Subject Inspection of English
REPORT

St. Louis Secondary School
Monaghan, County Monaghan
Roll number: 64820B

Date of inspection: 12 December 2013
REPORT  
ON  
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN ENGLISH  

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION  

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<th>Dates of inspection</th>
<th>11, 12 December 2013</th>
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<td><strong>Inspection activities undertaken</strong></td>
<td><strong>Observation of teaching and learning during eight class periods</strong></td>
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<td>• Review of relevant documents</td>
<td>• Meeting with subject convenors</td>
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<td>• Discussion with principal and teachers</td>
<td>• Examination of students’ work</td>
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MAIN FINDINGS  
• The quality of teaching and learning was good overall and examples of very good practice were observed in many lessons.  
• The quality of preparation for lessons was very good in almost all cases and of particular merit was the range of resources used to engage learners.  
• While there is a good focus on reading and writing skills, planning for the development of speaking and listening is an area for development.  
• Expectations of students are high, attainment is good and uptake of higher-level English is very good.  
• Students participated actively in classroom tasks and are very well supported in their learning.  
• Assessment for learning is practised through questioning and high-quality, written teacher feedback but there is scope for development of peer and self-assessment.  

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS  
• Teaching and learning in the areas of speaking and listening should be developed.  
• All students should compose in a wide variety of genres to become more effective users of language.  
• A full range of assessment modes should be developed in order to place greater emphasis on the student’s role in her own learning.  
• Planning for the implementation of English within the junior cycle framework should now be regarded as a top priority.  

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INTRODUCTION

St Louis Secondary School, Monaghan, is an all-girls voluntary secondary school with a current enrolment of 466 students. It provides the Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate programmes, the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme, an optional Transition Year (TY) programme, and the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programme.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- The quality of teaching and learning was good overall and examples of very good practice were observed in many lessons.
- Lessons were very well prepared and purposeful. Very good resources such as film clips and handouts were made ready in advance. Question sheets and frames were designed to scaffold student learning.
- The learning intention was clear and explicit in all lessons. Very good practice was observed where the planned learning outcomes were written on the board or on a slide. In all lessons, the outcomes should be revisited at the end of the lesson to ensure that learning has been achieved by all students as an assessment-for-learning strategy.
- Almost all lessons were well structured and paced to maximise learning. In a very small number of cases, the lesson plan was not well executed so that meaningful learning was not achieved. Lesson planning needs to be reviewed in such cases.
- Comprehension and analysis of texts encountered were central to lessons observed and thorough work is being done. The teaching of writing skills also featured but to a lesser extent. For example, in one lesson, students collaboratively explored the genre of letter writing. To build on this, all students should learn to compose in a wide variety of genres in order to become more effective users of language.
- There is scope for developing teaching and learning in the areas of speaking and listening. There should be more time for structured student discussion, students should be encouraged to express personal views, make presentations to their peers and they should have sufficient thinking-time to answer questions in full sentences.
- High expectations were set in all lessons and attainment is good. In this regard, the work being done by the LCA class is highly commended.
- Presentation and maintenance of folders and copybooks were both very good in classes visited.
- The balance of teacher input and student activity was good in most lessons. Students participated actively in learning, for example through answering questions and through group and pair work. This is commended. To develop this good practice, the full potential of co-operative learning techniques should be explored to develop specific, named skills.
- In a minority of lessons, there was too much teacher intervention and direction and this should be reviewed. Students should be encouraged to become independent, creative learners and thinkers.
- In the best lessons, there was a good balance between lower-order questions aimed at information retrieval and searching questions designed to provoke deeper reflection and analysis and this is very commendable.
• Classroom management was excellent and there was a warm rapport between students and teachers in all lessons.
• The environment was enriched with stimulating resources to support learning.
• Assessment for learning was practised through questioning and high-quality teacher feedback in copybooks.
• There is a good focus on literacy development through vocabulary acquisition. Classrooms featured a word wall. Understanding of words was checked regularly. A literacy section features in the first-year English house examination, a good reading programme operates through the school library and reading for pleasure is encouraged.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT
• Whole-school support for the subject is very good. Timetabling allocation is very good with five lessons in each year of the junior cycle, four in TY, four in the LCA programme and five in the Leaving Certificate programme.
• First-year and TY students are organised in mixed-ability groupings. In years two and three, five and six, students are placed in discrete higher-level and ordinary-level groups. Uptake of higher-level English is very good. A number of measures are in place where students wish to change level and these are designed to support students and raise expectations.
• Resources including Information and Communication Technology (ICT) resources are very good. A member of the English department has specific responsibility for library development and very good work has been done.
• A very committed team of five teachers delivers English with additional teaching being provided by two other teachers. The majority are subject specialists. There is very good engagement with continuing professional development (CPD).

PLANNING AND PREPARATION
• There is a well-established planning structure and the role of subject convenor rotates.
• A plan for English has been developed and there are detailed schemes of work for each year group. The assessment section of the subject plan should be developed further. Criteria and protocols for peer and self-assessment should be developed and there should be a greater emphasis on the student’s role in her own learning.
• There is a good TY English plan which focuses on skills development and learning to be achieved.
• In the context of future development, work should now begin on the junior cycle plan beginning with the first-year student intake of September 2014 and based on the published English specification. Account should be taken of both the indicative and prescribed lists of texts that are now available on the Junior Cycle for Teachers website.
• Record keeping is generally good.
• Examination outcomes are analysed and the team should consider how such information can feed into future planning for the subject.
The draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation were discussed with the principal, 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.