Subject Inspection of English
REPORT

Coláiste Rís
Dundalk, County Louth
Roll number: 63880O

Date of inspection: 20 April 2016
REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN ENGLISH

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dates of inspection</th>
<th>19 and 20 April 2016</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Inspection activities undertaken</strong></td>
<td><strong>Observation of teaching and learning during eight class periods</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Review of relevant documents</td>
<td>• Examination of students’ work</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Discussion with principal, deputy principal and teachers</td>
<td>• Feedback to principal, deputy principal and teachers</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Interaction with students</td>
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MAIN FINDINGS

- The quality of teaching and learning in the majority of lessons observed was good or very good with instances of excellent practice as well as areas for development; in one lesson, there was considerable scope for improvement in teaching and in facilitating learning.
- In some lessons, a variety of teaching methodologies was used and students were actively engaged in learning.
- A wide range of resources was used to enhance student learning.
- Excellent assessment practices were observed in some lessons and very good formative commentary was seen in some students’ written work.
- Subject provision is very good across all years and programmes.
- Deployment practices have resulted in an English department with a large number of teachers, including student teachers.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- Lessons should have a clear focus on intended learning and should be planned to include a variety of teaching methodologies, learning activities and opportunities for students to demonstrate their learning.
- The very good assessment practices observed in some lessons should be extended to all years and programmes and a consistent approach to homework assignment, correction and recording should be agreed and implemented.
- The school should examine its teacher deployment policy to ensure it is in line with best practice.
- An action plan for the English subject department that sets out agreed goals and objectives should be written and used to progress and guide the development of English in the school.
INTRODUCTION

Coláiste Rís is a co-educational secondary school with a ‘sruth gaeilge’ in the junior cycle. The school caters for 585 students and provides the Junior Certificate, Leaving Certificate, Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programmes as well as an optional Transition Year (TY).

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- The quality of teaching and learning in the majority of lessons observed was good or very good with instances of excellent practice as well as areas for development; in one lesson, there was considerable scope for improvement in teaching and in facilitating learning.

- Teachers used a wide variety of valuable resources including audio and video clips, photographs and worksheets to promote learning. Resources had been carefully selected to complement the lesson topic and to engage students.

- Learning intentions were shared with students in most lessons. In one instance, the teacher encouraged the students to engage with the intended learning by asking them to explain it to their peers; in another, the learning intention was presented as a question that students would be able to answer at the end of the lesson. These innovative approaches were very successful in helping students to focus on the lesson topic and effectively supported assessment of learning. The intended learning should be shared and its attainment assessed in all lessons.

- In some lessons, a variety of teaching methodologies was used to facilitate high-quality learning. In other lessons, a limited range of methodologies was used and there were few opportunities for students to engage in active or independent learning or to demonstrate their knowledge and skills. Teaching methodologies and classroom activities should be explicitly planned to support and extend student learning.

- Excellent assessment practices were observed in some lessons. Well-established classroom routines such as the use of “exit tickets” gave students the opportunity to reflect on their own learning. Very good formative commentary that clearly identified areas for improvement was seen in some students’ written work. Assessment for learning (AfL) practices should be extended to all years and programmes.

- Teachers’ approach to the assignment, recording and correction of homework varied across year groups and programmes. A whole-school homework policy was published in 2015. The English department should now implement the policy with due regard to the principles of AfL.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- Subject provision is very good across all years and programmes. Concurrent timetabling has been implemented for all year groups, apart from first year and TY. This very good practice could be used to support collaborative approaches to teaching.

- The English department comprises twelve teachers, some of whom do not have significant contact with the subject. Deployment of teachers should serve to broaden and deepen the pool of expertise and experience within the subject department and should offer teachers opportunities and challenges to extend their range. This is in line with good
practice, as recommended in the Department of Education and Skills’ composite report, *Looking at English* (2006). It is recommended, therefore, that deployment practices should be reviewed and developed in the best interest of students’ learning.

- Two student teachers are timetabled to teach English. Other student teachers are deployed from time to time under the direct supervision of a co-operating teacher. It is commendable that the school has facilitated student teachers by providing them with the requisite teaching hours to achieve their professional qualifications. However, the deployment, monitoring and support for all student-teachers needs to be carefully planned and implemented so that the school can assure itself that the learning needs of its own students are fulfilled. It would be worthwhile referring to the Teaching Council’s guidelines on school placement for student teachers for further advice.

- Junior-cycle students are taught in mixed-ability groups. Students have access to higher-level and ordinary-level options at Leaving Certificate based on teachers’ professional judgement, junior certificate results, students’ preferences and performance in TY where applicable. These good practices provide all students the opportunity to achieve their potential.

- Students with additional needs are well catered for in small groups and through withdrawal. Commendably, support is also provided for some English class groups through a team-teaching model.

- Teachers facilitate a range of valuable subject-specific co-curricular and extra-curricular activities including participation in national competitions. A school magazine is produced by TY students under the auspices of the English department and, commendably, provides opportunities for many students to showcase their writing.

- The school library is stocked with a wide variety of fiction and non-fiction books. Computer workstations are also available for library-based research projects. This very good resource is central to whole-school literacy initiatives, such as drop everything and read.

**PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

- The subject department plan contains comprehensive schemes of work for each year group. Further development should focus on identifying the methodologies, learning activities and assessment practices to support specific learning outcomes with particular reference to the new English specification.

- The TY subject plan has an appropriate emphasis on improvement. It would now be worthwhile examining how student self-evaluation and target setting could be introduced so that remediation and skills development become central to the TY learning experience.

- It is good practice that a statistical analysis of state examination results is made available to the English department each year. Subject department meeting minutes should record decisions and actions consequent to teachers’ reflections on this information.

- An action plan for the English subject department that sets out agreed goals and objectives should be written and used to progress and guide the development of English in the school.
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.