An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection of English
REPORT

Saint Joseph’s Secondary School
Castlebar, County Mayo
Roll number: 64590K

Date of inspection: 30 March 2011
REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN ENGLISH

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dates of inspection</th>
<th>29 and 30 March 2011</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inspection activities undertaken</td>
<td>Observation of teaching and learning during ten class periods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Review of relevant documents</td>
<td>Examination of students’ work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion with principal and teachers</td>
<td>Feedback to principal and teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interaction with students</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

MAIN FINDINGS

- There were significant strengths in the quality of teaching and learning observed. Lessons were creative, well structured and engaging.
- The focus on cooperative learning led to active and collaborative learning and gave all students a voice.
- Deep learning was promoted through the interrogation of texts and the development of critical thinking skills.
- The four key skills of reading, writing, speaking and listening were developed and there was frequent assignment and very good correction of written work.
- The success of students in state examinations in English is evidence of the very good work and high expectations of the English department and the success of the manner of student placement.
- There is very good collaboration and planning among English teachers.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- Teachers should review the learning outcomes with students at the end of each lesson.
- Teachers should be timetabled with the same group from first year until third year and be informed in advance of the beginning of the school year about the class groups they will be teaching.
- The school library should be developed and teachers should teach a novel in each year of junior cycle or else two novels and two dramas over the three years.
- The SEN department should be afforded the opportunity to formally address the staff about SEN teaching strategies at staff meetings and the draft SEN policy should be ratified.
INTRODUCTION

Saint Joseph’s Secondary School is an all-girls’ school that serves the town of Castlebar and its environs. 415 students are currently enrolled in the school. As well as the traditional Junior and Leaving Certificate programmes, the school also offers the Transition Year (TY) programme (optional) and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP). 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.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- Teachers were creative, enthusiastic and committed to their students, school and subject. All lessons were very well structured, had an appropriate pace and were linked with prior and future learning. High quality teaching and learning was observed.
- The aims of the lessons were either implicitly or explicitly stated. It is recommended that the learning outcomes of each lesson be reviewed by teachers at the end of the lesson to ensure awareness of learning among students.
- An effective mix of whole-class teaching and independent learning opportunities served the students very well. There was a strong focus on cooperative learning in all lessons. This was well managed, gave all students a voice, developed students’ listening and speaking skills and led to very good discussion. Individual attention was given as needed.
- Questioning of students was very good; a mix of lower and higher-order questions was posed. Directed questions ensured that all students were included in the lessons.
- Set tasks led to very good student engagement and there was deep interrogation of texts. Critical analysis skills were developed and students’ personal responses were also encouraged. Students were clearly learning and making very good progress. Very good resources, including information and communication technology, were effectively used to enhance learning.
- There was a very good focus on developing students’ writing skills. Students’ copies and journals indicated frequent assignment of written work in all genres. This work was well corrected and students received very good feedback on their work. Other assessment for learning strategies, including self-assessment and the sharing of criteria of assessment with students, were sometimes in evidence.
- The teaching of language and literature was integrated, and new vocabulary was also integrated into lessons.
- There were very good interpersonal relationships in all lessons. Students were enthusiastic, focused, well behaved and worked well together.
- Key quotes, students’ work and relevant posters were on display in base classrooms, which created a stimulating learning environment.
- The large uptake of higher level in Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate English state examinations and the success of students in these examinations are indications of the very good work and high expectations of the English department. The department reviews results annually.
SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- Provision of English lessons is good; first years have four lessons weekly, second, third and fifth years have five lessons weekly and sixth years have six lessons weekly. TY students have three lessons weekly, as well as Speech and Drama, and a Creative Writing module.

- The placement of students in junior and senior cycle is clearly working. Final choice of level is not made by students until after their ‘mock’ examinations.

- Full concurrence is not provided on the timetable for the current fifth years; management has stated that this will not recur.

- Teaching resources are good; the department has completed an inventory of resources and has a storage area for common resources. The school library is currently used as a classroom. A reading area should be developed to encourage reading and promote the English department’s reading policy.

- Teachers are appropriately deployed and rotated among levels. Teachers should be timetabled with the same English group from first year through to third year. Teachers should also know in advance of the beginning of the school year what class groups they will be teaching.

- A large range of co-curricular activities provides students with the opportunity to develop the skills learned in English and to foster creativity.

- Teachers have availed of a range of continuing professional development (CPD), are members of the subject association and share ideas learned from CPD. A range of school-based in-school in-service has also been provided.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- English is very well coordinated and the subject has a high profile in the school. The coordinator role should be rotated among teachers.

- There is very good collaboration among English teachers. Formal meetings are held twice a year and there are also frequent informal meetings. Minutes of meetings reflect good discussion and a review is carried out at the end of each year.

- The English plan is very good and is clearly laid out in terms of learning outcomes, teaching methods and resources. For ease of review the plan should be electronic. The plan allows for some elements of teacher choice of texts but ensures that if students change levels they are not disadvantaged. Where students are withdrawn for additional support classes, the text studied should be the same in the base class. The full range of genre is covered in all years.

- The English department has developed a reading policy and a number of strategies to encourage reading among students. To build on this good practice, it is recommended that all teachers teach a novel in each year of junior cycle or else two novels and two dramas across the three years.

- There is good liaison between the SEN department and the English department. The SEN department should be afforded the opportunity to formally address the staff at staff
meetings about SEN teaching strategies. The school’s draft SEN policy should be ratified by the board of management.

- Formal examinations take place at Christmas and in the summer and common examinations are provided across year groups.

The draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation were discussed with the principal and subject teachers at the conclusion of the evaluation.