An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection in English

REPORT

Ainm na scoile / School name	Meánscoil na mBráithre
Seoladh na scoile / School address	Ennistymon County Clare
Uimhir rolla / Roll number	61940T

Date of Inspection: 06-02-2019

An Roinn Oideachais
agus Scileanna
Department of
Education and Skills

SUBJECT INSPECTION

Subject Inspections report on the quality of work in individual curriculum areas within a school. They affirm good practice and make recommendations, where appropriate, to aid the further development of the subject in the school.

HOW TO READ THIS REPORT

During this inspection, the inspector evaluated learning and teaching in English under the following headings:

1. Teaching, learning and assessment
2. Subject provision and whole-school support
3. Planning and preparation

Inspectors describe the quality of each of these areas using the Inspectorate's quality continuum which is shown on the final page of this report. The quality continuum provides examples of the language used by inspectors when evaluating and describing the quality of the school's provision in each area.

The board of management of the school 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.

CHILD PROTECTION

During the inspection visit, the following checks in relation to the school's child protection procedures were conducted:

1. The name of the DLP and the Child Safeguarding Statement are prominently displayed near the main entrance to the school.
2. The Child Safeguarding Statement has been ratified by the board and includes an annual review and a risk assessment.
3. All teachers visited reported that they have read the Child Safeguarding Statement and that they are aware of their responsibilities as mandated persons.

The school met the requirements in relation to the checks with the exception of 1 above. The Child Safeguarding statement was prominently displayed near the main entrance to the school but a separate sign naming the DLP was not. The school has subsequently and immediately furnished evidence of total compliance with all aspects of these requirements.

SUBJECT INSPECTION

INSPECTION ACTIVITIES

Date of inspection	6 February 2019
Inspection activities undertaken • Review of relevant documents • Discussion with principal and key staff • Interaction with students	• Observation of teaching and learning during four class periods • Examination of students' work • Feedback to principal and relevant staff

School context

Meánscoil na mBráithre is an all-boys' post-primary school under the trusteeship of the Edmund Rice Schools Trust, with a total enrolment of 221 students. In addition to the Junior Cycle and Leaving Certificate programmes, the school also provides an optional Transition Year (TY) programme and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme. The school is collaboratively engaged in an amalgamation process with the other two post-primary schools in the town.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

Findings

- Students are respectful, affirmed by hard-working teachers, and are provided with some very valuable English-related co-curricular activities.
- Strong uptake of higher level and good overall learner outcomes were noted in both junior and senior cycle certificate examinations of English.
- The quality of teaching and learning observed in lessons ranged from good to satisfactory; the teaching of writing was an area for development.
- Teachers were generally providing detailed written feedback on students' work; teacher and student use of success criteria needs to be added to departmental assessment practice.
- Whole-school support for English is good.
- Overall, the standard of collective/collaborative planning and preparation was satisfactory; while good formal discussions to support junior cycle implementation have taken place over the past school year, year group plans for English now need to be improved.

Recommendations

- Explicit teacher modelling of the writing process using technology needs to be incorporated into departmental practice, with students developing this approach to writing from first year onward.
- Students should be guided to co-create success criteria for substantial tasks with teachers and to apply them to exemplars of oral/written texts of different levels of achievement, to further develop their self and peer assessment skills.
- Members of the subject department need to develop together a deeper understanding of the junior cycle learning outcomes, and of existing Junior Cycle for Teachers support service materials, and need to work together to develop aspects of the junior and senior cycle year plans.

DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. TEACHING, LEARNING AND ASSESSMENT

- The quality of teaching and learning observed in lessons ranged from good to satisfactory, with evidence of some very good practices also noted.
- Very good teacher-student rapport was apparent in all lessons. Student learning was being supported by teachers' knowledge of prescribed texts, by good classroom management practices, and by the use of digital clips to enhance the learning experience.
- In a few instances, teachers needed to share learning intentions with students more clearly at the outset of lessons with a focus on what students would know or would be able to the do by the end of lessons, rather than primarily focusing on content coverage.
- Strong uptake of higher level and good overall learner outcomes were noted in both junior and senior cycle certificate examinations of English. There is potential to further increase achievement of higher grades at junior cycle through some changes to pedagogical practices and through subject department planning.
- Teachers tended to assess students' engagement with junior cycle studied texts through their knowledge of plot, character, themes and some generic conventions. However, prescribed texts for Junior Cycle English need to be approached as vehicles for teaching learning outcomes rather than as stand-alone texts. A learning-outcomes approach to question setting for junior cycle homework and in-class assignments needs to be established. Assessing students' capacity to apply or transfer learning gained from textual study should be a guiding principle.
- A number of collaborative learning tasks were commendably integrated into lessons. In particular, a very good example of "working with others" was observed. Students were organised carefully into groups by their teacher and asked to plan together how to act out sections from a studied dramatic scene before performing the scene for their peers and student judges. This task developed students' skills of comprehension, personal response, reflection, dramatisation and peer assessment. In undertaking such tasks, returning to the learning intentions for the lesson and gathering student feedback would be key final steps.
- Written teacher feedback was being provided on copybooks in the lessons observed, with some very rich, detailed feedback on senior cycle work in particular. To strengthen students' ability to act on such feedback and to give peer feedback, the practice of co-creating success criteria for substantial tasks needs to be established as departmental practice. Also, students should be guided to apply success criteria to exemplars of oral/written texts of different levels of achievement, to further develop their self and peer assessment skills.
- Teachers led students to gather ideas for writing tasks through questioning and through requiring students to work together to complete graphic organisers. The next step to strengthen student output is to integrate explicit teacher modelling of the writing process (draft/redraft) using technology into departmental practice. The use of the devices being provided to teachers by the school or of visualisers is advised. When teachers co-create paragraphs and ultimately longer texts with students through questioning, think-aloud activities and saving texts for continued development the next day, students will see how to engage with the draft/redraft writing process in their own work.

2. SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- There is good whole-school support and provision for English. Timetable provision is in line with specification and syllabus requirements and most teachers have their own base classrooms.
- A number of highly commended co-curricular activities support the development of English-related skills, knowledge and attitudes. Many of these are part of the TY programme, including song-writing workshops, film-making and radio production modules, trips to theatrical productions, the promotion of personal reading in first year, and Culture/Arts week. Junior cycle students would also benefit from inputs from such workshops or from senior students demonstrating and reflecting on their deepened skills of oral and/or written production. Building links between the TY and junior cycle schemes is encouraged in this regard.
- The school is using a shared online platform, teachers are being equipped with tablet devices, and continuing professional development (CPD) is being provided to upskill teachers. As was described in the previous section, technology will be a key tool in developing students' writing skills into the future.
- The same teacher has been timetabled to teach senior-cycle higher-level English for a number of years. The fact that a second teacher is now being prepared to teach senior-cycle higher-level English is good practice, hopefully resulting in greater sustainability and professional collaboration in this area of study.

3. PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- Overall, the standard of collective/collaborative planning and preparation was satisfactory.
- In past years, meetings of the English department tended to focus on logistical items. However, from the 2018/19 school year onward, the department has been engaging more deeply with junior cycle implementation, discussing methodologies, sharing resources, and planning for classroom-based assessments (CBAs) and this is commended.
- To date, year group plans have largely been the personal plans of individuals. As collective/collaborative documents, they are at a fair level of development currently. They now need to be reviewed by all members of the department, with peers providing constructive feedback to each other. Areas for development include moving from a content to a skills focus organised around thematic units of learning, the integration of language and literature in units of learning, providing more specificity in senior cycle plans, and ensuring that plans serve as a practical guide in the event of another teacher taking over the class group.

The draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation were discussed with the principal and subject teacher at the conclusion of the evaluation.

Appendix

TO THE REPORT

Submitted by the Board of Management

Part A Observations on the content of the inspection report

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Part B Follow-up actions planned or undertaken since the completion of the inspection activity to implement the findings and recommendations of the inspection.

The English Department have a class set of Surface Go devices available to them now which are being used to model the writing process and to build answers on the whiteboard.

Students are co-creating success criteria and engaging in peer assessment.

Work has begun on a separate 5th year senior cycle plan providing clearer specificity.

There is increased integration of language and literature in the junior and senior cycle.

THE INSPECTORATE'S QUALITY CONTINUUM

Inspectors describe the quality of provision in the school using the Inspectorate's quality continuum which is shown below. The quality continuum provides examples of the language used by inspectors when evaluating and describing the of quality the school's provision of each area.

Level	Description	Example of descriptive terms
Very Good	***Very good*** applies where the quality of the areas evaluated is of a very high standard. The very few areas for improvement that exist do not significantly impact on the overall quality of provision. For some schools in this category the quality of what is evaluated is ***outstanding*** and provides an example for other schools of exceptionally high standards of provision.	Very good; of a very high quality; very effective practice; highly commendable; very successful; few areas for improvement; notable; of a very high standard. Excellent; outstanding; exceptionally high standard, with very significant strengths; exemplary
Good	***Good*** applies where the strengths in the areas evaluated clearly outweigh the areas in need of improvement. The areas requiring improvement impact on the quality of pupils' learning. The school needs to build on its strengths and take action to address the areas identified as requiring improvement in order to achieve a *very good* standard.	Good; good quality; valuable; effective practice; competent; useful; commendable; good standard; some areas for improvement
Satisfactory	***Satisfactory*** applies where the quality of provision is adequate. The strengths in what is being evaluated just outweigh the shortcomings. While the shortcomings do not have a significant negative impact they constrain the quality of the learning experiences and should be addressed in order to achieve a better standard.	Satisfactory; adequate; appropriate provision although some possibilities for improvement exist; acceptable level of quality; improvement needed in some areas
Fair	***Fair*** applies where, although there are some strengths in the areas evaluated, deficiencies or shortcomings that outweigh those strengths also exist. The school will have to address certain deficiencies without delay in order to ensure that provision is satisfactory or better.	Fair; evident weaknesses that are impacting on pupils' learning; less than satisfactory; experiencing difficulty; must improve in specified areas; action required to improve
Weak	***Weak*** applies where there are serious deficiencies in the areas evaluated. Immediate and coordinated whole-school action is required to address the areas of concern. In some cases, the intervention of other agencies may be required to support improvements.	Weak; unsatisfactory; insufficient; ineffective; poor; requiring significant change, development or improvement; experiencing significant difficulties;