

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection of English
REPORT

Loreto College
Swords, County Dublin
Roll number: 60810B

Date of inspection: 5 February 2013



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**

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

Dates of inspection	4, 5 February 2013
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 six class periods• Examination of students' work• Interview with subject co-ordinator• Feedback to principal and teachers

MAIN FINDINGS

- The overall quality of teaching and learning observed was very good.
- Very effective classroom management facilitated students' engagement with learning.
- Some exemplary strategies for differentiation were observed.
- The majority of teachers provide extensive formative and developmental feedback to students.
- A highly commendable level of collegiality is evidenced by the range of very good electronic and other shared resources that have been developed by teachers in the English department.
- Very good individual planning was evident in all lessons.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- The good practice of sharing learning objectives with students should be further developed to focus on learning outcomes.
 - Active learning methodologies should be developed further.
 - All year groups should have formal daily contact with the subject.
 - The subject department plan should be developed to specify the learning outcomes, methodologies, resources and assessment strategies for each topic or content area.
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INTRODUCTION

Loreto College, Swords, is a voluntary secondary, non fee-paying school for girls, with a current enrolment of 630. The school offers the Junior Certificate, Leaving Certificate, and an optional Transition Year (TY) programme.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- Six lessons were observed during the evaluation. The overall quality of teaching and learning in the lessons observed was very good.
- In all lessons, the learning objectives were shared with the students at the start of the lesson. In the majority of lessons, these were revisited either during, or at the end of the lesson, or both. This very good practice should be further developed by focusing on learning outcomes that are expressed in terms of what the student should know or will be able to do by the end of the lesson.
- Group and pair work were used very effectively in most of the lessons observed. However, the physical arrangement of groups in some lessons did not facilitate easy peer communication. Teachers should ensure that students can participate fully in the groups to which they have been assigned. Active learning methodologies should be developed further to facilitate student-centred learning.
- A very effective range of classroom activities engaged students in learning. In one lesson, the impromptu dramatisation of a poem enhanced all students' comprehension and enjoyment. In another lesson, students used factual evidence that was presented in a video clip to predict the theme and to imagine the tone of a related poem.
- Questioning was successfully used to assess learning. Higher-order and lower-order questions facilitated seamless differentiation. Students responded willingly in all lessons and initiated questioning in some lessons.
- Classroom management was very effective and discipline was sensitively maintained. Most classrooms had good displays of student work that contributed to attractive and stimulating learning environments. Interpersonal relationships are very good with mutual respect between teachers and students evident at all times.
- Extensive formative assessment, in keeping with the principles of assessment for learning (AfL), was noted in written comments on students' work. This is commended. It is suggested that teachers devise strategies to ensure that students reflect on and learn from the feedback. An agreed practice for the recording of assessment outcomes should be established within the English department. This would support all teachers' record keeping and assessment practices.
- School-wide literacy strategies, such as "Drop Everything and Read" and "Book in Bag", have been adopted by the school and are actively supported by the English department. It is highly commendable that the efficacy of the selected strategies will be assessed towards the end of the school year by re-evaluating students' reading habits. In all classes, teachers focused on literacy through the modelling of sophisticated but accessible language and the development of students' vocabulary.
- An active and contextualised approach to numeracy was evident in most lessons. In one lesson, the teacher encouraged students to calculate the age of a given author; in another,

the students worked out the duration of an event that featured in a poem. This very good practice is highly commended.

- High expectations are set for all students. Assessment outcomes reflect the commitment of the school to developing each student's potential.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- Curricular provision is very good across all years and programmes. Senior cycle classes have daily contact with the subject. Junior cycle classes have four lessons each week; this should be increased for optimal provision. Drama modules, which complement English, are timetabled for first, second, TY and fifth-year students.
- Junior cycle and TY students are taught in mixed-ability groups. At senior cycle, higher and ordinary-level classes are formed. The criteria for class formation at this level include the student's motivation and achievement throughout the junior cycle. Concurrent timetabling allows for mobility between levels. Uptake of higher-level English is good and teachers encourage students to develop their potential.
- The English department has access to a very good range of resources. A subject-specific folder on the school computer server is used to share resources. The school is developing a virtual learning environment to support teaching and learning. Non ICT resources are stored in a central location.
- The school's vibrant and welcoming library is run by in-school staff as well as student and parent volunteers. Reading is actively encouraged through library-based activities which complement the school literacy strategy. The school should consider developing links with the local public library.
- Teachers, all of whom have subject-specific qualifications, rotate across levels and programmes thus facilitating the sharing of knowledge and experience. The school is encouraged to ensure that teachers have significant contact time with the subject as this provides necessary continuity for students and contributes to the development of teachers' skills and expertise.
- Management encourages and enables teachers to attend continuing professional development (CPD) activities. The English department should consider joining the Irish National Organisation for Teachers of English (INOTE), and seek out opportunities for subject specific CPD.
- A considerable range of co-curricular and extracurricular activities is provided by English teachers including theatre trips, debating, and drama. This extends and enhances students' learning opportunities.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- Subject-department planning is supported through timetabled and minuted meetings. Informal meetings also take place. The subject coordinator actively facilitates the sharing of resources and good practice. The comprehensive subject plan identifies all aspects of the syllabus and programme requirements. This should be further developed to identify specific learning outcomes, methodologies, resources and assessment strategies that are associated with each topic or content area.

- All lessons observed were very well planned. Interesting and stimulating resources were used. In one junior cycle lesson a teacher had prepared differentiated handouts to ensure that all students would be able to undertake a homework task. This is highly commendable.
- The subject folder contains evidence of good reflective practice, including outcomes from annual subject reviews and analysis of state examination results. Strategies for reflective teaching and learning, and planning for cross-curricular development have been initiated. This is highly commendable.

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; a response was not received from the board.