooks and folders were carefully maintained and contained a substantial volume of work. High standards of application and presentation were evident. Teachers provided an excellent level of written developmental comment. The English department

could usefully discuss criteria of assessment which could be shared with students, to build on the commendable assessment-for-learning approaches already in place.

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

- Very good timetable provision is made for English in almost all years. The possibility of offering a fifth lesson in first year could be investigated, to provide optimal opportunities for first-year students to practise key skills and reinforce learning.
- English is taught in base class groups, which are of mixed ability, throughout the junior cycle. This practice is appropriate to the student cohort and supports high expectations of student application and attainment. Most students take Junior Certificate English at higher level, and outcomes are very good.
- Participation in the optional Transition Year (TY) programme is high. Modules in related areas such as drama augment the three lessons per week for English. The Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programme is offered every other year and good provision is made for it.
- Concurrent timetabling of English in fifth and sixth year was recently introduced. This facilitates the formation of separate higher and ordinary level class groups. While uptake of higher level is very high, the formation of a discrete ordinary level class each year is desirable, as it would allow an appropriate programme to be planned and delivered.
- The current English department comprises eight teachers. The pattern of deployment is generally very good in that the majority teach the subject to at least four class groups, thus supporting the delivery of the subject as a continuum of knowledge and skills development from first year to sixth.
- Information and communication technology was widely available and well used. Students are encouraged to use the library. A good range of co-curricular activities, including drama and debating, extends students' experience of English.

#### **PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

- There was evidence of good collegiality, sharing of resources, and professional dialogue over the years among the established teachers. However, subject department structures need to be robust enough to accommodate changes in personnel and curriculum, and to ensure good communication within the whole department.
- A system of rotating co-ordinator is in place to maintain the subject planning folder and convene meetings. Meetings take place quite regularly; minutes should be filed chronologically. It would also be useful to record discussions and decisions on issues other than organisational matters. It is recommended that the subject department discuss and agree the rotating co-ordinator role, to reinforce its developmental aspect and give all teachers an opportunity to lead subject development.
- The subject plans set out overall aims and objectives, and include schemes of work for each year. Junior cycle students experience a broad range of texts over the three years, and language and literature are integrated appropriately. Further development of the subject plans would provide an opportunity for teachers to discuss and agree the desired learning outcomes for each junior cycle year and to state them in real and measurable terms.

- Planning for English in the senior cycle shows strengths and weaknesses. Good programmes of work have been planned for Leaving Certificate, especially higher level, and for LCA. However, the plan for TY lacked detail. The English department should collaborate to produce a wide-ranging and challenging TY programme.

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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 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.

*Published November 2012.*

# **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 welcomes this very positive report that validates the work of our teachers who create an environment in which our students can show 'good application and engagement in their learning'. Loreto Secondary School will continue to support the continued development of this positive learning environment.

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

The Board also welcomes the very constructive suggestions contained within the report and through collaborative subject planning is working towards the implementation of same as appropriate.