

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

**Subject Inspection of English
REPORT**

**Saint Joseph's Secondary School
Foxford, County Mayo
Roll number: 64640W**

Date of inspection: 31 March 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

Date of inspection	31 March 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 five class periods• Examination of students' work• Feedback to principal, deputy principal and teachers

MAIN FINDINGS

- There was good quality teaching and learning in evidence in the lessons observed.
- There is a whole-school approach to encouraging students to reach their full potential.
- There is good whole-school support for the subject.
- The English department collaborates very well to plan programmes of work, to review practice, and to progress issues.
- The English and special educational needs (SEN) departments have implemented a range of literacy strategies.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- Students should be given more responsibility for their own learning in some lessons. Teachers should also review the aim of lessons with students at the end.
 - Teachers should give more developmental feedback to students on their work, share criteria of assessment with students, and encourage students to redraft their work.
 - Management should increase provision of English lessons in junior cycle and Transition Year (TY)
 - New material, including a new novel and/or play should be introduced in third year.
 - The use of one English class each week for students' private reading in first and second year should be reviewed.
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INTRODUCTION

Saint Joseph's Secondary School, Foxford is a co-educational school that serves Foxford and its environs and has an enrolment of 360 students. The school provides the Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate programmes, the TY (optional) programme and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme. The board of management of the school was given an opportunity to comment on the findings and recommendations of the report; the board chose to accept the report without response.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- The quality of teaching and learning of English was good. Teachers were very focused on ensuring the best outcomes for their students.
- Co-operative student work was encouraged in some lessons which led to active student involvement. Further opportunities for co-operative learning should be developed so that students are given more responsibility for their own learning.
- Frequent use of directed questions ensured full class participation. Higher-order questions were used effectively to ensure understanding and to encourage students to think more deeply.
- Although there was generally a focus on encouraging students' personal responses to their texts, in some cases, teachers moved towards immediate analysis of a poem after the first reading. Students' overall response should be sought initially and key concepts should be pre-taught prior to moving to line-by-line analysis.
- Teachers shared the purpose of the lesson with the students from the outset. They should also review with students at the end of the lesson whether the purpose was achieved to ensure that students are aware of the learning that took place.
- Students were well managed and well behaved and there was a good classroom atmosphere. Links were created between course work and students' own lives and interests, which put their learning in context.
- There was a good focus on developing students' vocabulary, and the teaching of language and literature was integrated. Most classrooms were stimulating learning environments with students' work and key words displayed.
- There was frequent assignment of written work and homework, including extended pieces of writing. Students' copies were well maintained. While students' work was always corrected, there was often an absence of developmental feedback to guide students on where they needed to improve their work. There is a need for teachers to give more formative feedback to students. They should share the criteria of assessment with students and should also encourage students to engage in self or peer assessment at times. Students should be encouraged to redraft their work if necessary.
- Students' copies revealed that teachers encourage students to write summaries of chapters or scenes from dramas on a regular basis. Teachers should sometimes find alternative ways of consolidating students' work, as an over-emphasis on writing summaries could lead, in examination situations, to the students summarising texts as opposed to answering the specific questions asked.

- Results of state examination in English indicate a great improvement in uptake of higher level in recent years. Results at all levels are very good. Teachers are commended for their comprehensive analysis of examinations results.
- There was good preparation and use of resources in lessons. Information and communication technology (ICT) was used well in some lessons to enhance learning.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- Junior cycle provision is barely adequate as students have just four lessons a week in each year. TY provision is poor with students having just two English lessons weekly, although two hours of Drama weekly in the first term complements this. Provision of five lessons weekly in fifth and sixth year is satisfactory. It is recommended that management increase provision of English in junior cycle and TY.
- Lessons are evenly distributed and concurrences on the timetable are used well for movement of students between levels and for whole-class activities, including rotation of teachers among TY class groups.
- The organisation of class groups is very good in junior and senior cycle. There are three mixed-ability classes in each year of junior cycle and one small class of students who require additional support.
- There is good provision of resources for teaching English, including ICT in all classrooms.
- Teachers have participated in relevant continuing professional development courses and the school has also provided relevant in-service on teaching students with special educational needs and on mixed-ability teaching.
- The school's homework and assessment policies are commended. Formal examinations take place twice yearly. The good practice of setting common examinations takes place. TY students complete a portfolio of work for assessment. Students' success in terms of improvement in work, in examinations and in competitions is frequently celebrated. There is a whole-school approach to encouraging students to reach their full potential, as evident from the tracking of students' results, the uptake of higher level and the high expectations of teachers.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- The position of coordinator of English is rotated annually. The department is commended for its frequent meetings to progress identified issues and the records reflect very good discussion and review. There is clearly very good collaboration among the three English teachers and special educational needs teacher and between the English department and teachers pursuing the postgraduate diploma in education.
- The English plan is very well laid out for each year group. Teachers follow common programmes of work for the same levels. All genres are taught in first and second year. Third year is predominantly devoted to revision. New material, including a new novel and/or play should be introduced in third year. The fact that all students study a Shakespearean drama in junior cycle is commended.

- A range of co-curricular activities complements English and provides students with opportunities to develop their competence in the subject.
- There is a major effort being made to improve students' literacy levels and a literacy plan comprising a range of literacy strategies is being implemented. Teachers have organised boxes of books for use with their first and second-year students for private reading once a week. Given the current provision of English in junior cycle, the devotion of one English class to private reading for the entire year should be dispensed with.
- Very good teaching and learning resources have been collected for teaching English to students with special educational needs.

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.