An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection of English
REPORT

Saint Joseph’s College
Nun’s Island, Galway
Roll number: 62960H

Date of inspection: 11 May 2011
REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN ENGLISH

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

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<th>10 and 11 May 2011</th>
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<td><strong>Observation of teaching and learning during 9 class periods</strong></td>
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<td>• Review of relevant documents</td>
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<td>• Discussion with principal and teachers</td>
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MAIN FINDINGS

- The quality of teaching and learning was good in many lessons; in a few cases it was not clear that students were learning.

- Lessons were best when student participation was encouraged and facilitated. The tendency for too much teacher talk in some lessons led to passivity among students.

- Most teachers placed a strong emphasis on the development of writing skills; an appropriate range of work was assigned and this was generally well corrected.

- Students’ work was well maintained and teachers generally kept a good profile of students’ work and progress.

- Collaborative planning was poor.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- More opportunities should be provided for students to engage in active learning, including cooperative learning.

- There should be greater collaboration among the English department so that students follow common integrated programmes of work and sit common examinations.

- A discrete ordinary-level class should be established early in fifth year and greater efforts should be made in lessons to accommodate the range of student abilities through differentiated teaching methods.

- The practice of using one English lesson each week for silent reading in some years of junior cycle should be reviewed.
INTRODUCTION

St Joseph’s College, Galway is an all-boys secondary school with an enrolment of 788 students. The school provides the Junior Certificate, Leaving Certificate and Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme. There is no Transition Year available in the school.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- While there was good quality teaching and learning observed in many lessons, it was not clear in some instances that students were learning.
- Good links were often made between the theme of the lesson and the students’ own lives, which put learning in context.
- The lessons that were most effective were those where active learning was promoted through discussion, and where teachers asked higher-order questions which explored in depth the topic being taught, as opposed to eliciting surface meanings. In these lessons, it was clear that students acquired new knowledge as the lesson progressed; they were more confident in answering questions and were able to analyse texts and give reasoned answers. Full class participation was generally achieved when questions were directed at individual students rather than asked globally.
- In some lessons far too much teacher talk and little student participation led to passive and disengaged students. Teachers should ask questions of students as opposed to giving meanings, and look for initial responses before line by line exploration of texts.
- While the use of PowerPoint presentations in many lessons helped visual learners and usually heightened student interest, its overuse throughout some lessons contributed to student passivity.
- Lessons moved along at a swift pace which was appropriate for more able students but there is a need for teachers to differentiate their teaching to ensure that less able students are being catered for. Co-operative learning should be encouraged so that students of different abilities can support and learn from each other. This would also enable more active learning.
- Most teachers placed a strong emphasis on the development of writing skills and there was evidence of assignment of an appropriate range of work. In most lessons, very good developmental feedback was given to students on their work and clear marking criteria were used. However, in some lessons only a grade was given or work was ticked. In these cases students received no written direction on where they needed to improve. More developmental feedback is recommended.
- Students’ work was well maintained and presented and most teachers kept a good profile of students’ work and progress.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- The provision of four English lessons in each year of junior cycle is minimal and management should endeavour to increase provision to five lessons. Provision of five lessons at senior cycle is good. Timetabling of English is good with concurrence provided at senior cycle and lessons evenly distributed across the week. In addition, another teacher is sometimes timetabled alongside English to support students with particular
needs. Consideration should be given to using this teacher to team teach alongside the class teacher, as all teachers should take responsibility for supporting all students in mainstream lessons.

- Students are placed in mixed-ability class groups throughout junior cycle and in fifth year of senior cycle. One ordinary-level class is then created in sixth year. Results in state examinations give evidence of a very high uptake of higher-level English and of students achieving very well at this level. Results at ordinary level are not as good. Consideration should be given to creating one ordinary-level class at senior cycle from early in fifth year to give further support to students wishing to study English at this level.

- There is good provision of resources for English. There are data projectors in all classrooms. A school library is now open and is well organised and popular among students.

- There is good coordination of special educational needs (SEN) and a strong awareness by this department of students with particular needs. The SEN coordinator should be provided with an opportunity to address all staff about teaching strategies for students with particular needs. In addition, as there was little evidence of differentiation in lessons observed, management should organise in-service for staff on differentiation.

- English teachers are appropriately deployed.

- The frequency of formal assessments is appropriate.

**Planning and Preparation**

- The English subject plan broadly outlines a programme content for each year group but individual teacher plans varied significantly from the subject plan. It is recommended that all English teachers collaborate to develop common programmes of work in terms of stipulating the same topics and learning outcomes that each year group should cover. This would also facilitate withdrawal for learning support and the development of common examinations and would lead to greater security for students in terms of knowing that teachers were broadly covering the same topics.

- Different practices prevail in relation to choice of topics and texts. It is recommended that all genres be taught in each year of junior cycle. All first years should study a novel, second years should study a novel and play and third years should study another novel and/or play. In addition, teachers should integrate the teaching of language and literature so that various sections of the syllabus can be taught together.

- The position of English coordinator should be rotated among all English teachers. Records of teacher meetings show discussion on organisational matters and it is now recommended that teachers use these meetings to discuss collaborative planning for each year group and to share teaching methodologies.

- Many teachers use one lesson period a week in some years of junior cycle for silent reading by students. Students reported that teachers often use this period to correct copies. If silent reading is to be part of the programme of work, teachers should support students in their reading during the lesson period and ensure that a clear outcome is planned and achieved. Given that there are just four lessons each week in each year of junior cycle, silent reading for one period a week for the entire year should be reviewed.
The draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation were discussed with the deputy 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.

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