

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

**Subject Inspection of English
REPORT**

**St Finian's Community College
Swords, Dublin 9
Roll number: 70120F**

Date of inspection: 11 March 2015



**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	10, 11 March 2015
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 eight class periods• Examination of students' work• Feedback to principal, deputy principal and teachers

MAIN FINDINGS

- The quality of teaching and learning in the majority of the lessons observed was good, with some instances of very good practice. However, there was scope for improvement in a significant minority of lessons.
- Very good subject plans with clear links to literacy and numeracy strategies have been developed.
- The English department has a large number of teachers, a significant minority of whom teach only one or two class groups and therefore do not have substantial contact with the subject.
- Timetabling for English is very good for some class groups, however, not all students have daily contact with the subject.
- Teachers use the analysis of student attainment in the state examinations to inform subject planning.
- Team teaching is used to support learning in some class groups.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- Lessons should incorporate opportunities for the demonstration and assessment of learning.
- High expectations of students' attainment should be evident in the learning intentions and planned activities for each lesson.
- In the interests of developing the potential of all students, teachers should consider maintaining mixed-ability class groups throughout the junior cycle.
- To support planning for improvement of learner outcomes and tracking of individual students' progress, the English department should adopt a homework, assessment and record-keeping strategy.

INTRODUCTION

St Finian's Community College is administered by the Dublin and Dun Laoghaire Education and Training Board and has an enrolment of 272 girls and 324 boys. All senior-cycle and junior-cycle programmes, except Transition Year, are offered. The school participates in the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) initiative.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- The quality of teaching and learning in the majority of the lessons observed was good, with some instances of very good practice. However, there was scope for improvement in a significant minority of lessons.
- Objectives and learning intentions were shared in all lessons. In some lessons, these were revisited to assess attainment. This good practice should be extended to all lessons, as appropriate.
- A very good range of resources was used in the lessons observed including photographs, video clips, audio recordings and worksheets.
- Active learning methodologies including group and pair work were used effectively in some lessons. Best practice was seen where detailed instructions were given; success criteria were clearly communicated; and plenary sessions were used to elicit student inputs and feedback.
- Lesson content and pace were generally appropriate. However, in some lessons, teachers attempted to cover too much material at the expense of consolidating and assessing students' learning. Lessons should incorporate opportunities for the demonstration and assessment of learning.
- Some lessons were dominated by teacher exposition and students did not have adequate opportunities to explore and develop their own ideas. Lessons should be planned to achieve a balance between teacher-led instruction and student tasks.
- Students were appropriately challenged and their learning was extended in most lessons. However, in some lessons, tasks were not sufficiently challenging and learning was not optimised. High expectations of students' attainment should be communicated in the learning intentions and planned activities for each lesson.
- Very good examples of written work were seen with, in many cases, good formative assessment commentary. In some cases, however, comments were non-specific and did not refer to the positive features of the work or identify areas for improvement. Practices for using formative assessment commentary should be agreed and implemented.
- A number of focused strategies for literacy development are in place and there is evidence that students' literacy levels have improved. Paired reading is reported to have been a particularly successful initiative.
- Teachers display a very caring attitude towards their students. Relationships are good and students were at all times well behaved and respectful.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- Timetabling is very good for some class groups, however, not all students have daily contact with the subject. The school should seek to provide daily English lessons for all students.
- The English department has a large number of teachers, a significant minority of whom teach only one or two class groups and therefore do not have substantial contact with the subject. In order to enhance teachers' experience, skills and subject-specific knowledge, it is recommended that members of the English department should teach a range of levels and programmes. The school should aim to deploy teachers in line with good practice, as recommended in the Department of Education and Skills' composite report, *Looking at English* (2006).
- There are five class groups in each junior-cycle year. A Junior Cycle School Programme (JCSP) group is formed in first year and is maintained throughout the junior cycle. Four other mixed-ability class groups are formed in first and second year and are divided into higher-level and ordinary-level classes at the start of third year. In the interests of developing the potential of all students, teachers should consider maintaining mixed-ability class groups throughout the junior cycle.
- Common assessments are held for each year and level at Christmas and at the end of the school year. Teachers consult with each other regularly in relation to grading of students' work. To further develop this very good practice, consideration should be given to implementing a moderation strategy to ensure consistency of standards and to support student profiling.
- A comprehensive learning-support programme is in place at both junior and senior cycle. The withdrawal model of provision is generally used, however, team teaching is also practiced for some class groups. This recently introduced initiative has been adopted very enthusiastically by English teachers and should be continued and expanded wherever possible.
- English teachers facilitate a wide range of extra-curricular and co-curricular activities to extend students' learning experiences.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- The subject plan is very well organised and makes explicit reference to learning outcomes, methodologies and assessment. It is very good practice that strategies for literacy and numeracy development are clearly linked to the plan.
- Common schemes of work for each year and level have been developed and, commendably, teachers use these to plan and structure their own teaching schedules.
- A consistent approach to the assignment and correction of homework was not in evidence. To support planning for improvement of learner outcomes and tracking of individual students' progress, the English department should adopt a homework, assessment and record-keeping strategy.
- Teachers meet regularly both formally and informally to discuss issues relevant to teaching and learning. Minutes of formal meetings record development plans and

decisions over a number of years. The value of the minutes would be enhanced by the inclusion of more detail including the names of attendees.

- Teachers use the analysis of student attainment in state examinations very effectively to inform subject planning. This very good practice has resulted in specific actions related to increasing higher level uptake, including monitoring of academic progress by tutors and provision of additional support for students.

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, and the response of the board will be found in the appendix of this report.

Appendix

SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

Submitted by the Board of Management

Area 1: Observations on the content of the inspection report

The Management and Staff were very happy to welcome the inspector to our College to conduct the English Inspection.

However there are some points which both management and the English department would like to respond to.

Bullet point 4: “Timetabling for English is very good for some class groups. However not all students have daily contact with the group”.

For Leaving Cert the English Department requested a double period to facilitate elements of the syllabus. If the school provides daily English lessons for all students then this double period for LC students must go. To remove this double period would be ignoring the wishes of the English department who plan this double period in their schemes/planning.

Under Main Recommendations Page 2 Bullet Point 3

“In the interests of developing the potential of all students, teachers should consider maintaining mixed ability class groups throughout the junior cycle”

As a school we believe that the interests of all students are best served through mixed ability teaching and we allocate students to classes on the basis of mixed ability. To make sure that students achieve their potential we have many interventions in place to improve literacy etc. Until very recently the English Department did have mixed ability English classes until the end of 3rd year. However after analysis of Junior Cert. results and feedback from teachers within the English Department, the department decided that it would be most beneficial to all students to divide them into Ordinary and Higher level at the start of third year, to ensure all students reached their potential.

Area 2: Follow-up actions planned or undertaken since the completion of the inspection activity to implement the findings and recommendations of the inspection

The school is currently devising a whole school policy on Assessment for Learning which will guide all subject departments

The English Department is planning to adopt a homework assessment and record keeping strategy.

The English Department continue to work on schemes of work, subject planning, developing materials and sharing best practice as was commented on in this report

The recommendation on teacher deployment is an issue the school is keen to respond positively to.