

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

**Subject Inspection of ENGLISH
REPORT**

Coláiste Cholmcille
Indreabhán, Contae na Gaillimhe
Roll number: 71250A

Date of inspection: 9 December 2014



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

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| Dates of inspection | 8 and 9 December 2014 |
| 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 teachers of English display deep levels of knowledge and enthusiasm for their subject and strongly promote students' reading for pleasure.
- Very good, affirming rapport exists between teachers and students.
- Teaching ranged from good to very good. Student learning was generally good, with some scope for development.
- It is highly commended that the school has moved away from streaming students on intake in first year to mixed-ability class formation.
- There is generally good timetable provision for senior cycle. However, junior-cycle provision for the subject needs to be improved.
- Subject department planning is an area for further development.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- Strategies for balancing teacher and student activity in classes and for explicitly supporting students' oral language and learning to learn skills should be shared and further developed as consistent department practice.
- The amount of time allocated to the teaching of English at junior cycle should be increased, as per the recommendations of Circular 25/2012 and the Inspectorate publication *Looking at English*.
- Subject department planning needs to be further developed through incremental skills-development planning in schemes. Effective methodologies and resources should be shared by the teachers during their formal meetings and annual, targeted action planning should be engaged in.

INTRODUCTION

Coláiste Cholmcille, situated in the Connemara Gaeltacht, operates under Galway and Roscommon Education and Training Board (GRETB). It is a co-educational school with an enrolment of 262 students in 2014/15. The school is the sole provider of post-primary education in the locality and serves a largely rural population. The curricular programmes offered by the school are Junior Certificate, Junior Certificate School Programme, Transition Year (optional), Leaving Certificate and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme. The school also participates in Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS), the Department's action plan for educational inclusion.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- The members of the department are a hardworking and dedicated group who had all engaged in detailed planning for the lessons evaluated.
- Very good interpersonal relations exist between teachers and students.
- All classrooms had very good displays of students' work and of subject-specific materials.
- Teaching ranged from good to very good. Very good practices observed in a few lessons included the setting of structured, timebound group work; the pre-preparation of information and communication technology (ICT) materials by teachers to support learning; and the requirement that students occasionally engage in independent research for homework. Moreover, the planning of thematic units of work based on local sites of literary interest and on historical anniversaries was another effective pedagogical approach. Teachers should share these practices.
- In a small number of lessons, there was scope for moving the teaching from a largely content-centred to a more student-centred approach. This would involve explicitly activating students' prior knowledge and personal responses and moving from an emphasis on teacher-talk and on whole-class questioning toward more of a balance of active student learning opportunities with teacher inputs.
- Learning was generally good, with evidence of some very good practices gleaned from documents provided and from discussions with teachers. Also, analytical comments on studied texts were offered by some students in classes observed and were evident in some copybooks and this is commended.
- To raise students' learning outcomes even higher, it is recommended that "learning to learn" tools such as graphic organisers be more consistently utilised by teachers. Also, it is advised that criteria for assessment be set and shared with students for all substantial in-class and homework tasks, to support the achievement of all.
- Given that English is a second language for almost all students in the school, it is recommended that the enrichment of students' vocabulary and syntactic repertoires in English be explicitly planned for. This could be done through careful questioning and through the integration of word banks and starter phrases for discussing texts across different genres.

- Homework was being regularly set and corrected in the sample of copybooks reviewed, with good written formative feedback being supplied by teachers. The linking of functional writing tasks with the study of texts was particularly prevalent and is highly commended. To further support students' skill acquisition, it is recommended that the most common mistakes students make in substantial writing pieces be recorded and that some lessons be taught based on this diagnostic work.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- Whole-school supports for English include the provision of teacher-based classrooms, teacher continuity with class groups for English for an entire cycle of study, and the rotation of teachers across all subject levels.
- The school actively promotes reading and has a stock of suitable reading material available.
- Timetable provision for junior cycle needs to be improved. Students are routinely provided with four single periods of English per week in first, second, and third year. However, due to a specific circumstance, second-year students were timetabled for two single periods and one double period of English in 2014/15. Optimal provision is where junior-cycle students are timetabled for five periods of English per week, as per Circular 25/2012. In the short term, scope for this increase could be found by reviewing current provision of standalone ICT classes in first and second year. In the medium term, increased provision for the subject should be agreed when the school designs its future junior cycle curriculum.
- It is highly commended that the school has moved away from streaming students on intake in first year to mixed-ability class formation. Also, teachers' encouragement of as many students as possible to study at higher level is lauded, particularly given that this usually requires the teachers to plan for mixed-level classes.
- A range of co-curricular and extra-curricular activities enhances the learning experience for students. In particular, the exposure of students to visiting writers and students' involvement in dramatic presentations helps hone their appreciation of the writing process and of the techniques of stagecraft.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- The teachers of English are collaborative and are in constant informal discussion about aspects of subject delivery. Good progress has been made in developing the subject department plan since the last subject inspection of English.
- It is recommended that the teachers of English engage in regular, formal sharing of effective teaching and learning methodologies and resources at departmental meetings.
- Schemes should be further refined by ensuring that skills development is incrementally integrated into subject delivery. Finally, action planning for continuous improvement should be built into subject department meetings. Priorities for consideration could include the most common mistakes students make in working to master particular texts and skills. Student feedback surveys and an analysis of Junior and Leaving Certificate examination results over a period of years would also be useful in this regard.

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.