

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

**Subject Inspection of English
REPORT**

**Greenhills College
Greenhills, Dublin 12
Roll number: 70130I**

Date of inspection: 25 November 2011



**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	24 and 25 November 2011
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• Feedback to principal and teachers

MAIN FINDINGS

- The quality of teaching in all the lessons observed was good or very good, and some excellent practice was noted.
- There was solid evidence of learning in all lessons observed and students' engagement with learning was very creditable to them and to their teachers.
- While many students are achieving at a high level, there is potential to increase the uptake of higher level English.
- Timetable provision for English is optimal, and teacher deployment is generally very well targeted.
- English and literacy are very well resourced and there is exemplary engagement with a range of co-curricular initiatives.
- Good and progressively more collaborative planning practices are in place.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- Teachers should increasingly favour teaching approaches and learning activities that encourage students to have the highest realistic expectations for themselves with regard to attainment and progression.
 - While the rationale for teacher deployment targeted to meet the needs of younger year groups and students in difficulty is acknowledged, school management should consider creating higher and ordinary level class groups in fifth as well as sixth year.
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INTRODUCTION

Greenhills College is a co-educational school maintained by County Dublin Vocational Education Committee (VEC). The college has 140 mainstream post-primary students and a large further education section. A wide range of programmes is offered, although not the Transition Year programme. The school participates in DEIS, the Department's initiative to deliver equality of opportunity in schools, and also has developed and participated in a variety of literacy initiatives.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- Six lessons were observed covering all years, levels and programmes. The quality of teaching was good or very good, with instances of excellent practice. Teachers managed the learning activities well, chose stimulating and effective approaches and resources, and were encouraging and affirming.
- Class groups observed were generally small and allowed teachers to interact with all students and to guide whole-class discussion in a way that included all students. In these interactions teachers' questioning served a number of purposes. It helped students to link prior and new learning, tested recall and established their level of understanding, and prompted them to formulate more considered responses at times. An increased focus on questioning that supports the development of higher-order skills and helps students to deliver the fullest possible responses is recommended.
- Very good resources were prepared, including a variety of materials using information and communication technology (ICT). Teachers should ensure that such resources are exploited to the full for a variety of purposes; for example, the same visual text can be used to develop both factual and creative writing skills in a way that helps students to understand the importance of detail in good writing.
- Lessons and learning activities were well structured and organised. A purposeful pace was established through a staged approach to topics and good sequencing of activities. The learning outcome was often stated explicitly at the outset and lessons allowed for regular reinforcement and consolidation of learning. Classroom management was very good, and interactions were friendly and respectful.
- Differentiation was used purposefully. Worksheets and task outlines were modified to provide a greater level of support for students with difficulties. At the same time, extension tasks were available to more able students. These merit teachers' particular attention, as they provide a necessary element of challenge and promote high expectations.
- There was solid evidence of learning in the lessons observed. Students engaged with the class work and were co-operative, readily asking questions and volunteering responses. This is very creditable to them and to their teachers, as is the fact that many students are attaining good grades and engaging very successfully in creative writing projects. However, the number of students attaining very high Leaving Certificate grades in ordinary level English suggests the potential to increase the uptake of higher level.
- While lessons had a clear focus on the development of students' skills, teachers might consider two areas for further work. The area of genre awareness is worth more attention so that students gain a deeper understanding of the different ways in which plays, novels and films tell their story. Secondly, teachers could consider approaches that would elicit from students their latent knowledge and show them that they know more than they think

they know. A focus on these areas should have a positive impact on students' confidence and perhaps encourage them to have higher expectations.

- Homework was set in all lessons observed and it was clearly linked to the topics covered. Where work is designed to reinforce points of language accuracy and good usage, it must be monitored very carefully to ensure that errors are not repeated. Substantial written assignments merit developmental feedback, affirming students' efforts and targeting specific areas for improvement. Some very good practice was noted in this regard.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- The timetable makes excellent provision for English in all years and programmes, both in the number and distribution of lessons. Almost all English lessons are timetabled in the morning.
- Class groups for English are of mixed ability initially, and ability sets are then created. Teachers are deployed so as to provide small class groups for the range of levels in the junior cycle, and to provide both the Leaving Certificate and Leaving Certificate Applied programmes in the senior cycle. The largest class group is a mixed-level group in fifth year. It is intended to divide this group for English next year to help students prepare for the examination at the appropriate level. The rationale for teacher deployment targeted to meet the needs of younger year groups and students in difficulty is acknowledged. However, given the evidence of very high attainment at Leaving Certificate ordinary level, school management should examine the feasibility of creating two class groups in fifth as well as sixth year.
- The English teaching team is relatively large but quite cohesive and contains a depth of subject expertise and pedagogical skill. Engagement with continuing professional development is high and many teachers have postgraduate and specialist qualifications.
- English is very well resourced. Many teachers have their own base classrooms which have been well developed as learning spaces. These rooms were used flexibly in many instances to support co-operative and active learning, and this is a trend to be encouraged. A very appealing resource area has been developed, providing an ideal environment for small-group work, special projects and displays, and ready access to a rich variety of materials and resources.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- A very substantial English plan exists, with permanent and developmental sections. Literacy initiatives, DEIS planning, related policies and special programmes for targeted students are all impressively documented. Highly reflective and self-evaluative practices were evident in these planning documents and in records of meetings. A subject co-ordinator is in place.
- The collaborative development of schemes of work is especially evident in the junior cycle plans. The use of email and an electronic folder also allows the collaborative development of common assessments. Practices that harness the collective expertise of the teaching team should focus on senior cycle planning also.

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 May 2012.

Appendix

School response to the report

Submitted by the Board of Management

Area 1: Observations on the content of the inspection report

Your recommendation that 5th Years be divided into Higher and Ordinary level, the same as all other years is now implemented due to the allocation of extra resources which were only given after the inspection.