An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection in English

REPORT

Ainm na scoile / School name	Scariff Community College
Seoladh na scoile / School address	Drewsborough Scariff County Clare
Uimhir rolla / Roll number	70900I

Date of Inspection: 18-01-2019

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agus Scileanna
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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.

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.

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.

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 did not meet the requirements in relation to 1 above and therefore was not fully compliant with the checks undertaken. However, the school has subsequently furnished evidence of compliance with these requirements.

SUBJECT INSPECTION

INSPECTION ACTIVITIES

Date(s) of inspection	18-01-2019
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

Scariff Community College is a co-educational post-primary school which operates under the auspices of the Limerick and Clare Education Training Board. Programmes offered by the school include the junior cycle, an optional Transition Year programme, the Leaving Certificate, and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme. Enrolment currently stands at 412.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

Findings

- The overall standard of teaching and learning was good with reflection on learning a commendable feature of all lessons observed.
- The use of assessment was, overall, of good quality; however, written formative feedback practices are in need of development and improvement.
- The school provides very effective support for literacy through the Accelerated Reader programme and an explicit focus on vocabulary development in English lessons.
- Student outcomes have benefited from a focus on reading and oral language development; the development of a process approach to writing should now be prioritised.
- Overall, there is good whole-school support and provision for English with deliberate efforts to meet the needs of students, however, the approach to supporting students with identified educational needs based on the formation of some smaller classes requires revision.
- Individual planning was good and each teacher has effectively implemented strategies prioritised in the school improvement plan; possibilities for improvement exist in collaborative planning.

Recommendations

- The English department should agree a strategy to support the continued development of student writing which includes written homework, an approach which will also further support the development of student portfolios in junior cycle and Transition Year.
- The provision of written formative feedback should be embedded in teachers' practice as a consistent support for student writing.
- The school should revise the practice of forming some smaller English classes so as to ensure a broad and inclusive curriculum is accessed by all students.
- As a means to further supporting inclusion within the curriculum and the classroom, extended opportunities for co-operative learning should be explored; such practices should be shared during subject department meetings as part of the regular discussions on teaching and learning.

DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. TEACHING, LEARNING, AND ASSESSMENT

- Overall, the standard of teaching and learning was good. Positive and supporting teacher-student relationships were consistently evident and students enjoyed lessons.

- Digital learning technologies were used effectively and appropriately by teachers in most lessons. Video illustrated the influence of rhythm on poetic meaning in one junior cycle lesson, a support which complemented the class's own dramatic readings; in a senior cycle lesson a teacher exhibited objects detailed in a text. As a means of building on such practice and deepening student ownership of the learning process, it is recommended that the subject department explore digital opportunities for the sharing of student inputs.

- Questioning was used well by teachers: of particular note was the eliciting of student feedback regarding the effectiveness of learning activities. Best practice was seen in those instances where teaching was responsive to student learning. In such instances, teachers explicitly checked student progress and adapted practice to address students' learning needs.

- An imbalance between the direction given for classwork and homework was evident with periodic issuing of written homework. It is recommended that the subject department agree a policy on the issuing of written homework which can be implemented by teachers as a means to supporting the further development of extended writing exercises.

- The assessment practices observed ranged from fair, in a minority of instances, to very good. In all lessons, student learning was supported effectively through learning intentions which were shared and revisited. Success criteria were used well to signpost the student learning journey in most lessons while peer-assessment was effectively guided by teachers. However, samples of student work viewed indicated that teacher assessment of written work was summative in focus and omitted specific directions for improvement.

- Teachers should now prioritise planning for written formative feedback with a focus on showing how and where improvement can take place. Such guidance should centre on the actions to be implemented by the student. The NCCA's support booklet *Focus on Learning: Formative Feedback* will provide useful guidance in this, as will the school's own improvement plan. The further use of success criteria together with exemplars, self and peer-assessment, verbal teacher feedback supported by student noting and action, and coded feedback should be considered as a means of supporting student writing.

- High-quality vocabulary enrichment featured in most lessons where students orally demonstrated an understanding of language appropriate to literary analysis. In a senior cycle lesson, students were guided from the literal to the symbolic meaning; highly effective practice was seen in a junior cycle lesson where student-developed word placemats incorporated images, antonyms, synonyms, and usage as a means of developing language in practice.

- Very good oral peer-assessment was observed in the majority of lessons and students demonstrated a capacity to support each other's learning. In all instances, effective student collaboration consisted of pair work. This good practice should be extended to encompass more complex collaborative learning opportunities. It is recommended that the subject department explore how variation in classroom layout may facilitate a greater incidence of collaborative learning opportunities.

2. SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- There is good whole school support and provision overall; action is required to improve provision in a minority of instances. Timetable design seeks to provide a strategic allocation for English lessons in all year groups. However, the school should revise the practice of forming some smaller English classes so as to ensure a broad and inclusive curriculum is accessed by all students.

- Effective whole-school curriculum planning has seen the school initiate the good practice of reporting to parents on student achievement through the use of new Junior Cycle descriptors. The assessment policy is being revised appropriately, as per Circular 15/2017, to incorporate the substitution of classroom-based assessments (CBAs) for in-house assessments.

- English teachers are deployed between levels and cycles, as is good practice. The department has implemented the Junior Cycle curriculum and engaged with continuing professional development (CPD) through the Junior Cycle for Teachers (JCT) support service.

- A significant number of co-curricular opportunities provide valuable opportunities for students to develop their English-related skills, attitudes and knowledge. Teachers have developed positive community links to support classroom learning. For example, Transition Year students present a slot on local radio while a poetry anthology is being prepared in conjunction with members of the locality.

- The English department provides excellent support for literacy development through the Accelerated Reader programme. A number of other supports are also in place including a noticeboard with student and staff reading recommendations, while teachers encourage personal reading through the organisation of library visits.

3. PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- Individual planning was good. Minutes of departmental meetings are maintained from which it is evident that significant preparation supported the implementation of the new Junior Cycle curriculum, and particularly, the CBAs.

- The English department is progressive and has identified possibilities for further improvement. As a means of further developing collaborative subject planning, it would be beneficial if schemes of work were progressed through a more explicit linking of learning outcomes with applicable teaching methodologies and assessment practices. In this context, the department should incrementally identify, agree, and assess extended writing assignments as part of each year group's schemes of work.

- The school self-evaluation (SSE) process has been engaged with successfully: effective practice was seen where the formative assessment practices prioritised in the school improvement plan were embedded in the lessons observed. To build on the very good work to date, all subject department meetings should now make space for a sharing of practice, and it is recommended that teaching and learning be a recurring item on the agenda for each meeting.

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 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;