An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection in English

REPORT

Ainm na scoile / School name	St. Cuan's College
Seoladh na scoile / School address	Castleblakeney Ballinasloe County Galway
Uimhir rolla / Roll number	62930V

Date of Inspection: 25-09-2019

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 each of the checks above.

SUBJECT INSPECTION

INSPECTION ACTIVITIES

Dates of inspection	24 & 25 September 2019
Inspection activities undertaken • Review of relevant documents • Discussion with principal and key staff • Interaction with students	• Observation of teaching and learning during five lessons • Examination of students' work • Feedback to principal and relevant staff

School context

St. Cuan's College is a co-educational post-primary school located in Castleblakeney, County Galway, under the trusteeship of the Catholic bishop of Elphin. The school offers the Junior Cycle, an optional Transition Year (TY) as well as the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme, the Leaving Certificate and Post-Leaving Certificate courses. At the time of the evaluation, the post-primary enrolment stood at 308 students.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

Findings

- The overall quality of teaching and learning in the lessons observed was good; very good practice was observed in some lessons, as well as areas for improvement.
- Lesson were well prepared, however, a greater range of methodologies and resources would have enhanced students' learning experiences.
- There was evidence of some very effective formative feedback on written work and students commented on its usefulness in helping them to improve.
- The subject department has developed a good approach to handling the student's Collection of Texts for junior cycle; there is scope now for further enhancement.
- Subject provision and whole-school support are good overall, and teachers facilitate students to engage in a range of extra-curricular and co-curricular activities that extend their experience of English.
- The overall quality of planning is satisfactory with a number of initiatives that have the potential to result in innovative and creative practices to support planning for teaching and learning.

Recommendations

- Methodologies that promote active learning and provide students with opportunities to take responsibility for their own learning should be extended to all lessons.
- Teachers should ensure that the student's Collection of Texts contains a range of genres and that the collection demonstrates students' development and progress over the junior cycle years.
- To further embed the use of formative assessment practices, teachers should develop and share success criteria with students and implement strategies to support their engagement with feedback.
- The English department should work collaboratively to create an agreed plan based on a shared vision, with reference to analysis of student outcomes in state examinations and including prioritised actions and strategies for improvement.

DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. TEACHING, LEARNING, AND ASSESSMENT

- The overall quality of teaching and learning in the lessons observed was good. Some very good practice was observed as well areas for improvement.
- Lessons very generally well prepared and there was evidence of teachers' passion for and detailed knowledge of the subject in many lessons. Teachers used digital presentations to share information and tasks with students. However, students did not use digital learning resources in any of the lessons observed. There is scope to extend the range of resources to support both teaching and learning and to include more variety.
- Active learning methodologies were used in some lessons and students' engagement and understanding were enhanced by their involvement in well-designed tasks. In a few lessons, there was an over-reliance on teacher explication and students' critical and analytical skills were not fully engaged. Methodologies that promote active learning and provide students with opportunities to take responsibility for their own learning should be extended to all lessons.
- There was evidence of a differentiated approach to teaching in many lessons and teachers provided support for individual students to enable them to access the learning materials as required.
- The special educational needs (SEN) co-ordinator has facilitated support for identified students though co-teaching and support teaching in some lessons. The implementation of this worthwhile initiative was at an early stage at the time of this evaluation. It would be worthwhile for teachers to plan how the additional teaching resource should be deployed for each lesson.
- English teachers support students in maintaining their collections of texts through a practical system that allows the collection to be developed incrementally during the junior cycle years. This practice could be enhanced by ensuring that the collection contains a range of genres, including extended pieces of writing, and that progress is demonstrated through the inclusion of drafts and redrafts, in line with Junior Cycle English learning outcomes.
- Students' work observed in copies and folders showed varied levels of presentation. To address issues around presentation of work, it would be useful if a whole-school approach were implemented that set standards for presentation of written work.
- In some instances, there was evidence of very effective formative feedback on written work and students commented on its usefulness in helping them to improve. To further the impact of this approach, teachers should develop and share success criteria with students and implement strategies to encourage students to engage with feedback.
- Self and peer assessment practices were facilitated in many lessons. In one lesson, the teacher provided very sophisticated guidance to students about how to carry out peer assessment based on agreed success criteria.
- Homework was assigned in all lessons and was well integrated with the lesson content. In some instances, the homework was designed to broaden and extend students' learning. In other instances, homework tasks were finite and limited in scope. Homework tasks should be designed to ensure that all students can experience both success and challenge.

2. SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- Overall subject provision and whole-school support are good. The number of hours timetabled for English meets the Department of Education and Skills' requirements at both junior and senior cycle.

- In junior cycle, first and second-year class groups are mixed ability. In third year, students are split between higher and ordinary level. In the current year, this practice has resulted in a significant numerical imbalance between the two third-year class groups. In the interest of supporting high expectations for all students, teachers should consider maintaining mixed-ability groupings throughout junior cycle.
- All teachers are supported and encouraged to undertake continuing professional development (CPD). In addition, management facilitates in-school training on specific topics where relevant.
- Comprehensive and regular reporting of student progress to parents is undertaken. It is positive that teachers and management are considering how future reporting will integrate with the demands and timing of classroom based assessments
- Teachers support students to engage in a range of extra-curricular and co-curricular activities that extend their experience of English including theatre trips, debating and public speaking. Senior management ensures that resources are available, as required, to facilitate these activities.

3. PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- The overall quality of planning is satisfactory with a number of initiatives that have the potential to result in innovative and creative practices to support planning for teaching and learning.
- The English department meets formally five time during the year and teachers also engage in frequent informal discussions and collaboration. Teachers' reflections contained in subject learning and assessment review (SLAR) reports show that teachers have valued this approach to assessment.
- Common schemes of work have been agreed by the English department for junior cycle. There is now scope to extend the development of the schemes of work to ensure that all required learning outcomes are addressed in units of learning and that formative and summative assessments are described.
- Templates for students' self-assessment of their progress in English, as seen in the subject folder, demonstrate a laudable commitment to the student voice. Teachers should consider how this approach could be used as part of the department's overall assessment strategy to support target setting and to encourage students to reflect on their learning.
- In light of the potential that is evident in initiatives commenced to date, it would be very beneficial to create an agreed department plan based on a collaborative and shared vision, with prioritised actions to achieve short-term and, ultimately, longer-term goals. Part of that work should involve the reflective analysis of outcomes and expectations for specific student cohorts, with a particular focus on higher and ordinary-level uptake at both junior and senior cycle, and attainment in leaving certificate examinations. The analysis of this data in conjunction with other school and student level information, including student surveys, should be used to inform strategies for improvement.
- The TY programme includes skills development and a portfolio approach for work done during the year. To further develop the skills associated with lifelong learning, students should be encouraged to take responsibility for setting goals and monitoring their own progress as they undertake and complete tasks.

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

Appendix

SCHOOL RESPONSE 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 has had two meetings since the Report has been issued. They have also met with the Principal and the Chairperson of the Board of Management. We accept the recommendations made, we have discussed them at length and they will be implemented to the best of our ability.

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;